AUDREY MILLER PORITZKY EDUCATION FUND FOR CHILDREN

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President's Message

By Laurence H. Miller, M.D.

Dear Fellow Contributor,

I am delighted to share with you some of the highlights of our Fund's progress in addressing our goal of "helping children realize their academic potentials and pursue their education dreams".

As you may recall, in our January, 2005 newsletter we mentioned some of the projects the Board of Directors were discussing. Those included a peer to peer mentoring program and a kickoff conference in which both mentors and "mentees" would be given the opportunity to spend at least a full day together listening to interesting speakers, receiving needed education and general advice and fostering the feelings of leadership, camaraderie and self-confidence that become the marks of successful mentoring programs.

To that end, Dave Poritzky spearheaded a planning committee comprised of Children's Aid Society (CAS) managers and staff and several of our board members to develop and implement a kickoff conference.

Their hard work came to fruition and on April 26, 2005, the Audrey Miller Poritzky (AMP) Education Fund for Children, in conjunction with The Children's Aid Society, sponsored a day long conference "Youth Speak Out on Education."

The conference brought together 200 teenagers involved in CAS programs, renowned educators and city officials including Councilman Robert Jackson and Deputy Mayor of the City of New York Dennis Walcott. CAS staff and AMP Fund board members participated as well in the day long activities.

During the morning, the teenagers presented vignettes focusing on their concerns about their education. Issues such as school curriculum, safety and teacher/student interactions were highlighted.

The AMP Fund also presented a memorial scholarship award in Audrey's name to a student who best demonstrated her qualities of education, leadership and service. Seven students applied for the scholarship

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Fall 2005: Beginning the Fund's Work

By David F. Poritzky

We are off and running.

As Larry's President's Message mentions, the springtime conference organized with Children's Aid Society was an unmitigated success, and it marked the official beginning of the implementation stage of the Audrey Miller Poritzky Education Fund for Children.

For this conference, and for the next stages of the fund's development, we need to focus on two seemingly divergent areas of the education-reform process. And we must ask ourselves this question: can we provide direct and needed assistance to individual students while also working to effect the important policy changes we all care so deeply about? In other words, can we help one, two or a handful of students while also reaching out to a community of several hundred thousand?

If the conference was any indication of things to come, then the answer should be a resounding "yes." By awarding a scholarship to a single – and extraordinarily deserving - student, we were able to make a real impact on this young woman's college decision-making process. Yet we were also able to provide the forum for more than 200 students to speak out on education, and we are even more pleased that several of our student speakers were invited to City Hall to deliver the

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same message to senior municipal officials.

The students' message focused on hard truths and real issues involving school security and student dignity, classroom size and teacher dedication, not to mention the jarring notion that many public-school students think that their prison-based colleagues may actually be receiving a superior secondary school education.

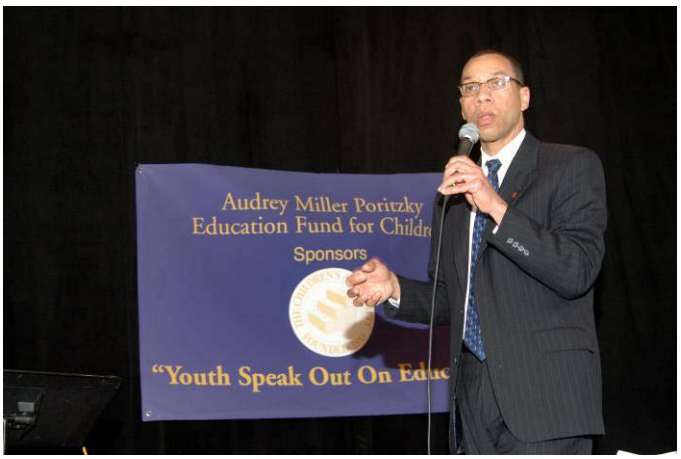
Another impetus for this necessary dual focus comes from Audrey herself. As many of you know, Audrey was able to dedicate her professional energy to a broad range of school-reform policy issues, while she also found time over the years to mentor and guide individual students

It is in the spirit of this incredible parallel dedication, not to mention the dire need in the education community, that we will opt to continue waging this education-reform war on two separate fronts.

