

## News Releases

Aug. 25, 2006

### DeKalb School Staff Prepare for New Year

How do *you* make a difference? This was the question posed to DeKalb District #428 staff on Aug. 24. Guest speaker, Dr. Pedro Noguera, professor in the Steinhardt School of Education at New York University, addressed a rapt audience of all District staff for 90 minutes in the high school auditorium. His presentation, “Creating Conditions that Promote Student Achievement,” was an important kick-off for the new school year. One of the District’s key strategies is to foster an attitude of high expectations in staff, students, curricula and all District operations. Dr. Noguera’s presentation spoke directly to that strategy and energized the staff.



According to Dr. Noguera, education’s primary goal is to prepare young people to be responsible adults. His statement that there is more to education than raising test scores drew murmurs of agreement from the audience. Too many schools, he said, focus exclusively on test score improvement. He noted that while the No Child Left Behind legislation has increased scrutiny on test scores, it has also mandated that all children must be learning, not just the ones who come ready to learn. He challenged the mostly teacher audience to examine their teaching methods and beliefs to make sure they help all students. “The kids who need it the most are the ones we have the most trouble reaching,” he said. These students often include African-American, Latino, and non-English-speaking students as well as those from single-parent homes or whose parents didn’t go to college. He noted that all parents have aspirations for their children. As an example, he asked how many in the audience – virtually all college-educated – had parents who did not graduate from college. At least half the people raised their hands.

Through anecdotes and real-life examples from California to Florida to Massachusetts, Dr. Noguera discussed teaching styles, gangs, and discipline. He also stressed the importance of educators learning from each other. He noted that students’ work is in part a product of what the teachers bring to the classroom. Throughout, he emphasized the importance of attitude. “The schools that make a difference,” he said, “are the schools that believe they can.”

Dr. Noguera’s presentation dovetailed with recent initiatives in DeKalb schools to improve the learning environment. In the last year, both middle schools and the high school established Positive Behavior Intervention Systems; The Stearnes Group and District personnel participated in a variety of community meetings to discuss initiatives to address diversity, and the Multicultural Committee worked on action plans; bilingual taskforces were formed at all schools; and the Project Breakthrough team continued work on resistance to change.

In addition to being a professor at New York University, Dr. Noguera is also the Executive Director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education and the co-Director of the Institute for the study of Globalization and Education in Metropolitan Settings (IGEMS). He is the author of several books, including *City Schools and the American Dream: Reclaiming the Promise of Public Education* (2003) and *Beyond Resistance: Youth Civic Engagement and Social Change* (2006). His research interests also include race and schooling, immigration, leadership and school reform, and student achievement.