

**“Steppingstone  
planted the seed  
and Park let it  
grow.”** Laniesha Gray '00

With the buds of spring come admission letters to hopeful Boston students anxiously waiting to hear if they are admitted to The Steppingstone Academy. Twelve years ago, one such letter was delivered to Laniesha Gray's mailbox in Dorchester. That letter not only transformed Laniesha's life, but also deeply affected the lives of the many people she would touch in the years ahead, starting with the students, faculty, and administration at The Park School.

After the 14-month academic component of *(Continued)*

## Partner School Profile: The Park School

(continued from front) The Steppingstone Academy, Laniesha entered The Park School in the seventh grade. “The Admission office made me feel comfortable right from the start. I loved touring the school where the kids seemed real and the academic environment was rigorous.” Laniesha recalls her very first day at Park as well. “My host student and I connected at first sight, and I immediately felt at home. I loved my whole experience at Park—serving on Student Council, starting a school newspaper, running on the track and cross country teams, and appearing in school musicals. Steppingstone planted the seed and Park let it grow.”

Park is now fortunate to have Laniesha back on campus as a co-teacher in seventh- and eighth-grade English. Laniesha discovered her love of teaching while serving as a summer intern at The Steppingstone Academy. “I discovered how much I enjoy working with middle-grade students and realized the draw to give back to the Park community, including the Scholars who are currently in the classroom.” After graduating from Columbia College where she most enjoyed her coursework in Shakespeare and creative writing, Laniesha joined the Park faculty. “Of course, I have a soft spot when I see a Steppingstone Scholar, as I know how hard they worked to be at a place like Park.”

Head of School Jerry Katz is quick to counter. “In fact, it is the 40 Steppingstone placement schools including Park which benefit from having Scholars in their respective communities.” Katz, currently in his 18th year at the helm, notes that Park’s commitment to Steppingstone pre-dates his time at the School. “Our commitment to Steppingstone is unwavering not just because we believe in its mission, but because Steppingstone students at Park raise the bar in terms of work ethic and character. While Park is committed to a range of diversity starting in pre-K, we continue to value our partnership with Steppingstone as a means to bring high quality students and good citizens to our halls.”

Park feels so strongly about the strengths that Steppingstone Scholars bring to the community that the School endowed a fund specifically committed to the financial aid of Steppingstone students

at Park. Katz shares, “The Board of Trustees views this fund as a vital tool both to ensure our future commitment to Steppingstone and to fulfill the greater mission of The Park School.”

Katz notes that having Laniesha Gray on the faculty is particularly rewarding. “We are always proud when bright and talented Park alumni want to explore teaching as a profession. It is an added bonus to have Laniesha here serving as a role model to all of our students. Laniesha is a colleague whose voice needs to be heard.” Katz further reflects that, “while Steppingstone may have started as an opportunity to transform individual students’ lives, schools like Park have come to realize

that students and faculty who come to us through different paths enrich the lives of the whole community.”

Laniesha Gray and the four Scholars currently at Park are testament to that. Laniesha recalls that in that her acceptance letter, Steppingstone told her the program doesn’t end at Steppingstone commencement. “Steppingstone sure held up on their end of the bargain and more. The greatest gift I received from Steppingstone was the confidence to know what I could achieve with hard work. I am the first person to graduate from college in my family and I am making a difference.”

### Scholars Making their Mark at Park

**Ayan Warfa '09, 8th grade**  
Favorite subject is history, is captain of Junior Varsity Girls’ basketball team, and just cast in the spring play.

**Basil Bacare '08, 9th grade**  
Volunteers at Beth Israel and the Homework Assistance Program, sings in the chorus, and plays Varsity basketball and soccer.

**Nancy Kacupaj '08, 8th grade**  
Enjoys ballet, soccer, basketball, and softball and participates in the Math Counts Club, Photo Club, Helping Hand Community Service Project, and Green Club.

**Denny Yu '10, 7th grade**  
Plays Junior Varsity Soccer, Junior Varsity Basketball, and enjoys community service activities.

