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News and information about Garfield Park Academy

Spring 2011

Teamwork Makes the Transition Back to the Local School A Success

Yulanda Williams does not mince words: “Garfield Park Academy saved my son and made him believe in himself.”

Williams said that when Darnell entered Garfield Park Academy in 6th grade, he could not read; he got frustrated and angry easily and was “shutting down.”

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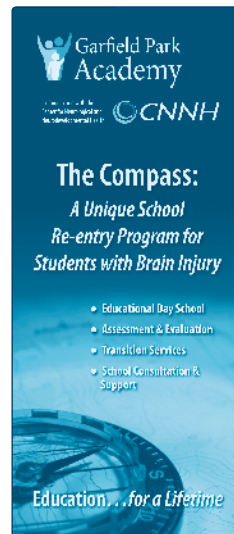
Yulanda and Darnell Williams

Garfield Park Academy Launches New Compass Program for Students with Brain Injury

After a brain injury, everything changes. Students need unique academic cognitive, behavioral, psychological and social support – and a school that understands them.

This spring, Garfield Park Academy opened The Compass, an individualized school reentry program designed to provide a supportive link between hospitalization or rehabilitation and a return to school. Compass offers a short-term, highly structured program individually designed to meet the needs each student.

Like all programs at Garfield Park Academy, The Compass is based on the Teaching-Family Model, an evidence-based intervention with more than 40 years of research to support its use. The Compass offers “Mindfulness Brain



Retraining” to help students learn specific strategies to improve attention and memory, reduce impulsivity, improve overall mood, and better organize their thoughts and actions.

The program is offered in affiliation with the Center for Neurological and Neurodevelopmental Health (CNNH). Their Brain Injury and Concussion Center, with internationally recognized doctors and treatment

professionals, provides comprehensive diagnostic and treatment services to children, adolescents and young adults immediately after brain injury and for years post-injury.

The highly qualified team includes neuropsychologists, neurologists, psychiatrists, speech and occupational therapists, psychologists, social

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Master Chef Joe Poon Visits Garfield Park Academy



Chef Joe Poon, center, with GPA chef Ed Battaglia, left, and Dr. Steven Morse, Superintendent.

Master Chef Joe Poon, author of 'Life is Short... Cooking is Fun' spent a morning at Garfield Park Academy with the students in the culinary program. His message, "Loving what you do and working hard at it will pay off."

His legendary energy and dramatic flair entertained and engaged students as Poon used a single six-dollar chicken to make a dozen unique Asian-fusion dishes.

He shared personal stories about how learning to cook at a young age helped him overcome challenges; "You have to find your strength" said Poon.



GOING SOLAR

During the long dark days of winter, students and staff at Garfield Park Academy were thinking about sunshine. This winter, a solar farm consisting of more than 1,200 solar panels was installed on one-and-one-quarter acres of its campus. The installation was arranged through a Power Purchase Agreement in which the school leases the land - at no cost - to the owner of the system and, in exchange, receives dramatically reduced rates for electricity. The 284 kW system is expected to save Garfield Park Academy as much as \$50,000 in the first year, and even more in years to come. "Going green is the right thing to do, not only for the environment, but also for the bottom line," said Dr. Steven Morse, Superintendent. "The panels have piqued the interest of our students and staff, who have become more conscious of energy conservation as a result. Teachers developed lessons around it in science, economics and history."



Dr. Steven Morse, Superintendent of Garfield Park Academy, right, with solar installation partner, Mark Napier.

Compass Program for Students with Brain Injury

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workers, learning consultants and special education teachers. All direct care staff are nationally certified brain injury specialists (CBIS).

When a student is ready to return to his or her home district, Garfield Park Academy provides consultation and recommendations related to behavioral supports, cognitive retraining, social and emotional needs, and family support.

In addition, Garfield Park Academy offers neurological, psychiatric, occupational, and speech assessments, which can be used to develop personalized treatment plans. The program's deep ties to CNNH allows access to local rehabilitation centers for supplemental services.

