

## P-TECH BEGINS WITH A GREAT SCHOOL LEADER

No great institution can exist in the absence of great leadership. P-TECH 9-14 schools are no exception. Research shows that “most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass. Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal.” (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 2) In the P-TECH 9-14 model, the job of the principal is all the more challenging because the individual variables expand beyond the confines of the school to include the College and Employer Partners.

**School:** Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH)

**Partners:** New York City Department of Education, The City University of New York, New York City College of Technology and IBM Corporation

**Launch:** September 2011, the first P-TECH 9-14 Model School

**Standout Fact:** Computer Information Systems and Electromechanical Engineering Technology

In developing the first P-TECH 9-14 school, the New York City Department of Education, The City University of New York, and IBM knew that this educational reform effort depended in large part on identifying a visionary and passionate leader. This leader needed to be able to shepherd this new model from idea to school and to quickly demonstrate significant success. New York City certainly had abundant talent to choose from, but finding the right leader for this challenging role because a critical first step for the partnership.

To inform its efforts, the partners wanted to hear from school leaders about both best practices and pitfalls when starting a new school or improving any school. They collaborated with the New York City school principals’ union to host a reception for 25 school leaders at IBM’s offices in Manhattan during the early phases of planning. At that reception, school leaders learned more about the school program and offered their advice. One person in the audience that evening was Rashid Ferrod Davis, who would eventually be chosen—after a rigorous selection process—to serve as P-TECH’s founding principal.

Mr. Davis, who had more than 10 years of experience in New York City Public Schools, brought impressive experience with him. Most recently, he had served as Principal of the Bronx Engineering and Technology Academy (BETA) and was widely recognized as a turnaround leader. BETA was listed on U.S. News and World Report 2010 America’s Best High Schools, with a Silver Medal recognition, and on Newsweek’s Top American High Schools list for 2010 and 2011.

Mr. Davis knew that assuming the leadership of a new model would be a significant challenge, but the opportunity to try new approaches to help underserved populations was extremely attractive. “Studies show that by the time they reach the age of 25, only 30 percent of people in this country have completed a four-year college degree. The numbers are much lower for people of color. This six-year model may seem like a long time, but if students are tasting success and given an opportunity to see themselves working as professionals at companies like IBM, I knew that we could make a dent in the completion of post-secondary education.”

According to Davis, public-private partnership is key to the success of the school, even if it complicates school management. “The triangulation of high school, college, and industry is challenging work; it requires all involved to move forward and challenge ‘business-as-usual’ approaches,” says Davis. This also presents advantages. “For example, teachers’ professional development opportunities are enhanced by industry and

college professors. Teachers also use blended learning. The teachers are encouraged to lead the school and live in the big picture.”

For the school to be successful, Mr. Davis has worked to unite all the variables that the P-TECH model has to offer to serve student learning. “How we structure time, how we structure resources, how we use adults, how we use industry mentors, how we use the skills from industry to ensure that students are college- and career-ready, and how do we be deliberate in making sure that kids are exposed to them through projects, through job shadow visits, through skill-based internships,” notes Davis. “It’s about being strategic and purposeful in making sure that the skills that are needed are embedded in the day-to-day work.”

Mr. Davis also has been intent on creating a culture of high achievement and high expectations for all of those in the school, including its students. According to Davis, “P-TECH is about promise, but it’s also about expectation. The promise is that if you come here, you’ll get the chance to gain the academic, workplace and interpersonal experience you’ll need to help make your dreams come true.” For Davis, this isn’t something that is given, but rather something that is earned. “The expectation is that you will apply yourself, take full advantage of this unique opportunity, and give back – both as a productive member of your community and as a mentor and role model for future generations.”

Published October 2014

---

For more information about Shared Decision-Making in the P-TECH 9-14 model, please visit [ptech.org](http://ptech.org)