



“Who Cares?” | A t.Lab Case Study |

The Pilot Project and t.Lab Summer Camp

November 4, 2016



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“Dr. Nixon, why do you care about us so much anyway? Nobody cares.”

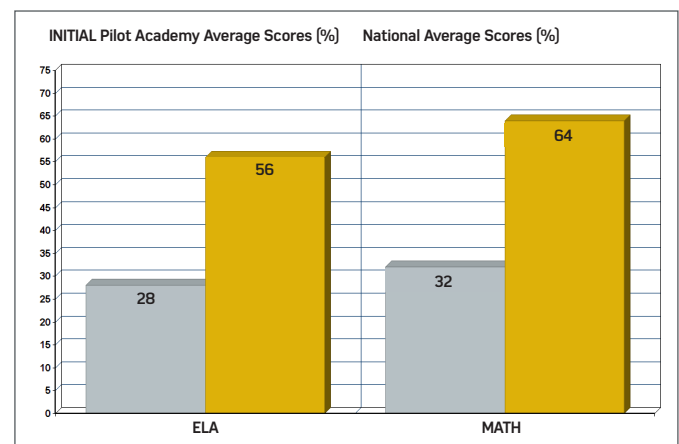
Miss Kelly Green, 9th grade student in case study

Why indeed? Miss Kelly Green (name changed) is a student in the 9th grade who participated in the Pilot Project. The Pilot Project began when the Pilot Academy (not their real name) engaged t.Lab to assess and deliver academic development services for targeted students qualifying for Title 1 Funding. In addition, they expected to integrate parents into the process. This, of course, was a definite win-win situation considering that parental involvement is a paramount principle of t.Lab. But before we tell you about the Pilot Project in greater detail, let us first address the question posed by one of the participants in the Project.

Miss Green was an ambitious young lady who was also very shy. Her plans upon entering the program were to complete high school with honors, realize the top 1% performance on the ACT and to be admitted into Oxford University on an academic scholarship. Lofty, but exciting goals from this quiet teen. Yet her question was very revealing of a systemic problem in the education crisis we currently face. Our young people have very little confidence that they matter. They, seemingly, have accepted the fact that they can reach goals without the leadership of those commissioned to teach them, lead them and guide them. Unfortunately, she was not far from the truth, rather, her attitude about leadership in the educational system points to yet another deficiency to be conquered.

Specifically, creation of a learning environment that will nurture students, encourage creativity and improve learning would have to overhaul negative attitudes from students, parents and educators. The first task, however, was to assess the educational levels of the 68 students who would enter the Project. With this accomplished, learning plans, including targeted improvement metrics for English, Math, Language, Reading, Technology, and Vocabulary were established for each

student. The results of assessment testing confirmed a need for radical intervention for each student participating in the pilot.

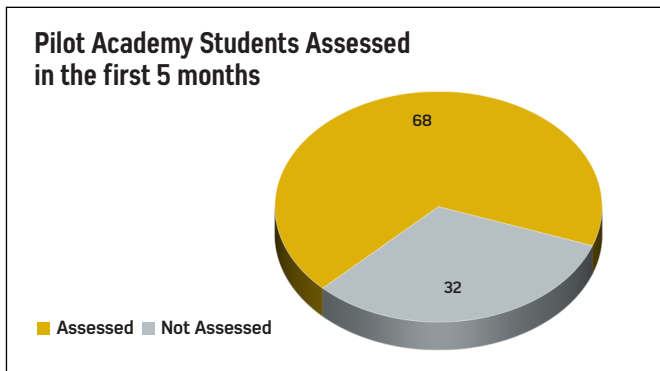


THE SURVEY SAYS

English, Math, Language, Reading, Technology and Vocabulary are critical applications for all students in the 21st century. Using Linkit, a common core aligned assessment tool, the average scores for Pilot Academy students participating in the program were 28% in ELA (English Language Arts) and 32% in Math. National scores range from 40%-50% higher. Each Pilot student operated substantially below their grade marking scores and their grade level, as validated per ELA and Math assessment tests.

Not only did their scores prove a need for improvement but their attitudes did as well. Initially, each student's desire was to avoid t.Lab Summer Camp. Their desire was to participate in sports, gaming, drawing, and/or listening to music. Finally, upon the start of camp, a few students engaged in aggressive and negative behavior towards each other and sometimes towards t.Lab staff members.

