WE MUST RECOVER OUR STUDENTS—ACKNOWLEDGING THE NEED TO SUPPORT NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL
OF NEW YORK
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. RANGEL. Madam Speaker, I rise today to enter into the RECORD a two-part series published in the New York Daily News by Erin Einhorn and Carrie Melago entitled: Room 206: Then and Now. This series chronicles the challenges faced by twenty students who began together in gifted kindergarten class at Harlem's Public School 36 but have taken diverse paths in terms of academic and personal development. Many of these students are succeeding against the odds to earn high school diplomas, while others have become causalities of societal forces arising from circumstances in their homes and community which conspire to tear them down. Citing family support and self-motivation as building blocks for their perseverance, the students graduating from high school this year who were once in Room 206 represent what minorities in New York City can accomplish despite institutional inefficiencies and personal difficulties.

More than half of the African-American and Hispanic-American students who enter New York City public high schools do not graduate in four years. Some of the challenges faced by the students cited in the New York Daily News series included the lack of useful teaching and sufficient guidance counseling due to the overcrowding of schools, family tragedy, and peer pressure to join gangs. However, 16 of the 20 students interviewed will graduate this year on schedule from high school: 3 from public schools outside of the city, 2 from private city schools, and 11 from New York City public schools.

The series also illustrates the diverse paths two young men can take with similar family backgrounds but dissimilar backing in terms of academic and professional development. One student had the support of counselors, teachers, and a mentor, while the other student had none of the above and efforts to gain the attention of the under-staffed guidance office by his mother were fruitless. The first young man will graduate this year from high school and pursue a bachelor's degree in law or medicine, while the latter was pulled out of high school to protect his life from rival gang members and will attempt to complete a GED program for the third time this year.

Both young men aspired to earn high school diplomas, but the disparity of sponsors within the New York City public school system can be attributed to their contrasting positions. We must work to ensure that our students achieve academic success and do not become victims of circumstances that can divert their path of learning. I encourage my colleagues to support the enhancement of middle and high school curricula and human resources that can provide the greatest opportunity for minority students disproportionately affected by school inefficiencies.

ROOM 206: THEN AND NOW

(Erin Einhorn and Carrie Melago)

The year is 1994, and the kids gazing out at the camera for their annual class photo have just entered the New York City public schools. As the girls smile broadly and some of the boys try to look tough, they're captured at a time in their lives when the future seems so far away. But in the 13 years that followed, the 23 kids who had the good fortune to test into the gifted kindergarten at Harlem's Public School 36 would see their class splintered by adversity and fate. One of the girls would grieve the murders of both her parents. One of the boys would be arrested three times and spend a week on Rikers Island. One would get involved in a gang. Another would attend a city high school so violent she'd see four knifefights in four years.

Their very personal stories illuminate a sprawling public school system where some children find ways to flourish but many become lost. Nearly 60% of black and Latino New York City public school students don't earn a diploma after four years of high school. But somehow, most of the youngsters who donned navy blue uniforms with little red ties to pose with teacher Rhonda Harris would beat the odds.

''It's a very big struggle, very big, trying to give them a good education, trying to have them stay out of trouble,'' said Denise Ortiz, a mother of six whose daughter Estrella was in that class. The Daily News spent two months tracking down the children of Room 206, finding 21 of the 23. Eleven report they're graduating this month from New York City public schools, two from city Catholic schools and three from public schools in other cities.

Two are still enrolled and working toward diplomas, and three have drifted away from the daily grind of education, unsure if they'll find their way back. Kelvin Jones, who dropped out last year, is one of the lost. ''Once you leave, you're going to get too used to this outside life, sleeping all day, doing what you're doing,'' he said. ''You ain't ready to go back to school.''

The children of Room 206 could be from any public school. The News chose them by chance, starting with a top Harlem high school, Frederick Douglass Academy, and asking to meet with top seniors. That led us to Kamal Ibrahim, a standout who plans to major in physics at Carnegie Mellon University. He gave us the name of Mrs. Harris, his kindergarten teacher. She led us to her 1994 class.

