



Cultivating Excellence

**Promise Academy Charter Schools
Strategic Priority Initiative**

School Year 2019-2020

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A Message from Our Leaders: Taking Our Schools To The Next Level

Dear Promise Academy Community,

Providing our students with an excellent education is a fundamental part of our work at the Harlem Children's Zone. Through our Promise Academy Charter Schools, we have not only improved the educational outcomes of our scholars, but we are proving what is possible in urban education.

We pride ourselves on being a learning community, which means that we reflect on our work, build on our strengths and identify weaknesses as opportunities to improve. In that spirit, we are excited to share with you the Cultivating Excellence Initiative, a collaborative effort which is taking our schools to the next level of consistency and strength. Beginning in 2018, leaders from our schools have participated in an unprecedented effort to implement our five strategic priorities. We have partnered together to improve our school culture, establish a clear, shared vision of excellence for our students, align our practices, embrace teacher voice in instructional decision making, further develop our staff's skills, and establish systems to improve our schools.

Through this initiative, we are strengthening our educational environment to engage our scholars in becoming stewards of their own learning. One of the earliest steps in this process was to create a vision for a Promise Academy graduate. Based on that, we defined our ideal school culture, one that ensures a focus on the whole child, promoting social and emotional learning at every grade. While we are proud of our progress to date, we are excited to take this work to the next level. For instance, we know that a driving factor in the success of our students is our ability to effectively develop and support our teachers. Therefore, we are continuing to look at ways to improve our professional development systems and instructional practices to support to our staff.

We are excited about the many benefits that our students, staff and families will experience through the Cultivating Excellence Initiative. Together, we will patiently move forward so these strategic priorities take root and help us grow into a school that assures all Promise Academy students successfully graduate from college, start a rewarding career and make their families and community proud.

Sincerely,

Anne Williams-Isom and Dr. Achil Petit



Anne Williams-Isom
Chief Executive Officer
Harlem Children's Zone



Achil Petit, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Promise Academy Charter Schools

Executive Summary

In 2018, Promise Academy launched a three-year **Cultivating Excellence Initiative**, designed to accelerate our growth and develop a stronger learning community for our students and staff. After a comprehensive assessment of both our strengths and weaknesses, we identified five strategic priority areas to cultivate excellence at Promise Academy. These priority areas are designed to help our six Promise Academy schools deliver on our shared vision for a Promise Academy graduate (see page 7).

Five Strategic Priorities

School Culture

Instructional Excellence

Observation, Feedback & Recognition

Professional Development

Systems & Communication

School Culture: This priority focuses on supporting positive behavior among our scholars and responding to their social, emotional and wellness needs. We are doing so by implementing a trauma-informed social emotional learning program and delivering high-quality professional development to our staff.

Instructional Excellence: Driven by our vision of a Promise Academy graduate, we are strengthening and re-aligning our course offerings and curriculum across grades to ensure all students are truly ready for the demands of college and career.

Observation, Feedback & Recognition: This priority ensures that we have both a clear set of expectations for all of our teaching staff, as well as a consistent process for teachers to be observed and coached. We have begun implementing new systems for observation, both formal and informal, so that every educator gets the direct feedback, training, and support they need to excel.

Professional Development: We strongly believe that investing in the development of our staff is critical to improving the educational outcomes of our students. This priority area focuses on transforming the professional development (PD) experience and resources we offer to our educators and administrators, not only increasing the frequency of PD, but improving the quality and relevance as well.

Systems & Communication: The implementation of these priorities will be supported by a broader focus on our communication and system alignment. By documenting key practices and systems and encouraging collaboration across schools, we will promote a positive, empowered, and accountable adult culture that will cultivate a strong and consistent student body from kindergarten through college graduation.

As an organization that has built a worldwide reputation for innovation, we are excited about the bright future ahead for our students, staff and families as we continue implementing the Cultivating Excellence Initiative.

Who We Are

Promise Academy Charter Schools are part of the Harlem Children's Zone, a nationally recognized model for breaking the cycle of poverty, that offers cradle to college to career programming in central Harlem.



HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE

MISSION STATEMENT: To break the cycle of poverty in Central Harlem by working at scale to build community, strengthen families and ensure children succeed from birth to college to career.