OFF TO A ROCKY START



The Pilot Project was rife with problems, inconsistencies and limited cooperation right from the beginning. As stated, the students were not committed to the program, and neither were parents. Even the Academy proved less than fully invested in the success of the Project. This initial pilot project was to include 100 students, however due to many execution issues we were only able to assess 68 students after 5 months of frustrating work with Project Academy's leadership. We did not get an opportunity to move beyond assessment with the students and parents—from January through June 2015. We encountered issues of incompetence in scheduling student access, facility access, record access, and coordinating efforts with staff and leadership.

After a meeting with Pilot Academy's fiduciary and operations leaders—it was begrudgingly agreed to do a 7 week summer camp. They believed that the problems of not being able to work with students from Pilot Academy was t.Lab's rigidity and inflexibility.

STUDENT/PARENT PRIORITIES:

Pilot Academy staff, students and parents needed to be convinced that t.Lab would actually make a difference in the children's academic status. Until they were convinced; other mentoring programs, field trips, social activities and family activities were more of a priority.

PILOT ACADEMY:

The Academy's commitment to the Pilot Project was less than desirable. Several key factors that would impact successful completion of the Project were not adhered to as agreed.

- **Absence of clear collaboration**—In the assessment process and development of the learning plans for

each student, t.Lab repeatedly sought input from the Academy. We were denied access to the teachers who were most familiar with the students. We were unable to ascertain if or what additional factors may have influenced the learning capabilities of the students. Not only that, but records were extremely unorganized, the Academy was unorganized and t.Lab was denied access to student records. One of the most critical events in this process—collaboration—was absent from the start. And as a result, additional duties were heaped upon t.Lab, as developing a learning plan without addressing critical skill needs and shortcomings would not benefit anyone, certainly not the students.

- **Unplanned workload**—Limited parental involvement and very limited staff involvement shifted the administrative responsibility to t.Lab. This included completing:

- 1) Student applications
- 2) Leadership assessment
- 3) Academic regimen
- 4) General administrative tasks

As well, there were approximately 11 sessions where very few or no parents/students appeared for planned sessions. This included sessions where t.Lab provided round trip bus transportation to and from its headquarters for planned parental/student work sessions. t.Lab was not compensated for any of these activities. The cost realized by t.Lab by end of June 2015 was approximately \$8,500.00.

- **Unclear motives**—The initial commitment was that 68 students would enter the Pilot Project. t.Lab completed assessments and developed learning plans for 68 students.

- 1) However, when the Summer Camp began in July, 2015 it opened with 8 students—60 less than committed.
- 2) t.Lab was not fully compensated for their work, however continued on with the Project.

Actions like this clearly point to an assumption that the students are not the priority, but federal dollars are.

- **Resource constraints**—Not only was access to Pilot Academy staff and teachers restricted, but the Academy's administration was noticeably unavailable. t.Lab

was still held accountable for meeting deadlines and met them. Also, computer equipment (headphones), and especially operating system software frequently failed.

The Summer Camp was in jeopardy from the start because:

- Students were not interested, they didn't believe they mattered.
- Parents were not committed, seemingly they either resented the additional time/resources required for participation or they did not feel they had much to offer (regarding their own participation)
- The Academy (a Charter school) appeared more interested in the funding support than the academic improvement of their students.

The Pilot Project & t.Lab Summer Camp

SUMMER CAMP GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

- To increase student performance levels in ELA and Math
- To identify repeatable systems to enable targeted students with “priority status” to realize grade level performance standards within two (2) years.

To accomplish these goals, t.Lab proposed the following steps:

- 1) Meet with Pilot Academy Leadership, confirm logistics and plans for summer sessions at t.Lab Headquarters. This would include travel to t.Lab Headquarters and weekly status reporting.
- 2) Contact each participant (parents), confirm availability and desire to participate in summer program.
- 3) Revise student teams—based on availability and desire to participate.
- 4) A special focus on 8th grade students transitioning to high school.
- 5) Initiate Pilot Project summer sessions.

t.Lab was entrusted with enhancing the academic skills of eight students from Pilot Academy from July 13, 2015 through August 27, 2015. Six students actually participat-

ed in the summer program as two of the eight dropped out. t.Lab collaborated with the parents of each student. The target academic goal was to increase student performance by 5% in Math and ELA over a seven week period.

