

## News Release

### **Springhurst Elementary School Principal Examines Federal and State Education Policy Mandates In Year-Long Education Policy Fellowship Program**

**Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. April 14, 2015**—Springhurst Elementary School Principal Julia Drake has spent the entire school year studying education policy. More specifically, she and her 17 colleagues representing New York State who were selected to participate in Columbia University's prestigious Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP), have been trying to understand the local and global rationale for U.S. education policy mandates and whether or not they are working.

"The exposure to research and experts in this field on the national and international scale is fantastic," said Ms. Drake. "We are meeting with so many smart people who have different roles in education and they are training us to enter the ring of policy making. Policies are often made by people who do not have direct experience teaching or working in the schools; it is therefore critical that the voices of those 'on the ground' are heard."

In September, the Fellows met with Dr. Susan Sclafani, Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education in the Bush administration and now Vice President for Program at Pearson, Inc. to begin to develop an understanding of the global rationale for U.S. education policy mandates. The group followed up with a field trip in October to the U.S. Army War College in Gettysburg and the Gettysburg National Battlefield for a Strategic Leadership Forum conducted by the War College faculty. Each participant also had the opportunity to take a leadership assessment, taken by the top generals in the army, which helped them tease out their individual strengths and weaknesses as leaders in education.

This coming weekend, April 19-22, the group will be traveling to Washington D.C. for a Policy Seminar in the nation's capital, the premier seat of policy making. EPFP Fellows from various states across the country will be in attendance. The theme of this year's Seminar is designed to spark a meaningful discussion about the federal-state relationship and where that relationship is headed, given the current political and policy landscape. Ms. Drake and her group will be meeting with Dr. Deborah Delisle, Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, United States Department of Education as well as political scientists and scholars from various Washington "think tanks" (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, The Cato Institute, and The Center for American Progress) to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives that motivate their actions.

Fellows will participate in a Congressional Insight Simulation to illustrate the complexities in public policy making. Fellows will also hear panel conversations and participate in sessions to discuss salient issues in education. In preparation for this trip, the Fellows heard from Dr. Michael Usdan, Senior Fellow at the Institute for Educational Leadership about the federal role in policy making and public education.

Before each monthly meeting the Fellows prepare by reading up on the topic and the speakers. Other topics covered included “What the research suggests about the effectiveness of the charter school movement” with Professor Luis Huerta from the Department of Education Policy & Social Analysis at Teachers College. In December, Michael Rebell, Executive Director, Campaign for Educational Equity, discussed the role of the courts in shaping school finance policy. In February, Dr. Jeffrey Henig, Professor and Chair, Department of Educational Policy and Social Analysis Teachers College and Professor of Political Science, Columbia University shared insights from his book, *The End of Exceptionalism in American Education*.

“We are networking and having audiences with influential people in all facets of policy making and learning first-hand how policy is created. I now have a better understanding from a ground level about the policies that I am asked to implement,” said Ms. Drake. “I will be taking all of this collective knowledge and using it to produce a policy analysis for the Dobbs Ferry School District. The policy I am researching is Universal Pre-K and whether or not it makes sense in our District.” Ms. Drake is partnering with the elementary school principals from Tarrytown and Pocantico Hills to complete this project and come up with a recommendation that she will present to the Superintendent and Board of Education.

Having been a political science major in college, with a concentration in law and politics, Ms. Drake feels that she has “brought her experience full circle” as she nears completion of the 2014-2015 Education Policy Fellowship Program. This professional development program, sponsored by Teachers College, Columbia University, Putnam/N. Westchester BOCES and Westchester Putnam School Boards Association, provides an enriching experience for more than 250 Fellows each year.

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**For more information, please contact:**

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