OVERVIEW: We offer a comprehensive, place-based model aimed at tackling the myriad socio-economic and environmental factors of poverty through in-depth, direct service programs for children, their families, and the community. Our high quality, no-cost programs meet their most urgent needs through education, social services, access to healthcare and other resources that influence social capital and upward mobility. Importantly, our pipeline—the seamless continuum of evidence-based supports tailored for every stage from early childhood through college and career. Since inception, we have achieved unprecedented success: our Pre-K programs are sending children to kindergarten school-ready, our charter schools have made significant headway in closing the racial achievement gap, and each year, we send 200+ students to college.

PROMISE ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOLS


MISSION STATEMENT: To provide high quality, standards-based academic programs for scholars, grades K-12, from underserved communities and underperforming school districts. We equip scholars with the skills they need to get to and through college and career successfully. Promise Academy promotes high achievement in all subjects through a demanding curriculum, extensive supportive services and the use of data-driven teaching methods. Promise Academy is committed to promoting academic accomplishment, positive character development, healthy lifestyles and leadership skills. In partnership with the Harlem Children's Zone, Promise Academy addresses the educational and developmental needs of each scholar.

HCZ BY THE NUMBERS




6,388
Baby College
Graduates
Since 2000

14,000+
Children Served

98%
Harlem Gems Pre-K
Students "School Ready"

97%
High School Seniors
Accepted to College




9,000+
Children in the Healthy
Harlem Program

Our Values

To ensure that 2,100 employees across 30+ programs are aligned in how we get all our children to and through college, HCZ has articulated six core values to guide us.



Children First

We embrace a holistic, youth-centered approach to create transformational opportunities, driven by justice and a radical hope for their future. We partner with families and our community to prioritize the safety, well-being, and development of our youth.



Excellence

We set high expectations and uncompromising standards because our children, families, and community deserve consistent, high quality opportunities and services. We role model, execute, and serve with integrity and accountability.



Respect

We deeply value the knowledge and experience that every child, family, community partner and colleague brings. We ask to understand, listen before sharing, and act with empathy.



Strategic Relentlessness

We explore every option to find the best approach to address the complex challenges each of our youth and families face. We persevere with resilience, balancing extraordinary effort with sustainable resources and expertise.



Army of Love

We support each other and work together with laughter and joy to turn shared strength and wisdom into collective impact. We learn from each other, ask for help when needed, and respond when asked.



Best Selves to Best Serve

We bring our best selves to this challenging work each day, to best serve our young people, their families and this community. We encourage healthy habits and support each others' journey for physical, emotional, and personal wellness.

“Just as we have personal values that guide our decision-making and daily actions, organizational values guide our work. This campaign is a way to be clear about who we are as an organization and help us be consistent.”

-CEO Anne Williams-Isom

Our Vision of a Promise Academy Graduate

We have a clear vision for a Promise Academy graduate: a life-long learner that is committed to pursuing their intellectual, social, and emotional growth. With this end in mind, we are aligning our culture model, course offerings, and instructional practices across K-12 in support of this vision.

Life-long Learners



Promise Academy Charter Schools develop life-long learners committed to the continuous pursuit of intellectual, social, and emotional growth, while holding high the importance of wellness and self-care. As members of our school community, our scholars embrace our organizational values to achieve self-sufficiency and success in school and beyond.

Ready for College & Career



Promise Academy scholars will graduate ready for college and the career of their choice, with advanced skills in mathematics and English Language Arts; a command of science, history and the arts; and familiarity with at least one secondary language. Our graduates will employ tech-literacy skills to navigate the college environment and the modern workforce, and they will have engaged in meaningful exploration of at least one potential field of study or career.

Conscious Citizens of the World



Promise Academy graduates will be equipped to pursue their passions and empowered to think, speak, and act positively on behalf of themselves, their community, the country, and the world. As conscious citizens, our graduates will understand issues of equity and social justice and engage respectfully in challenging discourse. With a firm foundation of compassion, they will work to strengthen and support their diverse communities.

