



The Chalkboard

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NYCSA

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Sisulu-Walker Charter School Celebrates 10 Years

New York State's first charter opened ten years ago this month, and today Sisulu-Walker Charter School celebrated a decade serving students in Harlem.

This charter school was approved with four others in the summer of 1999, less than a year following enactment of the state's charter school law. Sisulu was the first to open its doors, days ahead of the others. This was an auspicious beginning for charter schools and it's a real credit to Sisulu for being the most successful of those initial schools. After early struggles, leading to a short-term, two year renewal, the school improved results to the point where for several years this charter has outperformed District 3 in the percentage of students meeting and exceeding state math and English standards and is now in the middle of a full five-year charter contract renewal.

Today's celebration included several of the co-founders, including Marshall Mitchell, the first chairman of the school's board and former chief of staff to ex-Congressman, Rev. Floyd Flake, also in attendance; and Danielle Moss-Lee, a Harlem parent and lead applicant for the school. Also presenting were the school's principal, Dawn Cejas; and current board president, Martez Moore, the Senior Vice President for Strategy & Business Development at Black Entertainment Networks.

Rev. Wyatt T. Walker, whom the school is named after, co-founded the school but was not in attendance. A video was made where he recalled the school's founding. Rev. Walker is a life-long civil rights activist who served as chief of staff to Martin Luther King, Jr. Ten years ago, Rev. Walker enabled the charter school to lease space from the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ, from where he has since retired.

Sisulu-Walker Charter School has been managed by Victory Schools, Inc., founded by investor Steven B. Klinsky. Victory Schools manages several other charter schools in New York and other states, and got a jump-start on chartering after the charter law's adoption. Klinsky and his team established important community and grassroots connections, and deserves enormous credit for also putting charter schools in needy but politically difficult places in the state, including Yonkers and Roosevelt, Long Island. He's a man that has used his success to give back to Harlem and elsewhere, and used the state's Charter Schools Act to do so. Other investors and philanthropists have followed suit, but Steve

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