To that end, we will soon announce a special opportunity to get involved with the AMP Fund. As we discussed in the Fund's summer board meeting, we will organize a "college application day" for a New York City high school sometime this winter. Once we have more details handy, we will pass them along to you, our Fund's supporters and friends, so that we can recruit a group of volunteers to come into school and assist students with college applications, financial-aid requests, and general "navigation" issues as students compare potential college opportunities.

Since the Fund was initiated following Audrey's tragic death in March 2004, we have been searching for ways to engage some of our closest friends and professional peers. And, given the proliferation of undergraduate and graduate-level degrees among Audrey's closest friends, we have no excuse not to pull this off.

I look forward to working with you as this special daylong event comes together, and I look forward to continuing to grow the size and scope of this special cause.



New York Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott delivers one of the keynote addresses, which ended with an invitation to the students to speak to top municipal officials at City Hall.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: Continued from page 1

A group of students performs a skit illustrating the many difficulties of everyday school life.

and wrote essays about their qualifications. Dave and I reviewed the applications in collaboration with Michael Roberts, a CAS manager. The decision was very difficult since each of the applicants wrote such poignant and powerful descriptions of their lives, their struggles to attain an education and their goals in life. The successful applicant would be invited to serve on the AMP Board as our Student Advisor.

Wendy Flores, a senior at the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics High School, was our first recipient. Wendy's winning essay is reprinted with her permission in this newsletter. Wendy has since matriculated at City College of New York this fall and hopes to become a pediatrician.

The latter part of the day focused on College Preparation Workshops and more presentations by youngsters. It was an exhilarating experience and we know that Audrey would be pleased with its success.

As a follow up to the conference, the Vice Mayor invited the youthful presenters to meet with several education commissioners and himself. They accepted his invitation and, in June, 40 of the teenagers met with him at City Hall. There was a thoughtful and honest dialogue, which hopefully will serve as an impetus for more discussion and action.

At our annual Board Meeting held in early August, we decided to host another conference next Spring which would help advance the sharing of ideas between students and city officials by further raising the level of awareness of the city's commissioners who would be invited to participate in the conference. We believe that these conferences will continue to address Audrey's agenda about education reform at the system level.

The Board also voted to accept a proposal by Wendy Flores to develop a volunteer mentor program focusing on helping students through the college application process. A separate article in this newsletter addresses that topic.

I am heartened by the work of the Board in addressing Audrey's dreams. We are in the midst of a process, perhaps even a journey, to improve the quality of education for underprivileged youngsters. We invite you to join us!

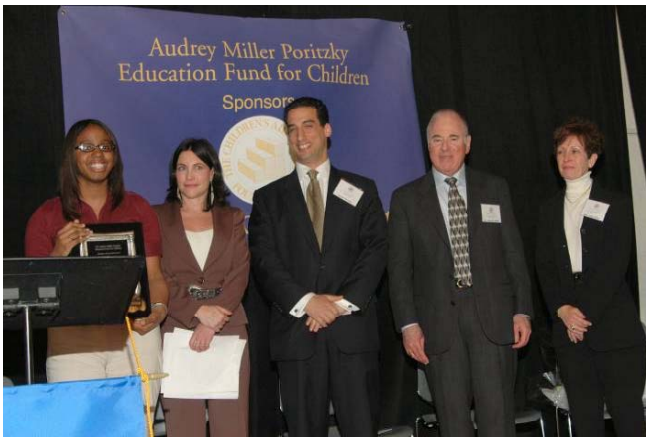
Our Honoree: Wendy Flores

A highlight of the April 2005 conference was the announcement of the winner of the inaugural Audrey Miller Poritzky Education Fund scholarship. This year's winner was selected from a pool of applicants based on the criteria of Leadership, Scholarship and Community Service, and we are pleased to attach her application letter below. In addition to a cash award, Wendy will also be joining us a member of the Board of the Fund. We look forward to working with her.

