

Student Radio

Magnifying Voices, Preparing a Future

Veronica McDermott

"I feel like a CEO!" 6th grader Danny blurted out as he entered the school radio station, a classroom commandeered by speech and language teachers at Beardsley School in Bridgeport, Conn., one of the poorest school districts in one of the richest states in the nation. Beardsley School also has the dubious distinction of being among the first schools in Connecticut to have been labeled failing under No Child Left Behind.

Today, however, the sound of failure is nowhere to be heard in Beardsley. Instead, having just come back from assignment, Danny—with recorder, headset, microphone, and shot book in hand—and fellow news team members, producer Joshua and assistant producer Taheera, beamed with their accomplishment.

"Doing a news story is fun," Taheera said, "because it's something different, and you're doing something that any other kid could only dream of. We're professionals—like people that actually work at radio stations. I think that's cool. I think it's awesome."

Before the week is done, the news team and their 40 fellow students in 6th grade will have created, written, produced, recorded, and hosted a [30-minute radio show](#) highlighting the strengths of Beardsley School. As members of the Beardsley Broadcasting Company (BBC) production team, students scoured the school looking for news, conducted ad hoc interviews called "streeters," made soundscapes of school life, created stings (the musical bridges between radio story segments), wrote opening and closing remarks for news stories, collected their musings in a series of radio diaries, and spontaneously created station logos just for the fun of it.

To reverse the cycle of failure that had gripped Beardsley School, it partnered with the National Urban Alliance (NUA). As learning and teaching have changed at the school, so have student outcomes. An analysis of vertical scale scores on state reading assessments showed that, between 2006 and 2009, the gains in reading for Beardsley 6th graders were 10 points higher than those of comparable students state- and district-wide. On mathematics assessments, the same study revealed that Beardsley students made a gain of 111 points while comparable students statewide made an 89-point gain and students districtwide made an 87-point gain. In addition, this year's 6th grade students achieved the highest score districtwide on the second quarter online math assessment, outperforming students in the magnet school, who are traditionally the highest performers in the district.

Beardsley students have been the beneficiaries of classrooms steeped in the Pedagogy of Confidence (Jackson, 2001), a signature feature of NUA professional development that encourages and supports all students' intellectual development, fulfillment of potential, and preparation to be productive members of society.

The goal of the NUA's Student Voices projects, such as Beardsley School's BBC, is to engage students as genuine members and leaders of the school community beyond the role they play as classroom learners. The BBC team members gave voice to the life of their school: through careful observation, reflection, and documentation, they've captured the strengths of Beardsley School.

In creating the broadcasts, students spoke to teachers who are transforming their practice. They roamed

the halls collecting snippets from students and staff about how they use their individual strengths. They walked into classrooms to capture on tape the sounds of engagement, motivation, and joy that filters into the hallways on a daily basis. They interviewed a classmate battling the ravages of brain cancer.

In short, students were given the open space to find their voices. By turning up the volume, we can hear their strong voices and believe—like they do—in their strong futures.

Reference

Jackson, Y. (2001). Reversing underachievement in urban students: Pedagogy of confidence. In A. Costa (Ed.), *Developing minds* (3rd ed., pp. 222–228). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Editor's Note: Hear the Beardsley School 6th graders tell their school story through the Beardsley Broadcasting Company. www.nuatc.org/projects/bridgeport/bbc_radio_show.html

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