

## Project Aspire Teams Up with Health and Hospitals Corp./Harlem Hospital's Hip Hop H.E.A.L.S. Program

**P**roject Aspire has expanded its partnership with Harlem Hospital's renowned Hip Hop Stroke and Hip Hop H.E.A.L.S. (Healthy Eating And Living in Schools) programs, which bring fun-filled lessons utilizing hip hop songs to Project Aspire schools to teach students how to prevent school-age obesity and recognize the symptoms of stroke in order to save lives.

As a result of the closer relationship, Dr. Olajide Williams, associate director of the department of neurology at Harlem Hospital and mastermind of the Hip Hop H.E.A.L.S./Hip Hop Stroke initiatives, visited P.S. 197 in February 2009 to teach the children about stroke and its warning signs. In addition, Dr. Williams, also an assistant professor of neurology at Columbia University, participated in health and obesity awareness events held at the Bronx High School for Medical Science (BHSMS) and Harlem Hospital last year that were co-sponsored by Project Aspire and Harlem Hospital.

At all three events, Project Aspire students watched an animated DVD, "Hip Hop Stroke," which features legendary rapper and beat boxer Doug E. Fresh and was produced by Electric Black Experience, the production company run by seven-time Emmy Award-winning *Sesame Street* writer Ian Ellis James, aka William Electric Black. An animated Dr. Williams appears in the animated short as the "Hip Hop Doc."



Hip Hop legend Doug E. Fresh and Project Aspire students

Through both the DVD and an energetic follow-up program performed by "Hip Hop Stroke" educators Tiffany Newton and Easy A.D.—a member of the pioneer hip hop group Cold Crush Brothers—the Harlem Hospital initiative utilizes hip hop lyrics written by Doug E. Fresh to teach students the signs of stroke and to call for help when spotting those signs. To the beat of hip hop,

the acronym F.A.S.T.—"F" is for face, "A" is for arms, "S" is for speech and "T" is for time—is used by the program to teach students that when a relative or friend's face droops, their arms drop and their speech is slurred, they are most likely suffering from a stroke and it is time to call 911.

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vated the school's pre-kindergarten through second grade students to learn about careers in the medical profession. "Our students are extremely eager to learn about the various physicians and their specializations through vocabulary and illustrations or various medical doctors actually coming into the school and visiting their classrooms. Both students and teachers love Project Aspire because it allows students to meet higher challenges and expectations, which ultimately leads to student achievement. We are also fortunate to have Project Aspire's staff working alongside our teachers, children and parents. They often go above and beyond the call of duty to provide materials and extracurricular activities for our

students."

Mr. Phillips noted that Project Aspire students are not only becoming "smart nutrition consumers" but are bringing the healthy lifestyle message home to their families. "The long view is that increasing the children's physical activity and helping them make wise nutrition decisions will ultimately reduce health risks like obesity, diabetes and stroke."

Indeed, Project Aspire has been such a resounding success that New York City Council Majority Leader Joel Rivera, who is chair of the City Council's Health Committee, told students at a Project Aspire event at the Bronx High School for Medical Science in April 2009 that the city plans to expand the Touro College initiative to public schools throughout

the five boroughs. "What you are taking part of is something so important in your lives and something so important to the people around you...We are going to make sure that it (Project Aspire) is not only here within this community. We are going to expand this project to the entire city," he said.

Largely as a result of a syndicated WNBC news segment about Project Aspire—a public health initiative of Touro College's Children's Health Education Foundation—Mr. Phillips has received inquiries from schools throughout New York City and around the country about bringing the program into their communities. "Hopefully, support from private contributors and government agencies will help make this a reality," he said. ■

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**AT THE BRONX HIGH SCHOOL** for Medical Science health awareness event in April 2009, more than 200 elementary, middle school and high school students joined New York City Council Majority Leader Joel Rivera at an exciting program that utilized hip hop music, dance and interactive video games to teach the students about the importance of exercise and nutrition in combating obesity, as well as how to recognize the signs of stroke and call 911 when they do.

“Project Aspire gets kids motivated to learn about healthier lifestyles, and to take care of themselves,” Majority Leader Rivera told the students. “It gives them a shot at something they need but do not have—longevity. As chair of the Health Committee, I’ve seen the alarming rate

the New York School of Career and Applied Studies (NYSCAS). He also announced a three-credit college course called Introduction to Health Sciences at the Bronx High School for Medical Science as part of Project Aspire’s Building Education Bridges middle school and high school component. Touro underwrote the cost of the spring 2009 course, which students can apply to their bachelor of science degrees. The course is being offered again this spring in BHSMS as well as other high schools in New York City.

**AT THE HARLEM HOSPITAL** event aimed at fighting school-age obesity last September, Doug E. Fresh performed live for more than 200 students from pre-k to 12th grade, encouraging them to eat healthy and exercise with special lyrics to his hit songs. “This is a chance for you to do something with hip hop that can make

why Harlem Hospital and Dr. Williams created the Hip Hop H.E.A.L.S. program, modeled after Hip Hop Stroke, which is operated in partnership with the National Stroke Association. Like Hip Hop Stroke, Hip Hop H.E.A.L.S. incorporates hip hop music into multimedia health messaging including short animated films to inspire children to exercise and lead healthier lives. Both programs also aim to educate parents through their children.

Dr. Williams said both Hip Hop Stroke and Hip Hop H.E.A.L.S. are excited to partner with Project Aspire because together the initiatives, which are working on similar goals, can serve children better. “Because we are citywide, we need to be in many, many schools across the city in a given school year,” he said. “We really don’t have the manpower that can be housed in a single school. We have to just keep moving.

But Project Aspire, because they’re in a school throughout the whole year, they have the ability to do a lot of things with us in the schools like measuring behavior change longitudinally for instance and...monitoring health indices of these children over a sustained period of time.”

Through the partnership, Project Aspire can get its healthy living and professional health career aspiration messages into multiple schools and Hip Hop Stroke/Hip Hop H.E.A.L.S. can consolidate their various health messages in individual schools, Dr Williams said. “Ideally, we would like this partnership to get even stronger so what we are trying to do is work some of our hip hop messaging into Project Aspire’s exist-

ing curriculum. I think with our collective experience, we can work together with our collective strengths to find a way to leave these programs behind in the schools where they can be autonomous and existing school resources can carry them forward. The goal would be to have programs that are self-sustaining. We believe that our collective ability and support are really going to position us to impact this disease of young children (obesity).” ■



“Hip Hop Doc” with P.S. 197 student

of obesity in young children in New York. We need to find a targeted approach to combat obesity, which leads to diabetes, heart problems and stroke.”

At the BHSMS event, Majority Leader Rivera announced that three students from the high school were accepted into the Touro College B.S./DO (Doctor of Osteopathy) Fast Track to Medical School seven-year option, a collaboration of TouroCOM and Touro College’s undergraduate school,

a difference in everybody’s lives,” Doug E. Fresh told the lab coat-clad students from P.S. 197 and P.S. 4 in Harlem.

According to the American Heart Association, cardiovascular disease and stroke are the leading killers of African-Americans, killing nearly 37% of the more than 291,000 African-Americans who die in the U.S. each year. And the obesity epidemic in the U.S. adds to existing stroke risk factors among African-Americans, which is