My name is Wendy Flores. I am an eighteen year old senior at Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics high school. I am highly involved within the Children's Aid Society (C.A.S.). I have been a part of several branches of the C.A.S. such as my school, the Hope Leadership Academy, Milbank, Harlem Center, and I.S. 218. However, of all its participants, I believe I am in the greatest need of becoming an Audrey Miller Poritzky Education Fund for Children recipient because I am a college bound student. Furthermore, I have been accepted into a prestigious and historically black university. Unfortunately, I might not be able to attend because I was not offered any financial assistance. Yet, me becoming an Audrey Miller Poritzky Education Fund for Children recipient will help me and allow me to attend Howard University for at least one year.

My educational dreams are to become a pediatrician. It has been a life-long dream. Nevertheless, my goals go further than just becoming a pediatrician. They have been specifically planned for. I would like to first go to Howard University and major in psychology. I then would like to attend either Howard University's graduate school, or Columbia University's graduate school. I would like to do my residency and then work for the New York Presbyterian Hospital. This is one of the leading hospitals for pediatrics. Once working here, I would like to create a clinic affiliated with the hospital, geared to help and support young adults, and those individuals with low incomes that might not have insurance.

Throughout the past year, I have accomplished great achievements. I am part of the Hope Leadership Academy. I also work for them as a Peer Educator at another academy. I am also a very active member in my school's government. I enjoy being able to voice others opinions and serve my peers. In addition to this, I am also a part of the E.X.C.E.L. program, and countless other programs and extracurricular activities. I have also had the opportunity of going upstate and lobbying to our senate in favor of after-school programs. Many of the funds available for after-school programs are being reduced. I was able to personally speak with some of the senators and stress the importance of these programs. My participation and leadership in these activities and programs show my commitment to my community which is one reason why I should be considered to be a recipient for the Audrey Miller Poritzky Education Fund for Children.



Wendy Flores accepts her award from Board Member Judy Dimon, as Dave Poritzky, Larry Miller, and Anne Miller look on.

In conclusion, I am an active member of my community. My involvement in these programs predicts how I will contribute to my community in the future. My primary obstacle has been to be able to participate in these different organizations, maintain an acceptable grade point average, and help cope with my grandfather's illness. My grandfather has been ill since November, and has been in the hospital until March. It has been hard for my mother, but I have been able to help her with her other responsibilities. One way is by making her proud, and completing both of our dreams to attend Howard University.

Reflections of Audrey: *Combining Individual Mentoring and Public Advocacy*

The following Letter to the Editor appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer, Philadelphia's largest newspaper, on April 28, 1996, and is emblematic of Audrey's tireless dedication to education reform over the years. The student mentioned in the letter, Chanae Smith, was mentored by Audrey for four straight years and then graduated the University of Pennsylvania in 2002. Chanae attended Audrey & Dave's wedding and is still in touch with our family today.

I am mentoring a student in the Sponsor-a-Scholar (SAS) college preparation program through Philadelphia Futures. Because I attended suburban schools, this experience has given me a powerful insight into the conditions faced by academically promising, inner-city students interested in college.

As a mentor to a current high-school junior, I have been astonished (and depressed) by the daunting obstacles she has faced in getting through high school and preparing for college. While I graduated high school only seven years ago, I might have graduated from a school on a different planet when I compared her high school experience with my own.

Here are some suggestions for the school system based on my experience:

First, students need more academically challenging course work. Make sure they take courses that require heavy reading, frequent writing and tough-minded analytical thinking; that they're able to take home books; and that they take exams that make them apply and analyze what they've learned, rather than just cite facts.

My student never had books she could take home in every course until this year. Since she has no free periods during the day, and the library closes 20 minutes after school ends, she has no chance for research.

Audrey and Chanae in 1996

Second, students and the entire staff need to be involved in making schools safer. My student carries her winter coat all day for fear it will be stolen from her locker.

Third, students need better academic advice and college guidance. My student was unwisely allowed to skip geometry in order to take advanced math courses. However, because colleges require geometry, she'll have to take it in night school or summer school.

The student I have mentored has enormous talent, maturity and motivation to succeed. But without the mentoring program, I doubt she would have the same opportunity for college that she now enjoys.

Audrey Miller
Philadelphia

The Audrey Miller Poritzky Education Fund for Children
P.O. Box 688
Summit, NJ 07902-0688

Dedicated to helping children realize their academic potentials and pursue their education dreams

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