AND SO WE BEGAN...

...at the beginning. Certainly manners, respect for others and common decency are character traits we expect the students to bring with them to the program. This was not so, they didn't really want to be there and had no confidence that their situation would improve by being there. One of the first actions we took was to institute morning and afternoon huddles. The function was to introduce the students to a paradigm shift in the way they saw themselves, their peers and t.Lab leadership. It was clear that self-esteem was at a major deficit. We made the focus of the huddles a time of encouraging. We spoke encouraging words to the students and required they do the same to each other. They began to speak encouraging words to each other, they began to bond together. The normal, daily conflicts among them were greatly reduced. The students were affected by commonality of purpose and a general improvement in how they felt about themselves.

Another blessing we took full advantage of was Dr. Charisse Gibert. She is a pastor at Detroit World Outreach and the wife of Bishop Ben Gibert. And considering that we had no anecdotal data from the educators who had been working with our students every day, we knew we needed to get to know them better and quickly. Dr. Charisse helped us by conducting multiple one-hour coaching sessions with the students. She quickly determined their self-esteem and trust levels were low and other important factors. Dr. Charisse used a variety of instruments to interact and engage the students. She was able to gain student trust immediately. The students shared both personal and professional information and thus enabled a path to academic transformation.

THE ASSESSMENT

As previously mentioned, the ELA and Math scores of the students were significantly below national averages by 40–50%. Additionally, we discovered the recorded grades of the students were deceiving—to the students. If the most recent card marking grade was A, the assessment rated the student at C level. Students

whose report card grades were B or C were assessed at D or E levels.

Another important discovery was extremely critical in helping the children reach the goals we set. We were only privy to this information after developing a trust level with them. While it was not initially part of the Project, having to provide daily transportation from the Academy to t.lab turned out to be a blessing in disguise—albeit an expensive one. During the bus rides from the Academy to t.Lab, then back to the Academy we engaged the students in conversation. We engaged their minds preparing them for their t.Lab sessions; preparing them to plan their after school time and speaking encouraging, positive words.

The information we got from Dr. Charisse's efforts clued us in to perform as much time mentoring the students as we did tutoring them. It gave us an opportunity to work on character development as well. And it was in conversation with one of the students we discovered a critical piece. When a student was asked "why didn't you take notes?" The student responded "Well, Dr. Nixon—I don't know how."

While this was disparaging, it was also a sign that our plans were working. Obviously the student felt as if t.Lab did indeed care about him. So we witnessed the vicious cycle perpetuated when schools hang their kids out there unprepared. Test scores come back that "Johnny can't read!" This is especially true in urban areas, but the truth is they are not prepared for tests. They don't have good study habits and they are not taught how to study or how to take notes, making it nearly impossible for them to adequately prepare for tests. Their notes are disorganized and chaotic as are their study habits.

Added to existing t.Lab goals was the focus on interpersonal, character building skills as well as an introduction to effective study habits. Now we could begin working with the kids.

RECAP

- All parties concerned, with the exception of t.Lab, came to the program with such low expectations that success was scoffed at in disbelief
- The Academy administration, especially, was uncooperative to the point where their actions could be considered sabotage.

- The Academy did not live up to their part of the process, subsequently ignoring:
 - o The number of students committed to the program (after assessing all of them)
 - o The resources required to transport the kids to t.Lab
 - o The equipment and software was substandard, basically unusable
 - o The Academy denied t.Lab access to the student's primary teachers and provided a minimal amount of student data
 - o The Academy did not perform various administrative functions like registering the kids into the Project
 - t.Lab developed learning plans for the students with minimal input from the Academy
 - t.Lab had added responsibilities to handle functions originally agreed to be handled by Academy administration
 - In addition to the t.Lab Summer Camp Goals of:
 - o Increasing student performance levels in ELA and Math to 5%.
 - o Identifying repeatable systems to enable targeted students with "priority status" to realize grade level performance standards within two (2) years.
- New goals were added, namely:
- o Develop a system of trust with the students that conveyed a sincere care for/about them. This linked directly with their self-esteem issues
 - o Ensure that study habit/note-taking skills were not only enhanced, but in most cases introduced

DAILY ACTIVITIES:

Our days began with the bus ride from Pilot Academy to t.Lab headquarters at Detroit World Outreach and ended with the bus ride back to the Academy. We provided breakfast and lunch for the children. The following activity log describes the typical day at t.Lab Summer Camp.

