

Public School Press

OCTOBER 2013

The Coaches

Behind the Push for Great Teaching

They hail from the five boroughs of New York, small towns in the Midwest—even the other side of the globe.

Each day, an elite team of coaches fans out to every corner of the city to work with school leaders on the city's historic new teacher evaluation and development program, *Advance*, designed to improve the quality of teaching in every classroom.

The program, which kicked in last month, overhauls a nearly 80-year-old system that only allowed principals to rate their teachers' performance as Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. For the first time, they are given detailed options to pinpoint teachers' strengths and weaknesses.

And that's where the coaches come in.

"My job is to identify, celebrate and share great practices that are helping students," says Rebekah Shoaf. As a coach, she visits schools each day to offer feedback on teaching methods.

Ms. Shoaf is an energetic Florida native who's spent the last 10 years living in Brooklyn and teaching in the city's public schools. After a decade in one classroom, she now visits many.

Another coach, Chris Lagares, a long-time resident of Queens, spent 16 years as a teacher and principal. In his new role as a coach, he helps school leaders strengthen their skills.



Coach Andolyn Brown

As a teacher, he was used to seeing his impact on students. He wondered if he'd be able to make the same kind of difference once he became a coach.

Now, with the school year in full swing, he says his one-on-one time with school leaders has been exhilarating. "I've had great conversations with principals, talking about the strengths of their teachers' practices and how that can impact students," he says.

And impacting students is precisely what *Advance* aims to do: get all students on track to graduate from high school prepared for college and successful careers.

"I want any child born in this city to have the same opportunities, regardless of the color of their skin, their country of origin, or their zip code," says Mr. Lagares.

"I truly believe in what we're doing."

The All-Star Team

A vast team of coaches has been organized to help school leaders implement *Advance*, the historic new teacher evaluation and development program that began last month. It's designed to improve the quality of New York City's public schools. These are some of the people helping to usher in change.



BRENDAN MIMS

AGE: 33

HOMETOWN: Brooklyn, NY

COLLEGE: Temple University

YEARS IN EDUCATION: 10

"I've always been a sports person," says Brendan, a Crown Heights native. He excelled at football as a middle school student and when he transitioned to high school, he switched to shooting hoops. His coach told him he was one of the most talented players on the court, and encouraged him to use his talent to lift up his teammates.

Today, the former earth science teacher and assistant principal is as passionate about education as he used to be about scoring touchdowns. As a teacher, dean, assistant principal, and coach, he believes that all students can achieve, no matter their life circumstances.

"Being part of a team, making people better, led me to want to be a leader in the classroom," he says. He sees his time spent supporting school leaders as an investment. "The return is going to be the progress and performance of the students."

Brendan's athletic experience still comes in handy. "The same way I might do shooting drills in basketball—as a coach I can hone and improve peoples' abilities through feedback," he says.



REBEKAH SHOAF

AGE: 35

HOMETOWN: Miami, FL

COLLEGE: Harvard University

YEARS IN EDUCATION: 10

Rebekah comes from a family of teachers.

Her grandmother, a librarian as well as an English teacher, encouraged her grandchildren to read.

She remembers her grandmother's old house, almost a library in itself, brimming with books.

Over a decade later, she found herself in another library, this time in a Bronx middle school. It was her first day as a teacher and she was nervous. She was scheduled to teach five classes in four different classrooms on three separate floors. 'Is it too late to back out?' she wondered.

She took a deep breath and walked down the hallway to teach her first class. She says overcoming her stage fright that day was one of the most significant moments of her life.

Rebekah works with nine different schools in the Bronx. Drawing on her past experience, she is confident that she can help teachers move their practice forward. "I've been asked some tough questions by teachers, but I'm prepared to answer them," she says.

CHRIS LAGARES

AGE: 38

HOMETOWN: Queens, NY

COLLEGE: New York University

YEARS IN EDUCATION: 16

At 6'4", Chris Lagares can remember only three students who were taller than he was during his 16 years as a teacher and principal.

