

## Annual Dinner Remarks

- Good evening. On behalf of the Guttman Center for Early care and Education, it's a pleasure to be here with you this evening.
- I've worked in the field of early childhood education my entire career, as a teacher, a qualitative researcher, a consultant and as director of this extraordinary program and I find that we're at a uniquely promising and curious, moment in the field.
- As Shael said, there is greater support today than ever before for early childhood education.
- What there is less of a focus on is the quality of that education. That's a mistake, for two reasons.
- It's true that the majority of infants and toddlers in the United States are in some form of childcare for most of their waking hours. What those of us who teach have known forever and what researchers are now finding, is that the more opportunities for quality education and professional development early childhood educators have access to, the higher the quality of care for their infants and toddlers.
- However, most states require only a high school diploma to work with very young children. As a result, salaries for early childhood educators ARE extremely low.
- Secondly, should we invest in high quality, the returns would be enormous. Research demonstrates that receiving high-quality care at a young age is associated with positive outcomes well into one's adult years. Unfortunately, the inverse is also true.
- This is where my team and I come in.
- There are thousands of early childhood educators across New York City and we know that not all of them have access to quality professional development.
- Our focus is on building the capacity of early childhood educators who work with infants and toddlers in communities traditionally labeled as being low in resources. For 5 months we listen to their stories and their priorities. We teach a class covering early childhood development, building quality environments and how to partner effectively with families. And we engage them in one on one coaching with experts in the field of early childhood development, mental health and social work.
- After participants complete the program we have seen marked improvements in the relationships participants have with their children, in the responsiveness of their environments and in the confidence they have in their own practice, all aspects shown to contribute to success later in a child's life
- I believe in this approach, and I'm also deeply familiar with how much work it requires.
- Two years ago, when I began reaching out to caregivers, I contacted an educator who was interested in the work that we did but expressed some hesitation about participating. A few hours later, I got a call from her neighbor, who it turned out, was also a caregiver of nearly 30 years. Her first words to me were "Who are you, and what are you doing in East New York?" [PAUSE]

- She said, “When you come into this community, you need to make sure you connect the city councilwoman and you need an audience with the State Senator, and the community board and the precinct board” Well, when she said “precinct board” I knew we were in hot water. But she went on to say that “You can’t just walk into the community without being vetted by the community.”
- So that’s what we did, and as a result, built strong and enduring relationships within the neighborhood which allowed us to reach dozens of educators serving hundreds of children.
- Both of those providers, Ms. Edna Elcock and Ms. Cynthia Reed graduated from our 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort and are here tonight. I hope you’ll join me in giving them a round of applause.
- So this work is not easy, but it is possible, and it’s vitally important. Before I close, I’d like to share one more story to illustrate why.
- Sherease Alston was born and raised in Brooklyn. A childcare provider for 10 years, Sherease has a deep passion for supporting children with special needs. However, by the time she joined our program she was so overwhelmed by the day-to-day life of running a family childcare program that she was ready to close shop and move on.
- Halfway through our five-month program, Sherease explained that a shift had happened in her practice. She was feeling reenergized and more self-aware. She said “Through the Guttman program I began to see the quality of my own work. I became a student of my own practice. All I needed was the support.” After graduating, she decided to keep her program open.
- Sherease is also here tonight and I’d like to honor her with a round of applause as well.
- In closing, I want to remind you that in East New York alone, there are hundreds of caregivers like Edna, Cynthia and Sherease, and behind each one are infants and toddlers whose own success relies, in large part, on the quality of their educators’ professional support.
- I’m proud of how we’re partnering with these caregivers, and I’m eager to expand this work to other parts of this city.
- On behalf of these extraordinary educators and the thousands of children that they serve, Thank you.