We found Kamal's classmates by word of mouth, public records and the Internet. Most agreed to tell their stories. Three refused. They made different choices along the way, but all of them started in the same place: a well-regarded school carved into a rocky bluff at 123rd St. and Amsterdam Ave., across from the Grant public houses.

The year the students of Room 206 started kindergarten, budget cuts meant students were crowded together in aging classrooms. Schools in poor neighborhoods were staffed with high numbers of uncertified teachers, and a lawsuit filed the previous year alleged that the average guidance counselor had to work with 700 kids. These youngsters were off to a good start at PS 36, a K–2 school, but there were problems ahead. Some of their families left town in search of better schools and safer streets. Some scraped together pennies for Catholic school tuition. Others used fake addresses or pulled strings to navigate a public school system that's as much a tale of inequality as the city itself.

In third grade, Jermaine Jackson enrolled at Harlem's PS 144, which was so chaotic the Board of Ed shut it down in 2001. In a crowded class there in 1997, he became distracted—and lazy, he said. He fell behind and had to repeat the third grade. '''It's not really their fault because I didn't try, either,'' he said.

Artavia Jarvis says she was hit by a teacher in the fourth grade at Harlem's PS 125. Her parents promptly enrolled her in parochial school, saying they'd rather remain in public housing so they could afford her tuition. Artavia doesn't think she would have graduated from public school. ''I would have continued being bad,'' she said. Other kids fell off track in middle school or high school, including Morgan Hill, whose mother moved her to New Jersey in ninth grade. ''I miss New York and that's where I want to go back to, but I think this was the time that I should have gone away,'' she said.

But Room 206 also produced public school success stories like Unique Covington, whose grades and writing skills got her into a small, creative sixth through 12th grade school in lower Manhattan called the Institute for Collaborative Education.

Her middle school classes had 17 students, enabling her to build close relationships with teachers. In high school, instead of exams, she wrote up to 20-page research papers and presented them to panels of teachers and students. Bound for the University of Hartford in the fall, she credits her success to great schools, an involved mother and herself.

And then there's Letricia Linton, who was 3 when she witnessed her mother's murder and 10 when her father was shot in the head by a mugger. She was raised by a powerhouse of a grandmother who pushed her to succeed and to draw on her past for strength. Tragedy ''made me want to do more with my life because I see how short life is,'' she said.

Graduating Thursday from Frederick Douglass, Letricia knew she'd be successful because she had the right ingredients. ''You have to have family support,'' she said. ''You have to have a good relationship with teachers. You have to have motivation within yourself. . . . And you have to have hope.''

They were smart children who tested into a gifted kindergarten at Harlem's Public School 36 in 1994, but Lance Patterson and Ronnie Rodriguez would each fall in with the wrong crowd. Lance would be arrested. Ronnie would join a gang.

Their challenges were similar, but they've ended up in very different places. One has a mother who will watch him don a cap and gown this week. The other has a mom who blames herself. ''I should have kept a closer eye on him,'' Sandra Lugo said of her son, Ronnie. ''I should have been on him maybe a little harder, been a little stricter.'' What happened to the two boys on their travels through the city's public schools tells an important story about the fates that divide kids into the half who graduate on time and the half who fall off track.

Lance and Ronnie are two of the 23 kids from PS 36 whom the Daily News tracked down 13 years after they entered school to see how they fared. Both boys are the sons of single mothers who dropped out of high school, but vowed their sons would succeed. Ronnie's mother lied about her address three times to get him into good public schools. Lance's mother enrolled him in the Boy Scouts and other activities to engage his mind. But when Ronnie started getting into trouble, his mother was the only one to notice. ''No teacher ever called me to say he was failing or nothing like that,'' she said.