The Compass Program Hosts Free Program on Brain Injury

As part of Brain Injury Awareness Month, Garfield Park Academy joined CNNH in hosting a free training program for more than 30 educators, school psychologists and other specialists. The lecture featured George Neimann, Ph.D., Director of Clinical Development, CNNH and Dale Starcher, Ph.D., Clinical Director, Garfield Park Academy. Participants learned about comprehensive assessment, and evidence-based special educational services, supports and accommodations that students who have experienced brain injury often require as they re-enter school.

Profile of Success: Darnell Williams

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But within months of entering the school, Darnell began to change. “He started to bloom. He opened his mind and his heart,” said Williams. “They did in a few months what others had not done for him in years.”

Mary Wightman Murdock, MSW, Darnell’s social worker at Garfield Park Academy said that over time, Darnell’s reading disability had eroded his confidence and made him believe he was unintelligent. “We not only taught him how to read, we helped him see that he is a very bright student, and a phenomenally creative problem-solver with great, out-of-the-box thinking.”

Last fall Darnell made the transition back to his local public school. Today, he is completing his junior year at Winslow Township where he is an honor roll student and an active member of the track and cross-country teams.

The multi-year planning process began when Darnell was a freshman. The IEP team identified specific goals that would get him ready for life in a large, public high school. Darnell’s case manager at his home district, Kevin Dunphy, was a vital part of the process.

“Mr. Dunphy helped Darnell identify activities - like being on the track team - where he could make friends and use his talents,” said Wightman Murdock. “Together, we mapped out a set of problem solving skill that he could take with him and use without the support and structure of our school,” she said.

Timing was critical. “If he had gone back earlier, it would not have been so smooth,” she added. “Darnell needed time to develop his confidence and refine his problem-solving skills.”

Dunphy said that the “academic, vocational, and nurturing support of the staff at Garfield Park Academy” helped make Darnell’s transition back to district possible. “He is excelling academically and



Darnell Williams with Garfield Park Academy social worker, Mary Wightman Murdock, MSW.

behaviorally and uses skills he developed at Garfield Park Academy to continue his academic growth,” said Dunphy. “The staff at Garfield Park Academy played a vital role in his successful return to our high school,” he added.

Wightman Murdock credits Darnell’s mother for encouraging her son to excel. “Garfield Park Academy stuck with him - and with me. They never gave up,” said Williams.

“When a student returns to a local district, teamwork and on-going communication are vital,” said Dr. Steven Morse, Superintendent. “While the planning process was a team effort, Darnell did the hard work and owns the credit for his success.”

2011 Golf Outing Scheduled, Registration Open

Please join us for the Eugene Morse Memorial Golf Outing benefiting Student Programs at Garfield Park Academy. This year we return to Ramblewood Country Club, a renowned and challenging 27-hole championship golf course. A silent auction will feature unique sports memorabilia and more great items up for bid.

June 9, 2011

Ramblewood Country Club
200 Country Club Pky,
Mt. Laurel, NJ.

Individual Golf
Registration: \$135
Dinner Only: \$35

For more information, visit us
online at:

www.garfieldparkacademy.org,
or call 609-877-4111.

Education... *for a Lifetime*



The STEPS program is growing!

Last spring, Garfield Park Academy launched STEPS - Social Teaching for Employment & Personal

STEPS
Transition . . . for a Lifetime

Success. The program is a New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities-approved after-hours program for adults with disabilities, offering flexible services and on-going support to help participants become the most successful, independent adults they can be. Since that time, enrollment has doubled to 16 participants, and is expected to continue its growth. The program uses the school's campus and facilities, offering classes in life skills, fitness, arts, cooking, gardening, computers and even Lego therapy. The program is open daily from 2:30 - 6:30 p.m., and can provide round trip transportation. For more information, call 609-877-4111.



Garfield Park Academy is a New Jersey state approved, not-for-profit school that provides effective, evidence-based special education services for students in grades K-12 who have a history of learning, social, emotional and behavioral challenges, and is Middle States Accredited. For more information, please contact Garfield Park Academy or visit our website.

Garfield Park Academy
24 Glenolden Lane
Willingboro, New Jersey 08046
609-877-4111
www.garfieldparkacademy.org
email: info@garfieldparkacademy.org

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Middle States Association Accredited
Teaching Family Association Certified

P.O. Box 189, Willingboro, NJ 08046