The oldest of three, he grew up in a Spanish-speaking home surrounded by a tight-knit family. His parents rewarded good grades with summer travel to see relatives in Spain.

Now, as the parent of an eight-month-old daughter, he feels strongly that she and her peers should have access to a high quality education no matter what neighborhood they live in.

"At this age my daughter is a sponge," he says. "There is no better evidence that all kids are born wired and ready to learn."

Teachers, he says, have the opportunity to bring out that capacity in each and every student. "In both teaching and coaching, goals need to be spelled out, and it's our job to support that work," he says.

He's clearly inspired by his daughter, who is at the age where she wakes up babbling. "She is excited to practice what she's learning," he says. He wants other parents to know that the new teacher evaluation and development system, *Advance*, will ensure that their kids are getting a good start for the road ahead.



Straight Talk from the Chancellor

Schools Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott responds to parents' questions

How will *Advance* benefit my kids?

For the first time in decades, both teachers and principals have clear guidelines for great teaching. Teachers work hard, and *Advance* will help us get to the next level. Based on feedback and guidance for each teacher's growth, our coaches make it easier for principals to recognize where teachers are doing well and where there's room for them to improve.



Coaches spend the day at a training workshop

So what do the coaches do?

It's incredibly important. While *Advance* will help teachers and principals identify successful teaching, they'll undoubtedly have questions about the new system. We've handpicked a group of educators to work personally with school leaders. They'll be in the schools to answer questions, share advice, and gather feedback. While schools adapt to the new teacher evaluation and development system, this team is on hand to smooth out any bumps in the road.

Are the public schools ready for this new system?

This new system involves approximately 75,000 teachers and 5,000 school leaders. We're doing everything possible to make sure our schools have the support they need. But this is a huge change, and there will certainly be kinks to work out this first year.

Over the past three years, we put *Advance* to the test. Over 250 public schools took part in a study to learn which practices worked best. Those parts about the system that didn't work, we tweaked. This summer, almost 13,000 educators had thousands of hours of training. And the new coaches are now available in our schools to answer questions.



Parents As Partners Week!

October 5-12, 2013

Important Events in All 5 Boroughs!

This October, you are invited to attend events in all five boroughs focusing on your child's present and future success.

To learn more or to register for an event, visit NYC.gov and search for School Parents and Families.

Saturday, October 5, 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

PARENT ACADEMY 2013: START THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR STRONG

Long Island University, Brooklyn

Monday, October 7, 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

ARTS FOR ALL

Staten Island Museum, Staten Island

Tuesday, October 8, 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm

Respect for All

Museum of the Moving Image, Queens

Wednesday, October 9, 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Parent Academy Workshop

Scholastic Publishing, Manhattan

Thursday, October 10, 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm

PROM-Parents Rolling Out the Motivation to Get to Graduation

Surrogate's Court, Manhattan

Friday, October 11, 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

To Infinity and Beyond: College and Careers

Long Island University, Brooklyn

Saturday, October 12, 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Parent Academy Workshop

The Walt Disney School (P.S.160), Bronx

70,000 Kindergarteners
900 Options
One Website.

**Kindergarten
Connect**

Starting in January, every NYC family can apply for kindergarten online, without the headache of traveling to explore their options.

It's another step in the modernization of the school system. Parents now have unprecedented access to information—and hundreds of great school options.

It's a whole new world out there, and we're preparing our kids for it.

Beginning January 2014. Search NYC.gov for Kindergarten or call 311.

NYC Department of Education
Michael R. Bloomberg Mayor
Dennis M. Walcott Chancellor



NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS OCTOBER CALENDAR:

MON, OCT. 14	THURS, OCT. 24	FRI, OCT. 25
Columbus Day <i>Observed</i> (Schools closed)	No school for pre-kindergarten students	High School Parent Teacher Conference (Afternoon)
	High School Parent Teacher Conference (Evening)	