Leaving a Legacy of Education

When the Ybor Grammar School opened in 1908, it opened the doors to the “American Dream” for many local school children. The school remained an institution of education in the community for over 60 years, but in 1971 it closed and fell into disrepair. The historic building stood abandoned for over 30 years before a group of visionaries sought to reinvigorate the community and reignite the desire for a high caliber education for those children so often overlooked in our society. The building was restored and reopened in 2003 as the Academy Prep Center of Tampa, where children of low-income families are given the opportunity to receive an outstanding college preparatory middle school education in fifth through eighth grades.

Today, this beautiful school serves as the same beacon of hope for 21st century children as it did for those at the turn of the 20th century. Within a one-mile radius of the campus, only 45% of adults hold high school diplomas. Academy Prep alumni have a 97% high school graduation rate – over twice that of the surrounding area. Even more important, most Academy Prep graduates continue their education after high school, with 82% of our high school graduates now attending colleges and universities through the nation.

This year marks Academy Prep Center of Tampa’s tenth anniversary. After a decade of service, we are realizing the goal that the students in our charge will leave a legacy of education, achievement, and leadership in their community. Academy Prep is standing upon the foundation of excellence in education that was built so long ago. Leola Siplin, mother of Tavonte (APT class of 2008; Jesuit class of 2012; University of Tampa class of 2016), attended the Ybor Grammar School during the last years of its operations, from 1963-1968.

“When I attended the school, it provided me a great opportunity to attain an education. Seeing the school close its doors was sad, but I am so happy to see a new generation of children from low-income families getting the opportunity to attain a higher education at Academy Prep.”

Leola and Tavonte are by no means alone. Reverend Jerry G. Nealy is the godfather of sixth grade student Freddie. Mr. Nealy attended the Ybor Grammar School when he was a child. Today, Freddie is relishing the same opportunities at Academy Prep: “I think it is pretty cool to get to go to the same school as my godfather. When I found out he used to go to the Ybor Grammar School, I started to work harder because I knew that being at Academy Prep would help make me successful, just like my godfather.”

At Academy Prep, we are breaking barriers and setting high standards for our students. Our staff, volunteers, and partners work tirelessly to guide our students to realize their great potential. As modern day shepherds to the American Dream, we are giving our students the opportunity to become future community leaders who leave behind a legacy of education and achievement.