Equipped Socially and Emotionally

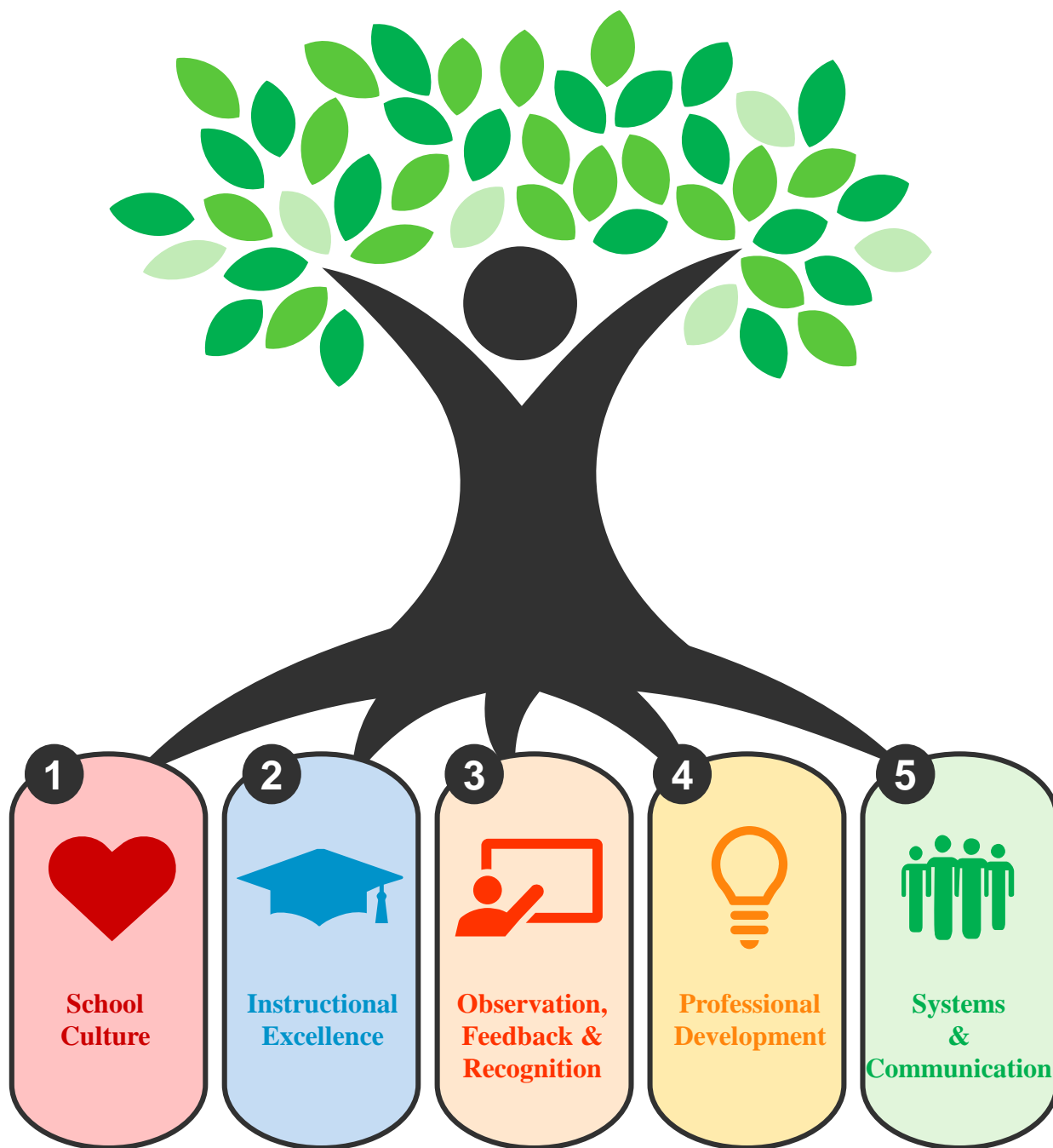


Confident and resilient, Promise Academy graduates will approach any circumstance knowing when and how to seek help if they need it. They will have the courage and self-discipline to take calculated risks, knowing that failing is part of learning. Our scholars will graduate as independent, motivated, and reflective individuals, carrying with them the love and dedicated support of their HCZ family.



Cultivating Excellence: Our Strategic Priorities

In 2018, we identified a set of five strategic priorities, ensuring alignment across our six Promise Academy schools that are bound together by one vision of a Promise Academy graduate. We believe that these shared priorities are foundational for cultivating excellence and growing together.



1

Strategic Priority 1:

School Culture

Design and launch a consistent set of systems for building classroom culture, social emotional development, and scholar agency.

Action 1:

Create and implement an aligned, developmentally appropriate K-12 school culture system that supports positive behavior among our scholars by maintaining consistent expectations, offering effective incentives and delivering appropriate consequences.

Action 2:

Design and implement a social emotional learning program that is research-based, comprehensive and trauma-informed.

Action 3:

Develop school leaders and staff to better meet the needs of their students by providing high-quality professional development focused on incorporating social emotional learning practices into their classrooms.



Action 4:

Develop systems to monitor and support teachers in meeting classroom culture expectations.