Lance, in contrast, was surrounded by supportive teachers, an attentive guidance counselor and an inspiring mentor who helped keep him on track. ''There was always someone in his corner,'' his mother, Lorraine Patterson, said. ''A lot of kids don't have that, but he was lucky to bump into people who said, 'I care. I think you can make it.' ''

Ronnie was a good student until middle school, when he began to socialize more. His grades slipped and his only option for high school was Louis D. Brandeis High, a massive upper West Side school then known for

its gangs and its large number of dropouts. ''The classes were jokes,'' Ronnie said. ''You'd go to class—it's everybody playing around, yelling, screaming, doing whatever they want, so if I'm not learning, I might as well just do what everybody else is doing.'' Everybody else was cutting, he said. A friend told him he'd be marked present if he attended just the first three periods of every day, so that's what he did. His mom arranged a meeting with a counselor to try to set Ronnie straight, but the meeting was chaotic, she said. ''I understand they're short-staffed but. . . it wasn't a priority to have Ronnie motivated or to have him do better.''

When he returned to school in September 2004, after being held back in ninth grade, Ronnie buckled down. ''For that month, I was doing everything I needed to do,'' he said. But he had a poor academic foundation from middle school and began failing tests. ''I'm thinking in my head: 'Why am I doing all this work if I'm not going to pass?' '' That's when he gave up and joined a gang, he said, first a local school gang, then the Latin Kings.

His mother tried to get him a transfer to another school after he was chased one day by rival gang members with knives, but when that didn't work, she pulled him out of school. ''I didn't want my son to end up getting stabbed or hurt or even killed,'' she said. Since then, he's tried two GED programs, but neither has been a good fit. He plans to try again next year so he can join the Army. ''It's sad, because it's not what I want for him,'' his mom said. ''I know college is not for everyone, but I thought he'd at least get a diploma.'' Brandeis Principal Eloise Messineo did not return calls seeking comment.

Lance, the class clown of his kindergarten, had strong elementary-school grades that got him into the well-regarded Frederick Douglass Academy in sixth grade. ''He was a little pain in the neck,'' Principal Gregory Hodge said of Lance. ''I think I met with his mother 10 to 15 times, on the low side.'' But Lance was bright, his teachers encouraged him and he looked forward to coming to school. He came every day, sometimes on Saturday, even after he got into trouble with police, he said. Juvenile records aren't public, but Lance says he was charged twice as a juvenile, once for stealing a woman's purse and once for picking a fight with a stranger on the street.

He was also arrested as an adult when he was 16. Those records have been sealed, but he said he was charged with a hate-crime assault that he wasn't involved in. The charges against him were dropped, but not until he'd spent a week locked up at Rikers Island, he said. It was one of the only weeks of school he's missed. ''Actually, I think it was good for me,'' Lance said. ''It clicked in my brain and made me want to do better, like, 'Oh, no, you can't do this. You've got to do better for yourself if you don't want to be in and out of jail. It's not fun.' ''

The juvenile court assigned him to a program called Esperanza that paired him with a caring mentor three times a week for six months. The mentor, Laurence Fernandez, was the father figure Lance needed. Lance also had a guidance counselor who stepped in and teachers who cheered him on. But in the end, he did the hard work. He's bound for college in the fall and hopes to become a lawyer or a doctor. ''I want to do better than to just sit at home, working a regular job,'' he said. ''I want to do better for myself. I know I can do anything.''

INTRODUCING A BILL TO REAUTHORIZE THE FAA

HON. JERRY F. COSTELLO

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. COSTELLO. Madam Speaker, today Chairman OBERSTAR, Mr. MICA, Mr. PETRI and I have introduced a bill to reauthorize the programs within the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)—The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2007.

This legislation keeps our aviation system moving forward so that we can increase capacity and safety, modernize our air traffic control system, and continue to reduce energy consumption and improve our environment.

I have said time and again that I believe our Next Generation system can be absorbed by the existing FAA financing structure with a General Fund contribution that is consistent with, or even smaller than, recent General Fund contributions. That is what we have done here.