1. Bus to t.Lab
2. Case Study—often about topics specific to students (i.e., bullying)
3. Morning Huddle

4. Performance Review and Coaching
5. Skill Development and Tutoring
6. Working Lunch
7. Read A Book and Produce Book Reports
8. Afternoon Huddle
9. Review Agenda for Next Day
10. Bus to Pilot Academy

Some of the other critical activities included:

- Completed leadership skills of Pilot Academy students.
- Established leadership development plans for Pilot Academy students.
- Completed training in software tools and email systems.
- Conducted academic games
- Weekly staff meetings including brainstorming for enhanced student performance.
- Students completed daily performance scorecards.

TRANSFORMATION BEGINS

Difficulties and obstacles have been stated, yet it should be noted several students missed more than one day during an already aggressive plan. Parents were not always in place as agreed upon. “I’m doing the best I can!” one parent lamented; a single mom who worked multiple jobs. Academy administration said the t.Lab outline was too rigid and moved as far away from the Project as possible without endangering funding via Pilot Academy’s Fiduciary Achievements and accolades never came from the Academy. In fact, successes of the Project along with recommendations for continuing the successes of the students were never seen by the Board.

They didn’t want their dismal results measured up against the t.Lab Project. In an example of how this attitude of the Academy was, seemingly, mean-spirited; the Academy administrator was in the parking lot for the arrival of the bus at t.Lab on the first day. This person was not interested in supporting the students or cheering them on. They only came to watch t.Lab and make sure the t.Lab bus actually picked up the kids. When their presence was noted, they were encouraged to come

over and at least greet their students!

Nevertheless, transformation began and the students were, happily, in the thick of it. The changes, during this seven week Project, were characterized by:

1. Student transparency and openness about academic and personal challenges.
2. Student acknowledgement of environmental conditions that changed their feelings about academics and learning (i.e. t.Lab staff cares about me!).
3. Student demands for increased time and days in academic activities and t.Lab.
4. Student excitement while sharing daily t.Lab experiences with parents and family.
5. Students verbally encourage each other and engage together in academic activities.
6. Staff engagement and excitement about the prospects of student performance gains.
7. **Student academic performance gains in ELA and Math—average gain 11%.**

THE RESULTS ARE IN!

Yes, it is true! Our students exceeded our goal of 5% improvement in ELA and Math; averaging an 11% increase in scores!

The Pilot Project—t.Lab Summer Camp was successful. It realized it’s primary objectives while serving as a catalyst for a change in the attitudes and behaviors of each student. Before we conclude the matter, we would like to provide a brief introduction to our students and showcase their progress. Ultimately, their desire to improve is the success of the Project.