Strategic Priority 2:

Instructional Excellence

Establish a clear and shared vision of excellence for Promise Academy scholars and ensure alignment of curriculum to this vision.

Action 1:

Develop a shared vision of excellence for a Promise Academy graduate.

Action 2:

Analyze, refine, and implement K-12 ELA and math curriculum that is aligned with the vision of excellence for a graduate, college- and career-ready rigor, as well as with Common Core standards. This includes offering more robust writing instruction in all grades.

Action 3:

Analyze, refine, and implement shared K-12 science and social studies curriculum that is aligned with the vision of excellence for a graduate.

Action 4:

Align K-12 course offerings to ensure consistent sequences of coursework and adequate preparation of a Promise Academy graduate, including enhancing our Advanced Placement offerings in high school.





Strategic Priority 3:

Observation, Feedback and Recognition

Establish a clear and shared system for assessing teaching at Promise Academy and for providing effective observation and feedback.

Action 1:

Adopt a clear system and set of expectations that define excellence for Promise Academy teachers, teaching assistants and teaching fellows.

Action 2:

Develop a clear and consistent approach for observation, feedback and recognition that is aligned with Promise Academy's expectations for teachers.

Action 3:

Adopt consistent tools for formal and informal observations and provide the necessary training and guidelines on the purpose and frequency of observations.



Strategic Priority 4:

Professional Development

Develop and retain highly effective and mission-aligned teachers through differentiated and relevant professional development.

Action 1:

Use data to develop a professional development (PD) scope and sequence with opportunities for organization-wide, site-specific and individualized professional learning.

Action 2:

Develop a systematic approach to PD content creation and delivery to ensure consistent implementation.

Action 3:

Collect teacher input and feedback on PD offerings to inform areas of strength and improvement.

Action 4:

Analyze and resolve any time, space and staffing barriers to implementing high-quality and effective PD, and then coordinate any required supports.





Strategic Priority 5:

Systems & Communication

Clarify responsibilities and adopt systems that will support a positive, empowered and accountable adult culture.

Action 1:

Develop a comprehensive document of shared K-12 systems and practices as a resource and reference tool for leaders and staff.

Action 2:

Refine and expand opportunities for teaching staff to have more voice in instructional decision-making.

Action 3:

Refine and expand systems to support greater alignment and effective collaboration across grades and campuses.



Our Anticipated Long-Term Impact

By focusing on these five shared priorities, we aim to cultivate excellence across our schools and grow together. We are prioritizing this work because we believe that the long-term impact will be significant and support the promise that we made to our students and families.



1

School Culture



- Improved social-emotional learning (SEL) skills among students
- Consistent expectations, incentives and consequences for students
- Fewer student removals and suspensions

2

Instructional Excellence



- Aligned student learning experience across K-12 grades
- Improved achievement against Common Core state standards
- Improved student mastery based on benchmark assessment scores
- Higher number of AP classes offered and a growth in college and career readiness among graduates

3

Observation, Feedback & Recognition



- Increased frequency of teacher observations and feedback
- More consistent implementation of optimal instructional practices
- Higher percentage of teachers feel supported and developed

4

Professional Development



- Higher frequency and quality of staff professional development
- Improved teacher retention
- Greater use of data to support instruction

5

Systems & Communication



- Clearer roles and responsibilities for educators and administrators
- Greater collaboration and alignment
- Higher employee satisfaction

Join us on our path to excellence!

As a learning community, we are committed to growing together. We invite you to get involved and share your ideas about how Promise Academies can continue improving so that every student graduates with the skills needed to succeed in college and career. We are excited to partner with you!

Teachers

- Speak with your education director or principal on ways that systems can be further clarified or improved
- Offer to lead a training or become a peer mentor
- Share your best classroom practices with other teachers
- Regularly implement social and emotional learning techniques and trauma-informed practices in your classroom

Students

- Speak with your teacher, counselor or principal on any ideas you have to improve your school or experience
- Ask questions and advocate for yourself and others
- Feed your curiosity and take advantage of the academic tutoring and afterschool enrichments available to you
- Become a peer mentor

Parents

- Speak with your child's teacher or principal on how you can support their learning and social and emotional development
- Nurture your child's interests and propose new courses or programs you would like to see
- Attend parent workshops
- Get to know your child's teacher and share any needs specific to your child
- Ask your child about their college and career aspirations

For further information on the Cultivating Excellence initiative, please reach out to Susan Rydz, Deputy of Special Projects at Promise Academy, at susan.rydz@hczpromise.org.





Harlem Children's
ZONE