Photo credit: Karen Snyder Photography



Head of School Jerry Katz chats with faculty member Laniesha Gray '00 at The Park School.

## COLLEGE SUCCESS ACADEMY

A Steppingstone® Program

### A New College Pipeline for Boston Students

In response to the high demand for Steppingstone’s academic programming, and in recognition that the vast majority of Boston schoolchildren attend traditional public high schools—and not the highly selective college prep schools that The Steppingstone Academy places students into—Steppingstone has launched a new initiative: the College Success Academy.

The College Success Academy will increase the number of Boston students graduating from four-year colleges. Starting in July, the program will be piloted in two Boston public K-8 schools, the Edison School and the Jackson/Mann School, both in Brighton. Based on the successful Steppingstone Academy model, the College Success Academy will provide after-school and summer programming to students at these two schools, beginning the summer before fifth grade and continuing through the summer after eighth grade. This extended academic programming will provide College Success Scholars with the skills they need to enter high school ready to participate in a college-preparatory curriculum. Additional academic programming will be offered during ninth grade to support students as they make the often challenging transition to high school. Students will benefit from support services, including college guidance, throughout high school and college to ensure that they graduate from high school and a four-year college.

Steppingstone has been busy this winter laying the groundwork for the College Success Academy’s July launch: the new director and

other program staff are collaborating closely with the schools’ principals, developing curriculum that will complement classroom material at the two partner schools, interviewing summer faculty, and admitting the first class of fourth-grade students to join the inaugural class.

Mary Driscoll, principal of the Edison School, is excited to join forces with Steppingstone to set more of her students on the path to college success. She shares, “The College Success Academy brings the high level of rigor and support that are Steppingstone hallmarks to families who want to take full advantage of the K-8 experience and be ready for success in a traditional Boston public high school and college.”



Students in NPEA-Boston programs posing questions during a college tour.

### Joining Forces for College Access

In November, six members of Steppingstone’s National Partnership for Educational Access’ (NPEA) Boston Learning Network joined forces and led a tour of several Massachusetts colleges. Thirty high school students from the six organizations, including The Steppingstone Academy, hopped on a bus and visited Clark University, College of the Holy Cross, and Brandeis University (see photo).

NPEA will host its third annual conference on April 28-29, 2011. Entitled *Developing 21st Century Leaders: Creating Paths to Success*, the conference will take place at the Westin Buckhead in Atlanta, Georgia. For more information about the conference, or to register, please visit [www.educational-access.org](http://www.educational-access.org).

Founded in 1990, The Steppingstone Foundation is a non-profit organization that develops and implements programs which prepare urban schoolchildren for educational opportunities that lead to college success.

Based on the premise that, regardless of circumstance, children can achieve at high levels if they are prepared in a focused, demanding academic environment, Steppingstone programs emphasize rigorous standards and achieve meaningful results.

# Beating the Odds: A Collaborative Effort Since 1990, The Steppingstone Foundation has helped Boston's schoolchildren get into and succeed at top independent and public exam schools, and put them on the path to college success. However, for

Photo credit: John Gillooly



At the ACCESS Gala (from left to right): Chancellor of UMass Boston, Keith Motley; ACCESS Chief Executive Officer, Bob Giannino-Racine; ACCESS Gala Honoree, Jeff Jones, Retired Senior Partner at Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge and ACCESS Board Member; and Steppingstone Alumnus Fernando Lora '03.

many Steppingstone families, the expenses of a four-year college degree are daunting.

Steppingstone helps Scholars and their families find scholarships and other need-based financing to pay for a college education. Through its Support Services department, Steppingstone provides academic support and guidance while Scholars are at their placement schools and helps them navigate the college selection and application process.

In order to give Scholars the most comprehensive, multi-faceted support to ensure college success, Steppingstone collaborates with other organizations with complementary missions, such as ACCESS.

“ACCESS is proud to partner with Steppingstone to support the aspirations of their youth,” says Bob Giannino-Racine, Chief Executive Officer of ACCESS. “Steppingstone does such an amazing job helping their young people succeed academically, that often the only thing that could keep them from enrolling in and graduating from college is the ability to pay for it.”

