

## Helping Minority Students to be Teachers

By Darice Bailer, The New York Times  
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Executive Director, Dr. Bettye Perkins, TSTT College Student, Maria Helena Henoa, NBC's Stone Phillips, and TSTT's First Teacher, Emerly Martinez.

If it had not been for the Today's Students, Tomorrow's Teachers program, Emerly Martinez would not be a student teacher at Ossining High School. He would not be a native son come home to herald the success of a career development program for minorities.

Five years ago, when Bettye Perkins was asked by Richard Freyman, the Ossining assistant superintendent for business, to devise a strategy for recruiting more minority teachers, Mrs. Perkins suggested that the district nurture its own.

Thus Today's Students, Tomorrow's Teachers began, with Mrs. Perkins as its executive director. The mission: to help black and Hispanic high school students get into a teaching career and provide mentors for them to achieve academic success. The goal is to alleviate a nationwide shortage of teachers, particularly a dearth of minority teachers.

Today's Students began five years ago with seven students, five of whom moved away or dropped out. Jeffrey Cole remained and is a sophomore at Manhattanville College. Mr. Martinez is the first program graduate.

"It's an honor," Mr. Martinez, 22, said. "I can't believe I'm going to be the first one. It's like I'm the finished product." He once thought he could not afford college and planned to enlist in the Army.

But with the encouragement and support of program mentors like Mrs. Perkins and an Ossining science teacher, Angelo Piccirillo, Mr. Martinez enrolled at the Yorktown campus of Mercy College. Now a senior, he took charge of Carol Loretto's ninth-grade global studies class last week for his student teaching. Dressed in khaki pants, a blue button-down shirt and a gold-and-navy checkered tie, Mr. Martinez walked down the aisles checking off homework and then led the class in a discussion about the Crusades while Mrs. Loretto watched and listened.

Mr. Martinez will be the first in his family to receive a college degree and teach. There are 63 students enrolled in college in the program that Mrs. Perkins started. She estimates that nearly 70 percent of them are the first generation in their families to go to college. Seeing Mr. Martinez fulfill her program's mission is "like planting a seed and watching it blossom," she said.

Mr. Freyman was so smitten by the idea of nurturing minority high school students to be teachers that he recommended to the Board of Cooperative Educational Services that other school districts begin the program. As a result, there are now 107 students taking part in the program at 18 high schools in Westchester, Putnam and Rockland Counties, including Bedford, Elmsford, Greenburgh Central, Greenburgh North Castle, Katonah, Lakeland, Mount Vernon, Peekskill, Somers, White Plains, Woodlands, Yonkers and Yorktown.

Today's Students, Tomorrow's Teachers is a nonprofit organization based in Ossining. It is financed by companies like Chase and Reader's Digest, as well as the Learning Foundation of Putnam-Northern Westchester and participating school districts and universities.

Administrators of Today's Students, Tomorrow's Teachers look for students with a B average, a desire to teach and leadership potential. Most students sign on when they are juniors or seniors. Once in the program, they tutor fellow students four hours a week to gain one-on-one teaching experience and complete a 20-hour-a-week summer internship - often involving tutoring. They join Future Teachers of America and attend free Scholastic Achievement Test preparation classes and workshops to prepare them for a successful college career.

They take tours of the 13 colleges that are aligned with Today's Students and which offer 50 Percent tuition scholarships to the teacher hopefuls, including the College of New Rochelle, Iona College, Manhattanville College, Marist College, Marymount College, Mercy College and Pace University in Westchester County. Today's Students' mentors help the students apply for admission and financial aid.

For some children growing up in poverty, a spot in the program is the only way they can afford to go to college. Their 50 percent scholarship can be combined with other financial aid so that a secondary education is financially possible. In college, the students must maintain a B average in their teacher certification program. They must also pledge to return to teach for at least one year in one of the program's high schools.

The hope is that the young men and women will become role models for black or Hispanic children, infusing them with self-respect. They might be adults who can better relate to minority youngsters and be more sensitive to their dreams.

In Westchester, according to the State Education Department, while black and Hispanic children accounted for 37.2 percent of the student population in the 1998-99 school year, only 9.9 percent of teachers were from minority groups. White teachers, on the other hand, accounted for 89.7 percent

Serge Azor, a 31-year-old black math teacher and program mentor at Fox Lane High School in the Bedford Central School District, said he had had very few minority teachers growing up in Queens. He was a B student at Thomas A. Edison Technical and Vocational High School in Queens and said he had wanted to attend Notre Dame University and study engineering. Although he had scored high in math on his S.A.T., a white engineering teacher at Edison discouraged Mr. Azor from applying to Notre Dame. In contrast, he said he tries to encourage his students.

Richard Berman, president of Manhattanville College in Purchase and a board member of Today's Students, Tomorrow's Teachers, said: "It's hard to think of a profession more critical to our society than teachers, and when you see a program like this that is effective in addressing the severe shortage of minority teachers and is currently making a difference, it's gratifying."

Dr. Bruce L. Dennis, superintendent of the Bedford Central School District, became involved with the program four years ago and said that hiring more minority teachers has been one of his priorities. By providing more black and Hispanic teacher role models to the district, Dr. Dennis said, "I think our whole system has benefited."

Mrs. Perkins would like to see the program replicated throughout New York State and the nation, "so that as many kids as possible could have the opportunity to achieve a dream of becoming a teacher."

Mr. Martinez, a native of the Dominican Republic, would not mind filling one of the five openings in the Ossining social studies department next year. He said doing so would set an example for minority children "to see somebody like me who came to this country in 1983 and has lived in an apartment and is not from a well-to-do family make it with a four-year college degree."

"It's good for these kids to see that they can do something with their lives." he added.