We are recommending to the House Ways & Means Committee that the general aviation jet fuel tax rate be adjusted for inflation from 21.8 cents per gallon to 30.7 cents per gallon, and that the aviation gasoline tax rate be increased from 19.3 cents per gallon to 24.1 cents per gallon. The forecasted growth of Trust Fund revenues, coupled with additional revenue from the recommended general aviation fuel tax rate adjusted for inflation, will be sufficient to provide for the historic capital funding levels required to modernize the ATC system, as well as to stabilize and strengthen the Trust Fund.

In addition to providing generous funding levels, aviation safety is extremely important and as a result, we have numerous initiatives and policies to make our system the safest it can be.

In particular, I want to highlight two issues that were recently raised in our NTSB Most Wanted hearing and are being addressed in this legislation. First, we are requiring the FAA to issue a final rule regarding the reduction of fuel tank flammability in aircraft no later than December 31, 2007. Second, we authorize $42 million for runway incursion reduction programs between FY08 and FY11. We also require the FAA to submit a report to Congress containing a plan for the installation and deployment of systems to alert controllers and flight crews to potential runway incursions and provide funding for runway status light acquisition and installation between FY08 and FY11.

Here at home and across the globe, more is being done to reduce energy consumption and emissions. Energy and its consumption are extremely important to our economy—we need it to drive a car; fly a plane; produce goods; and heat and light our homes and offices. We do, however, need to be responsible and aware of the environmental impacts of our energy use.

Within aviation, aircraft fuel efficiency has increased at roughly 1 percent per year, and research continues in engine efficiency, airframe aerodynamics, and the use of lighter materials, like composites currently used on the Boeing 787. Changes in a variety of other factors, such as operating procedures, aircraft routing, and load factors, can also have significant impacts on emissions.

Under this legislation, we establish new environmental provisions to help reduce emissions and energy consumption. I will highlight just a few provisions:

The CLEEN engine and airframe technology partnership which authorizes $111 million for cooperative agreements between the FAA and institutions or consortiums to research the development, maturing and certification of lower energy, emissions and noise engine and airframe technology.

Establishment of a pilot program that allows FAA to fund six projects at public-use airports that take laboratory proven environmental research concepts and implement them at actual airports. Eligible projects could include research that would measurably reduce or mitigate aviation impacts on noise, air or water quality.

Establishment of high performance and sustainable air traffic control facilities by implementing environmentally-beneficial practices for new construction and major renovation of air traffic control facilities. This provision is modeled after what is currently being done at O'Hare International Airport.

Finally, over the last eight months, passengers on our airlines have encountered delays and cancelled flights, resulting in lengthy tarmac delays. Voluntary efforts by the industry to improve airline service have come under strong criticism and I believe closer oversight of the aviation industry is needed. While I question a one-size-fits-all legislative approach to regulating consumer issues, changes must be made. During our April 2007 hearing, we learned that airlines and airports do not have emergency contingency plans in place.

I said then it should be a priority and that is why in this legislation, we require air carriers and large and medium hub airports to file emergency contingency plans with the Secretary of Transportation for review and approval. These plans must detail how the air carrier will provide food, water, restroom facilities, cabin ventilation, and medical treatment for passengers onboard an aircraft that is on the ground for an extended period of time without access to the terminal. The plans must also detail how facilities and gates will be shared. Fines will be imposed by DOT for any violations. Finally, the air carriers must update their plans every 3 years. The airports must update their plans every 5 years.

Madam Speaker, this legislation is the culmination of numerous hearings, indepth analysis, and a continued dialogue with the FAA, our colleagues, and stakeholders. These issues are important and difficult because our answers will determine our ability to continue to maintain the world's safest aviation system.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. HENRY C. ''HANK'' JOHNSON, JR.

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Madam Speaker, I regret that I was unable to vote on Thursday and Friday, the 21st and 22nd of June. Had I been present, I would have voted:

''Aye'' on rollcall vote No. 536, and amendment to H.R. 2764 which would prohibit the use of funds for programs at the Western