

Jubilee Schools Making a Difference in Memphis Neighborhoods

Reported by: Allison Sossaman, abcNews 24 (12/24/10)

MEMPHIS, TN - With the uncertainty of Memphis and Shelby County Schools taking the education spotlight, there is a group of schools quietly making a difference in some of the roughest parts of the city. The Jubilee Schools consist of eight Catholic schools in Memphis. Most of the students are poor and most aren't Catholic, but these unique schools are putting them on the fast-track to college.

Inside this classroom at Holy Names Elementary, the energy is incredible. The students chant English lessons about how to construct a sentence. The teacher is enthusiastic, and the education is impressive. This previously abandoned school building was re-opened eight years ago. It's one of eight jubilee schools.

"There really were no options for the children," said Supt. of Catholic Schools in Memphis Dr. Mary McDonald.

They're giving poverty-stricken families a chance at a private school education.

"Poverty doesn't mean that a parent doesn't love his child," Dr. McDonald said. "Poverty means there are no choices for his child, so the Jubilee Schools provide that choice."

Principal of St. Patrick School Halsey Mabry says, for many of the students, school is an escape.

"For a lot of them," said Mabry. "It might be the only meal they get, the only place where they know there's people caring about them, telling them to do the right things. Because, when they go home, they see different kinds of things, maybe gangs, violence."

And they're defying the odds. Last year a hundred percent of the seniors went to college.

"For many, it is changing the family tree," said Dr. McDonald. "They will be so different because of their children's education."

Parents pay tuition on a sliding scale. Private donations pay for the rest. Dr. McDonald says a recent donation could allow the schools to take on even more students. They received a challenge grant for the school year. A private donor will match contributions up to \$1.4 million.

"So every time someone gives us a dollar, we have two dollars," said Dr. McDonald. "And that goes right back into the education of the children."

The Jubilee Schools are providing a lot more than education.. They're giving the kids health and dental care. Even a backpack of food to take home over the weekend.

"Hunger was one of the biggest issues that we had to address when we first reopened the schools, and you can't teach children if they're hungry."

They're doing whatever it takes.

"Usually when kids come in at different grade levels, they're usually a couple grade levels behind," said Mabry. "And so what we do is make sure that we have the resources and the

needs to make sure we catch them up to the level they are and push them beyond."

"It never crossed our minds that they can't do it," said Dr. McDonald. "They're going to succeed and we believe in them, and they believe in themselves."

The Jubilee Schools also offer educational opportunities for parents. They have literacy training, parenting classes and health and wellness education courses.

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