

CHARTER LEADERS OF COLOR **MATTER.**



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My parents went through Cleveland public schools. When I was of age to enter the school system, they decided it would not be best for me as it did not serve them well. So, my parents chose to send me to a nearby Catholic school even though we weren't Catholic. My parents and all of the other parents chose this school as an act of resistance, to choose better for their children.

Upon high school graduation, I received an athletic scholarship to the University of Virginia, where I earned a BA in Sociology and a Masters of Education. I started as a math teacher in 2000, then became principal in 2008, and then started as executive director in July 2019.

Anacostia, where Thurgood Marshall Academy (TMA) is located, looks very similar to the neighborhood where I grew up. Gun violence between children is a regular part of life in many neighborhoods. I went to my first friend's funeral at age 13. Now, at any given moment, I receive text alerts about a shooting in the neighborhood, and the first thing I think of is which kids I know that live near the incident, and are they safe. I am hyper-vigilant about kids having a path, kids being in schools—otherwise, the likelihood is so high that they will end up on a traumatic path.

EDUCATION THROUGH CHANGE-MAKING

Thurgood Marshall Academy has been a Tier 1 school since 2012. Every year 100% of our seniors are accepted into college, and over 50% of our graduates complete college within six years. We have an exceptional staff retention rate, with many of our teachers have taught here for over 7 years. Founded by law students and their professors at Georgetown University Law Center, Thurgood Marshall Academy's mission is to prepare students to succeed in college and to actively engage in our democratic society. The education that our students receive is through the lens of advocacy.

One of my favorite examples of the mindset shift that happens when you allow students to drive change: This year two students approached me about doing an internship with Urban Alliance. They loved it and wanted to institutionalize this opportunity for other students at the school. Using their training from TMA, they spoke with Urban Alliance and the law firms that had participated in the program—and they organized these voices coming together to pitch to me why having a more formalized internship program was critical to their and future students' success. By the time our I received the proposal, the students had all stakeholders already excited to participate. Student voice and leadership like this happens throughout our building.

About three years ago, two members of the school were murdered within a few months of each other, during their commutes to school. In the face of this tragedy, our students rallied to help others. They created what they call the Pathway to Power group communicating with DC officials and proposing policy changes to make their community

safer. Now, city officials email these kids when they want the perspective of young people in helping to address particular community issues.

SHARED EXPERIENCE MATTERS

Charter school leaders of color have ways in which they are similar to many of the students that they serve. This school was founded by non-black folks. Being white didn't distract them from doing the work, but there is a different type of relationship that I can have with parents. There is an ease that comes with me sharing my background.

I am always learning what my students' version of life is. They are the only ones who can tell you that. Coming from similar experiences, my learning curve is a bit quicker for helping them. But this doesn't trump the work that adults have to do to develop strong relationships and be thoughtful about what they're putting in front of kids.

In DC, there are eight black male ED/CEO charter school leaders, out of 65 charter schools. But black students make up over half of the DC student population. By cultivating school leadership that is culturally reflective of a community's student body, we have an opportunity to relate to children in our most challenged communities and use this special relationship to show our students that they can succeed, that they can make a difference in the world.

THURGOOD MARSHALL ACADEMY

"We are a college prep school, pushing students to become leaders in their community right now."

Location	Washington, DC
Year Opened	2001
Student enrollment	385
Grades served	9-12
Website	www.thurgoodmarshallacademy.org

Student Demographics

Black/African-American	98%
Hispanic/Latino	2%



Homeless Youth	3%
At Risk Students	54%
Students with Disabilities	20%
ESL Students	.5%