

Franken hosts revolutionary educator: Geoffrey Canada in Northside tour

Written by

Sunday, 07 October 2012 10:38



U.S. Sen. Al Franken (D-MN) last week hosted nationally-renowned children's education advocate Geoffrey Canada on a visit to the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) in North Minneapolis.

The Northside Achievement Zone seeks to replicate Canada's revolutionary Harlem Children's Zone in creating a community-wide approach to ensure that young children stay on track through high school, college and into the job market.

Canada is president and CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), an organization he founded in the 1990's. His groundbreaking work to overcome seemingly-intractable problems to increase children's academic achievement has been profiled on the TV show 60 Minutes and in the documentary "Waiting for Superman."

In December, Northside Achievement Zone was selected as one of only five sites in the country to receive federal Promise Neighborhood funding - \$28 million over five years - to improve children's educational outcomes in North Minneapolis. The money will be used to partner with schools, organizations, and families to significantly improve educational opportunities by supporting children from pre-birth to college.

Sen. Franken supported efforts in Congress to bring the funding to Northside Achievement Zone .

Two Stops in Minneapolis' Northside Achievement Zone

Franken, Canada, and Northside Achievement Zone President and CEO Sondra Samuels visited the Family Partnership, 1501 Xerxes Ave. N., meeting with the pre-schoolers and parents taking part in early-childhood education programs. The Family Partnership early-childhood initiative includes a parenting-skills program for the parents of pre-school children. It is based on a similar successful program called Baby College in the Harlem Children's Zone. Franken read to pre-school children, and Canada and Samuels joined him in singing with children for music therapy session in another classroom.

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Canada's tour of Northside Achievement Zone concluded with a visit to Plymouth Christian Youth Center (PCYC), to interact with mentors and students in an after-school tutoring program for 4th and 5th grade students.

Canada briefly address an assembly of Northside Achievement Zone partners, including, leaders of Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center, Minneapolis Public Housing Agency, the United Way, and others are collaborating to make the Northside Achievement Zone a seamless network embracing and supporting children and their families. Canada encouraged the Northside partners to stay strong and stay focused on the children. Fifteen years into the Harlem Children's Zone, he said, the program now has over 900 youth attending college. "You can do that here as well," he said.