ACCESS works to ensure that all young people have the financial information and resources necessary to find an affordable path to—and through—a postsecondary education. Adam Reinke, Director of Community Engagement at ACCESS, states that “by providing free financial aid advice and advocacy to students and their families from middle school through college graduation, in Massachusetts ACCESS has helped students secure more than \$150 million in financial aid in the last three years alone, and awarded \$2 million from their own scholarship fund, Last Dollar Scholarship.”

Steppingstone Support Services Associate Luz Mederos is a former recipient of an ACCESS Last Dollar Scholarship. Mederos recalls meeting weekly with her ACCESS Advisor during her senior year in high school. “She made sure I knew exactly what my options were and what type of financial aid to apply for. Basically, my ACCESS Advisor was a great source of information and support.” Mederos went on to graduate from Northeastern University with a degree in business management, thanks to the financial support of an ACCESS Last Dollar Scholarship. “It gives me great satisfaction to pass along insights from my experience with ACCESS to the Scholars whom I serve at Steppingstone. Steppingstone develops a Scholar’s academic potential to succeed; ACCESS will make sure that a lack of finances will not be a barrier.”

Since the partnership’s inception back in 2007, over 100 Steppingstone Scholars have benefited from the services ACCESS provides. One such Scholar is Fernando Lora '03, a graduate of the John D. O’Bryant School and currently a freshman at Williams College. Fernando was able to blend the academic preparation gained as a Steppingstone Scholar with the financial counseling obtained through ACCESS, to gain admission to and afford college. ACCESS’ Reinke remarks, “Steppingstone does a fantastic job preparing young people. So, when ACCESS had to choose a youth representative to speak at the ACCESS Gala, we selected Fernando.” Fernando addressed the guests, introduced special honorees, and was cheered on by Steppingstone staff in attendance.

Looking ahead, Steppingstone and ACCESS will continue to work together by providing guidance and information to Scholars and their families, empowering them to navigate the often complicated financial aid process. With this collaboration in place, the odds of Steppingstone Scholars graduating from college, while meeting the expenses to do so, have gone way up.

## Steppingstone Placement Schools

- Beaver Country Day School
- Belmont Day School
- Belmont Hill School
- Boston College High School
- Boston Latin Academy
- Boston Latin School
- Boston Trinity Academy
- Boston University Academy
- Brimmer and May School
- Buckingham Browne & Nichols School
- Cambridge School of Weston
- Commonwealth School
- Concord Academy
- Dana Hall School
- Dedham Country Day School
- Deerfield Academy
- Derby Academy
- The Dexter School
- Fay School
- The Fessenden School
- The Governor’s Academy
- Holderness School
- The Meadowbrook School of Weston
- Milton Academy
- Newton Country Day School
- Noble and Greenough School
- John D. O’Bryant School
- The Park School
- Phillips Academy
- Phillips Exeter Academy
- The Rivers School
- The Roxbury Latin School
- Shady Hill School
- St. Mark’s School
- St. Paul’s School
- St. Sebastian’s School
- The Southfield School
- Thayer Academy
- The Winsor School
- Xaverian Brothers High School

## Celebrating 20 Years

On November 3, 2010, more than 300 people gathered at The Charles Hotel in Cambridge to celebrate Steppingstone's 20th anniversary. The event featured Alumni speakers as well as noted child psychologist and author, Dr. Richard Weissbourd. The event raised \$665,000 for Steppingstone programs.



Photo credits: Michael Blanchard



Above: Several Alumni from the very first class of Steppingstone in 1991—now in their 30s!—sang 'Happy Birthday' to Steppingstone in celebration of 20 years of success. Above right: Founder Michael Danziger poses with two of the evening's speakers, Frank McField '10, currently a seventh grader at Belmont Hill School, and Emeka Ekwelum '01, a Belmont Hill Alumnus and a current junior at Columbia University.