Figure 1: ELA SCORES BEFORE and AFTER t.LAB Summer Camp

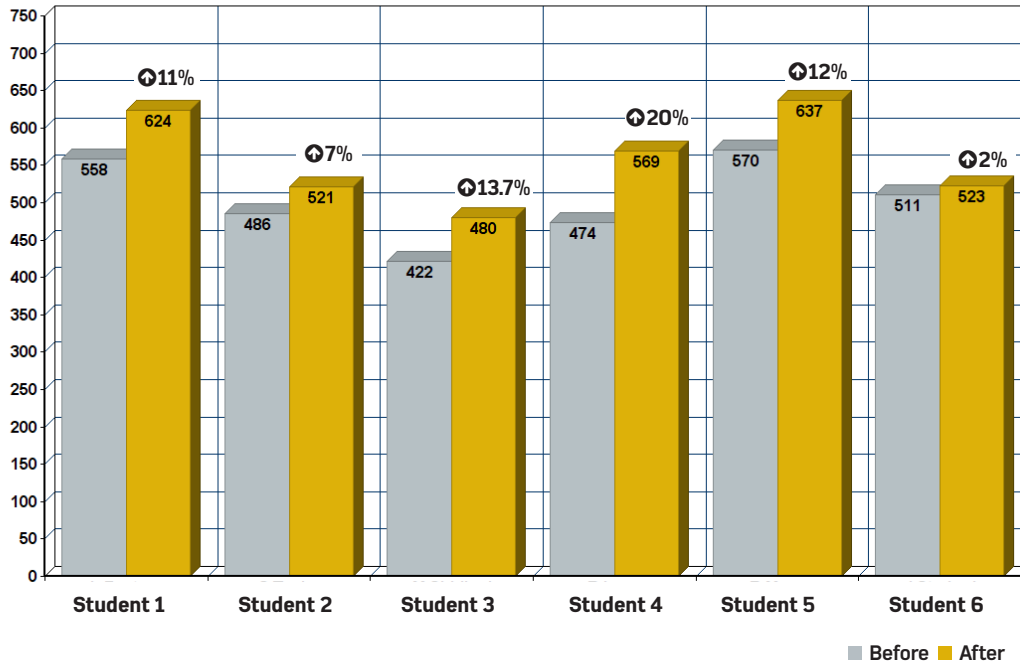
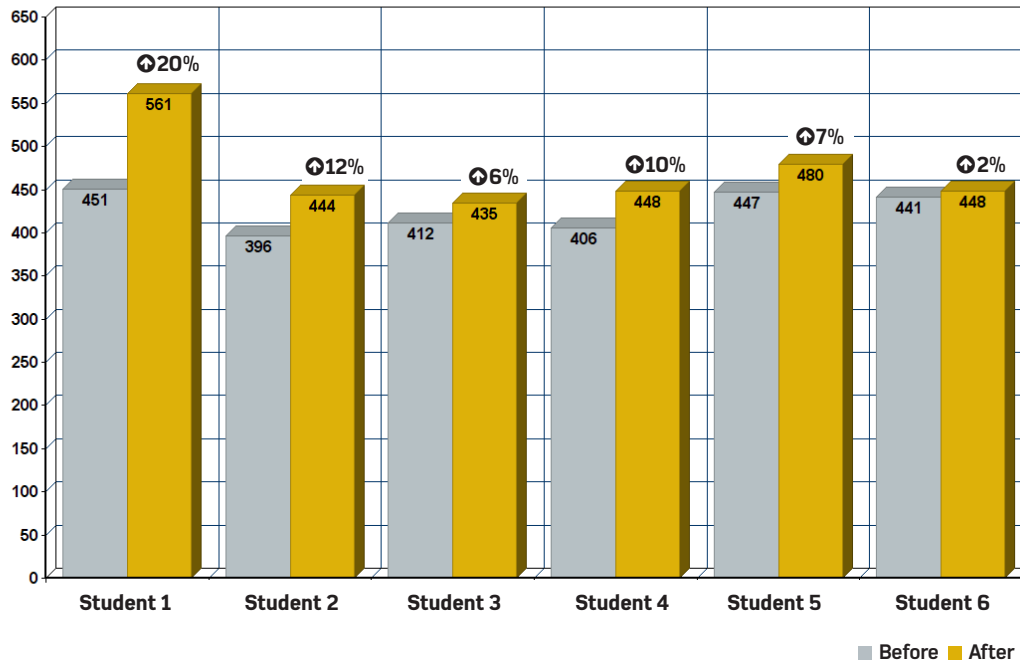


