



December 11, 2017

Dear Friends and Families of Kwanzaa Community Church,

Your support makes a real difference. Suzy joined the 21st Century Academy in 7th grade. She is bright, beautiful, with a brilliant smile. Suzy came to us already awesome, with a supportive mother; the kind of scholar that is ready to excel. She had everything she needed except a team of caring adults that could engage her where she was. The 21st Century Academy staff saw the beauty and brilliance in Suzy; we recognized the person God created to shine and be a beacon of hope to our global village.

We have learned that little sisters need a special team of caring adults to make sure that they survive the traps of the survival sex trade, the opportunity and achievement gaps, and early pregnancy.

Suzy's mother is a shining example of thriving against incredible odds, but she cannot support her daughter by herself; Suzy and her mother needed a team. She found it because the 21st Century Academy existed; you gave of your bounty to assist a young woman to excel.

Because of generational poverty, young girls that live on the Northside of Minneapolis may start trading sex at 11.5 years old. Minneapolis has the worst Achievement Gap for African American children in the country, and the teen pregnancy rate is one of the highest in our nation.

These statistics are startling and overwhelming, and yet daily we are blessed to see hope in the faces of young girls and boys like Suzy. Clinging to the hope that we can change the trajectory of the youth in our community, we provide a safe place for children K-12 to attend the 21st Century Academy for 3 nights a week from 2:30 - 7:30 so that we can live our mission and eliminate the Achievement Gap, through Academics, Arts, and Activism. By eliminating the gap one child at a time we are seeing results!

We are intentional about abating the stress and generational trauma that our babies experience daily. Therefore, we have developed a comprehensive mindfulness program where our children are encouraged to take a deep breath – yes, simply breathe!

When asked to describe how they felt after doing a mindfulness practice session, over half of our scholars reported feeling calm and at peace. Others described feeling loved, refreshed, clear-minded, improved, and happy.

Our reading and math data is showing great improvement as well!

When assessed for reading in the Spring of 2016 to the Fall of 2017, over 70% of our scholars showed significant improvements or stayed at their same reading levels in their testing scores. When assessed for math in Spring 2016 to Fall 2017, 80% of our scholars showed significant improvements in their math testing scores!

Improvements across the spectrum of learning are due to the long-term investment you have made in our programs. We are able to offer continual, year-round tutoring, mentoring, and progress monitoring for our scholars. Without this constant care and support, statistics show our scholars will fall behind, year after year, until the Achievement Gap for each scholar is so great it becomes insurmountable to close. By celebrating their accomplishments and providing support - rather than concentrating on the statistics that are stacked against them - we encourage and empower our scholars to be the great leaders and learners they are destined to be.

So how is Suzy now? She is fantastic, fabulous, and fast tracked for success. When we started 21st Academy we intended to serve only Middle School Scholars. When Suzy and three others graduated from 8th grade they started crying and asked, "Why can't we stay, we won't be any trouble we promise - just don't send us away!" So we kept them, put them to work tutoring the middle school children, and offering them a shelter after school and a safe passage into high school. Suzy is now a junior at a top arts academy, making straight A's. She has a clear path to college and an opportunity to defy all the odds stacked against her.

The expansion in our programming is incredible; we served over 110 children this year. We now serve youth from Kindergarten to 12th grade; younger brothers and sisters have now joined their older siblings in the 21st Century family so that everyone can excel, and no scholar needs to stay home to care for younger family members. We have expanded the ages of the youth we serve, but never wavered from the goal of breaking the Achievement Gap through Academics, Arts and Activism. We support one child at a time, one day at a time, one breath at a time.

Based on a recent Wilder Foundation study on youth programming in Minnesota, the return on investment for a program such as ours - which concentrates on mindfulness, relationships, and academics - is upwards of FOURTEEN times the original dollar investment. Every dollar counts!

In this moment in history where so many things seem to be crumbling, know that **your support matters**. Today and every day, each one of us can make a real difference: one child, one family, one future at a time.

In gratitude for what you can give,


Pastors Aika and Ralph Galloway