

more positive school environment,” says Program Director Balbuena.

According to School Director Cortes-Torres, youth development and leadership are infused in every component of the program. “The students and the staff are learning decision-making and problem-solving skills, public speaking and the electoral process, and they are exploring what defines them as individuals and community members. Our goal is to help them do well academically, personally and as members of the community.” ■



Members of the Salomé Ureña de Henríquez Campus youth leadership team (from left to right) Evelyn Fermín, Keith Cuesta, Jazmin Ogando and Jeuris Sandoval pose with Children’s Aid’s Program Director Miguel Balbuena.

*‘Overcoming Obstacles’ in the Bronx :*

## **Youth Development in Action at Fannie Lou Hamer**

*by Sarah Jonas*

Many youth workers and educators have long recognized the link between positive youth development and student outcomes. At Fannie Lou Hamer Middle/High School in the Bronx, Principals Nancy Mann and Lorraine Chanon are working with The Children’s Aid Society to ensure that youth development is part of the core curriculum. This work is aligned with the approach of the Department of Education (DoE)’s *Children First* reform.

At Fannie Lou Hamer Middle School, Principal Chanon reached out to Children’s Aid’s Community School Director, Tim Henderson, to discuss how to prepare incoming sixth graders to transition successfully to middle school. The answer was a Community for Education Foundation curriculum called *Overcoming Obstacles*, a program that provides fun, interactive lessons on communication, decision-making and goal setting.

A Children’s Aid youth worker, Darnell Holguin, teaches the curriculum to students during the regular school day, engaging youth through his skills in theater arts. However, as Principal Chanon puts it, “the key is that the facilitator makes sure students understand the important concepts and the learning embedded in these ‘fun’ activities.”

The focus on youth development continues at Fannie Lou Hamer High School, where Principal Mann and Director Henderson arranged to have Children’s Aid train teachers to deliver *Freshman Seminar*, a model first developed at Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics, a Children’s Aid community high school. *Freshman Seminar* helps ninth graders build the skills they need to thrive in a high school environment by incorporating *Overcoming Obstacles*, journal writing and team-building exercises. Teachers from

Fannie Lou have integrated *Freshman Seminar* into the last period of the school day.

In response to Principal Mann’s desire to address the potential dangers of violence in teen dating, Children’s Aid brought in staff from its Family Wellness Program to run *TARA, Teens Against Relationship Abuse*. This program helps young men and women learn about and help put an end to relationship abuse through activities such as role-playing and poetry reading.

Thanks to the vision of Principals Chanon and Mann and the support of The Children’s Aid Society, the students of Fannie Lou Hamer Middle/High School are getting an education that includes rigorous academics and quality youth development programs. This combination allows schools to develop, in Tim Henderson’s words, “successful and productive students who are also leaders in their communities.” ■



Fannie Lou Hamer Community School Director Tim Henderson and Freshman Seminar teacher Ellen Doyle pose with the Seminar leadership (from left to right) Nana Nantwi, Treasure Smalls, Avasna Collins Browles, Jamaal Lampkin, Demeterios Gould and Olori Lawrence, as well as Children’s Aid social worker Shannon Smith (far right).