# Stepping Out

## Steppingstone Rings the Bell

Philadelphia's Steppingstone Scholars, Inc. was awarded a \$50,000 grant from the NASDAQ OMX Education Foundation. In honor of the occasion, former State Senator Constance H. Williams, a member of the Board of Directors of Steppingstone Scholars, Inc., rang the NASDAQ closing bell on February 2. She was joined by Steppingstone Founder, Michael Danziger; Nina Weisbord, President of Steppingstone Scholars, Inc.; and Scholars, faculty, staff, and members of the Board of Directors from Philadelphia.



Photo credit: Daniel Burke Photography

## Party like Mad Men!

Young Bostonians gathered at the Four Seasons Hotel on Friday, February 25 for a Mad Men-themed Crystal Ball to raise money for Steppingstone programs.

Steppingstone Alumnae Cindy Nguy '97 and Yvonne Dabreo '95 (below) served on the host committee for the event which attracted 550 attendees and raised over \$100,000.



Photo credit: Harriet Groppe

## Scholars Honor Martin Luther King, Jr.

Steppingstone Scholars and staff joined Boston Cares for a day of service to honor the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. Gathering at the Curley Middle School in Jamaica Plain, the team created a quilt to provide inspiration and joy to needy women and children, as well as scarves, dental kits, and Valentine's Day cards for the Walnut Street Center, a nonprofit human service agency that provides comprehensive support services to adults who have developmental disabilities and their families.

**Tatianna Witter '04** of Dana Hall School was elected All School President.

Newton Country Day School's **Cassandra Vickers '06** is a member of the crew team. Last fall she rowed against Winsor School's **Lisa Luo '04**.

Kents Hill School's **Matthew Hayes '04** was elected Student Body President.

At The Roxbury Latin School, The National Merit Scholarship Program recognized **Nelson Tamayo, Kamorudeen Olaogun, and Abdul Ibrahim, all Class of 2005**. Nelson received the National Hispanic Talent Search award, and Kamorudeen and Abdul received the National Achievement Outstanding Participant award.

Newton Country Day School and Boston Trinity Academy's **Vanessa Rivera '05** was accepted to Brown University's Summer@Brown program, an enrichment program for talented high school students that helps them prepare for college success.

**Aquame Matthews '05** of Boston Latin Academy is the captain of the Robotics Team.

Xaverian Brothers High School's **Joseph Donawa-Farrell '10** and **Malik Voyard '10** were both on the school's football team.

John D. O'Bryant School's **Jamilex Pena '10** and **Dorothy Bernard '10** are on the school's volleyball squad.



**Jacqueline Painten '08** from Derby Academy was recently accepted into the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth (CTY), a program that offers gifted students programs and services that nurture their intellectual abilities and enhance personal development. **Dakorite Ojuka '09**, also from Derby Academy, won a 2010 Max Warburg Courage award from the city of Boston, based on an essay he wrote about standing up for a bullied classmate.

**Idva Cako '08** of Boston Latin School played the lead role in the school's play, *Check Please: Take Two*. Also at Boston Latin School, **Ryan Kelly** and **Ayo Edebirí**, both **Class of 2007**, are members of the school's band and play the saxophone.

Boston Latin Academy's **Sabrina Marzouki '08** was recently featured in *The Boston Globe* as the winner of a singing competition at the CambridgeSide Galleria mall.



Photo credit: The Boston Globe

Sabrina Marzouki '08

**Kiana Jackson-Dubose '09** of Cathedral High School is working with the 1010 Mass Ave's Youth Media Council. She is one of 10 youth involved in the Boston Public Health Commission's campaign for 'Building a Healthy Boston.'

Milton Academy's **Sean Chanicka '08** and **Kiana Mendes '08** were elected to the Middle School Student Council. They are working on making important changes at Milton such as removing unhealthy vending machines on campus.

**More than 150 Scholars from the Classes 2004 through 2010 have earned first-term honor roll.**

# Scholarly Achievements

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# Scholars make their mark at Park



## ALSO INSIDE:

- ◆ Steppingstone prepares to launch new College Success Academy
- ◆ Scholars Ring the NASDAQ Bell

**SPRING 2011**

# Steppingstonenews