Figure 1: MATH SCORES BEFORE and AFTER t.LAB Summer Camp



STUDENT	ELA	MATH
<p>1. STUDENT 1, 9TH GRADE, is a talented, focused young lady with high academic goals. She was also a bit subdued. After the coaching sessions proved that t.Lab staff did indeed care about her and her success she began to blossom. Student 1's confidence grew and her natural leadership abilities were used to inspire the team. She placed 1st in the Academic Games and was selected the t.Lab Summer Camp Most Valuable Student. She has become a strong independent learner.</p>	<p>BEFORE: 558 AFTER: 624 IMPROVEMENT: 11%</p>	<p>BEFORE: 451 AFTER: 561 IMPROVEMENT: 20%</p>
<p>2. STUDENT 2, 5TH GRADE, is an analytical problem solver with a clear and direct communication method. He was often easily distracted, preferring to play video games than schoolwork. Student 2 was transformed also; his attitude began to change as he realized the t.Lab experience was genuine. He volunteered for various assignments and led efforts to establish a template for the weekly book project. His leadership skills came to the forefront as he began leading team huddles and becoming more organized, subsequently more successful.</p>	<p>BEFORE: 486 AFTER: 521 IMPROVEMENT: 7%</p>	<p>BEFORE: 396 AFTER: 444 IMPROVEMENT: 12%</p>
<p>3. STUDENT 3, 5TH GRADE, is keenly sensitive to the environment, an excellent listener who rises to meet most challenges. She was crowned the 1st Summer Academic Games Champion. Student 3 was involved in verbal altercations and she missed a few days of Summer Camp. Despite these challenges she was the first student to request additional academic development time. As her attitude improved and she began to trust t.Lab, it became clear that her communication skills and powers of observation will be great tools as she remains focused.</p>	<p>BEFORE: 422 AFTER: 480 IMPROVEMENT: 13.7%</p>	<p>BEFORE: 412 AFTER: 435 IMPROVEMENT: 6%</p>
<p>4. STUDENT 4, 6TH GRADE, is analytical, curious, a visionary thinker and very creative. He was also one of those give to verbal assault of his peers. Once he realized that t.Lab staff was genuine and actually cared about the students, his attitude changed. Student 4 became a champion for the "read a book per week" project and encouraged others to learn foreign languages. His interest in software development was an impetus to improved ELA and Math scores. With the new level of confidence and focus, he is sure to become a top performer.</p>	<p>BEFORE: 474 AFTER: 569 IMPROVEMENT: 20%</p>	<p>BEFORE: 406 AFTER: 448 IMPROVEMENT: 10%</p>
<p>5. STUDENT 5, 6TH GRADE, is a talented student with significant skills and potential. During the Project it was determined he did not qualify for Title 1 funding. T.Lab decided to allow Student 5's journey to continue. He lacked discipline and was often disobedient but he was a voracious reader and excellent in Math. Continuing in the Project provided much needed structure in which he could realize improvement. His interests in gaming, music, movies, and software development helped him plug into the Project and increase his success levels.</p>	<p>BEFORE: 570 AFTER: 637 IMPROVEMENT: 12%</p>	<p>BEFORE: 447 AFTER: 480 IMPROVEMENT: 7%</p>
<p>6. Student 6, 4th Grade, missed over 3.5 weeks of camp sessions and still realized increased performance scores. Like the other Pilot Academy students he is very creative and was not much interested in t.Lab. His attitude and confidence levels evolved and began to increase significantly during weeks 6 and 7 of Summer Camp. Despite his limited time in t.Lab Summer Camp, his ELA and Math scores improved.</p>	<p>BEFORE: 511 AFTER: 523 IMPROVEMENT: 2%</p>	<p>BEFORE: 441 AFTER: 448 IMPROVEMENT: 2%</p>
<p>7. Student 7, 7th Grade (dropped out of Project)</p>		
<p>8. Student 8, 7th Grade (dropped out of Project)</p>		

NEXT STEPS

A rigorous and structured academic environment was established for the summer camp. It included approximately 1500 hours spent by t.Lab staff in professional development with students. In addition approximately 800 hours were spent by Pilot Academy Students in academic development activities.

The prototype has been developed and the results exceeded what we knew they could be. We know students need to be in an environment that will nurture them, make them feel important, teach them and allow them to grow. That's what t.Lab is, it's what t.Lab does.

Another success that our students were rewarded with was being honored by t.Lab at its Annual Golf Outing. The students came to the golf outing because t.Lab picked them up and dropped them back home at their doors. The students also received a tablet computer after keeping scorecards and meeting targeted academic goals.

With the exception of two students, each of our Pilot Students had no desire to return to Pilot Academy. They were pleased with what they accomplished and took pride in what they had learned. The bottom line is, their poor scores, the problems they had communicating, learning, writing—all of their academic woes—are all fixable. Easily fixable.

t.Lab projects that each student can realize grade level competence within six months to 1 year. However, it is paramount that each student be placed in a structured learning environment that fosters a great sense of care for each student and academic rigor. Critical to their future success, while mastering core academic subjects, will be participating in a highly structured and disciplined academic environment with rigorous academic standards.

Bishop Gibert says education is paramount and parents who depend on Public Education or the Media to educate their children are relegating them to lives as slaves, servants or consumers. t.Lab has proven that structure, caring, respect, goal setting, diligence and hope would prepare our students for success and leadership. Really diligence, which is simply doing what is required, creates a sense of hope. And where there is hope, change will occur.



Case Study Participants

Dr Charisse Gibert | Ms Sheree Dial | Ms Annaliece Hanlon | Mrs. Darlene Dixon | Dr. C. Nixon, Jr.