

Uncommon Schools

EXCELLENCE > NORTH ★ STAR < COLLEGIATE > TRUE NORTH < PREPARATORY <

Contact: Julie Shah
Associate Director of Development and Marketing
Phone: 347-287-7812
jshah@uncommonschoools.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 5, 2009

PRESS RELEASE U.S. EDUCATION SECRETARY VISITS NORTH STAR ACADEMY ON HIS "LISTENING AND LEARNING" TOUR

June 5, 2009. *Newark, NJ.* U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan visited New Jersey on Friday, June 5, 2009, as part of his "Listening and Learning: A Conversation about Education Reform" tour. He visited North Star Academy's Clinton Hill Campus Middle School, where he joined Governor Jon Corzine, Commissioner of Education Lucille Davy, Newark Public Schools Superintendent Clifford Janey, Congressmen Rush Holt and Donald Payne, and Senators Frank Lautenberg and Robert Menendez, to tour classrooms, participate in a community circle to celebrate student academic achievement, and hold a roundtable with students and their parents.

North Star Academy, a charter school in Newark, NJ, has created a culture of high expectations for all of its students by developing a rigorous curriculum, offering a longer school day and extended school year, hiring a committed and talented staff, and effectively implementing data-driven instruction. As a result, the school's students have made tremendous academic strides, and North Star ranks among the highest performing urban middle schools in the State of New Jersey.

"We asked to see the best middle school in Newark, and we were told that this was it," said Secretary Duncan, as he was welcomed by North Star's student body in a community circle gathering. "One thing is for sure – this school is raising the bar."

Following a classroom tour and community circle, Secretary Duncan and Governor Corzine met with students and parents to "listen and learn" about what makes North Star a great school. In this roundtable session, students and parents shared their take on the elements that have been most effective in building the school where they are paving their way to a successful future – the unwavering dedication of their tireless team of teachers, the school's core values and strong sense of community, the opportunities to travel and visit colleges, a strong and experienced leadership team, and the shared vision of students, parents, staff, and leaders.

"My math teacher, Mr. Chen, gave us the opportunity to study with him for our math final," said Muata Nkosi, an 8th grade student at North Star's Clinton Hill Campus. "So, I worked with him after school until 5:00 to clear up the things that I didn't fully understand in class, and I earned a 97% on the test. Without his personal help, I wouldn't have done as well."

"Our teachers make sure that all of us are on the same path; they don't leave a single student behind," added Tyniqua-Irving Flowers, also an 8th grade student.

Nayda Segarra, parent of 8th grader, David Segarra Jr., talked of the tremendous change she saw in her son once he enrolled in North Star as a 5th grade student, upon which Secretary Duncan turned to David and asked, "What changed for you? You had the same parents, same talent...what changed when you came here?"

“[When I came to North Star], I had a plan for my future that I didn’t have before,” explained David. “There is no question that I am going to college. Every detail of this school, everything that we do, is so that we can build this path to a successful future.”

At the conclusion of the roundtable discussion, Governor Corzine remarked, “We’re so proud of you. Everything we saw and heard today was incredible. You have set the standard for the model; this is what we want for all children.”

During the visit, Secretary Duncan also announced that more than \$891 million is now available for New Jersey under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. The funding is being made available per the state's successful completion of Part 1 of the State Stabilization Application made available April 1, and will support education reform initiatives throughout the state.

“The stabilization aid that the Secretary announced today comes with a sense of urgency about education reform,” said Evan Rudall, Chief Executive Officer of Uncommon Schools. “This funding is critical for our state, but we know, too, that the Secretary is encouraging all of us in New Jersey to work together to secure a half-billion dollars in race-to-the-top funding that could help expand networks like Uncommon Schools and North Star in Newark. We sincerely appreciate the Secretary’s deep commitment not simply to charter schools, but to building more great schools.”

“North Star demonstrates how our education system can benefit from higher standards and committed teachers,” said Secretary Duncan. “We need to take these islands of excellence and make them the norm, not the exception. North Star's push for higher standards, along with longer school days, is exactly what needs to happen in order for our children to get the education they need and deserve.”

ABOUT NORTH STAR ACADEMY

North Star Academy Charter School of Newark, co-founded by James Verrilli and Norman Atkins in 1997, has become a nationally recognized model for academic success, and has grown to include two middle schools, a high school, and an elementary school. The North Star schools are members of the Uncommon Schools network. Uncommon Schools is a nonprofit organization that starts and manages outstanding urban charter public schools that close the achievement gap and prepare low-income students to graduate from college.

Of North Star’s 760 students enrolled across four campuses, over 75% qualify for free and reduced price lunch and 99% are students of color. The North Star schools consistently outperform their neighboring district schools and rank among the top schools in Newark and New Jersey. North Star plans to build additional schools in Newark, ultimately serving 1,400 students in grades K through 12. For more information, please visit: www.northstaracademy.org.

ABOUT UNCOMMON SCHOOLS

Uncommon Schools is a nonprofit organization that starts and manages outstanding urban charter public schools that close the achievement gap and prepare low-income students to graduate from college. Uncommon builds uncommonly great schools by developing and managing regional networks that are philosophically aligned and highly accountable. Based in New York City, the organization has created a home office from which it provides management services that allow school leaders to focus on instructional leadership. Uncommon manages eleven schools in New York City, upstate New York, and Newark, New Jersey and has two associate member schools in Boston, Massachusetts. The organization will grow to include 30 schools serving 8,000 students within four years and ultimately will encompass 33 schools, serving nearly 12,000 K to 12th grade students. For more information, please visit <http://www.uncommonschools.org>.

###