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**Schools That Can & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights announce finalists for the RFK Urban Education Awards**

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Robert F. Kennedy Urban Education Awards will celebrate a student, teacher, and school leader, and will commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kennedy's "Ripple of Hope" speech*

**NEW YORK (May 18, 2016)** — Robert F. Kennedy's "Ripple of Hope" speech, delivered on June 6, 1966 in apartheid South Africa, implored citizens to reject injustice and embrace community service. He said:

*"Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."*

On June 11, 2016, Schools That Can (STC) and RFKennedy Human Rights will celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kennedy's address by honoring change-makers from across the country. This week, we are proud to announce the finalists in each awards category. The RFK Urban Education Awards will be presented during a Luncheon at the STC National Forum on June 11, 2016 at New York University's Kimmell Center. Fresh back from a visit to South Africa, commemorating her father's historic visit, Kerry Kennedy, President of RFKennedy Human Rights, will present the awards.

Presented annually by STC, a national nonprofit focused on improvement and innovation in urban education, and in partnership with RFKennedy Human Rights, the Awards celebrate a student, a teacher, and a school leader who embody Kennedy qualities. "We are thrilled to be part of the celebration that honors education," said John Heffernan, Executive Director of RFKennedy Human Rights, Speak Truth To Power. "Bobby Kennedy once said, 'Education is the key to... human dignity itself.' It is educators and students who are the essential ingredients in building a citizenry committed to promoting and protecting this dignity."

### **School Leader Finalists**

**Richard Clark, President, St. Martin de Porres High School, Cleveland, OH**

Rich Clark served many years as the principal of a high-performing college preparatory private school before he found his calling. During a trip to Peru, where he visited a network of Jesuit schools throughout Latin America, he was inspired to open a faith-based school for Cleveland's underserved community. In 2003, Rich opened St Martin de Porres High School and "led a revolution in Cleveland, Ohio tearing down the walls of oppression and resistance to change urban education to help break the cycle of generational poverty."

**Franklin J. Headley, Founding Principal, VOICE Charter School, Long Island City, NY**

"Mr. Headley's story is unequivocally one of steadfast moral conviction and shared transformation, both within and without-- extending to a growing community." Having grown up in a low-income family in rural New Jersey, Mr. Headley experienced the transformative power of education firsthand. First in his family to graduate college, he went on to receive 5 graduate degrees. After teaching in NYC public schools, Mr. Headley founded VOICE Charter School, dedicated to helping underserved students achieve at high levels while providing a school-wide vocal music program. Mr. Headley's leadership at VOICE has included unpopular decisions that "later proved powerful in service of our mission."

**Dominique Lee, CEO, BRICK (Building Responsible Intelligent Creative Kids), Newark, NJ**

After serving as a Teach For America Corps Member, Dominique recruited peers to found a new school management organization dedicated to improving quality in district schools in Newark. BRICK launched two schools in the South Ward, but, unsatisfied with slow improvement, Dominique has since united other district and charter schools to create the South Ward Alliance, which aims to coordinate resources for and attract innovation to the community. "To better these odds Dominique has changed the system of how to educate children – it is not only high quality schools but high quality case management of health and social services that will improve these odds."

## Teacher Finalists

### **Raisa Capellan, Family Coordinator, Girls Prep Lower East Side Middle School, New York, NY**

Raisa, whose family is from the Dominican Republic, was born and raised in New York City and is a product of the city's school system. Raisa joined Girls Prep right out of college and has worked her way up within the organization while simultaneously pursuing her own education outside of work. "Raisa has an incomparable ability to build the closest of relationships with our families so that she can not only support them through their celebrations and struggles, but she can also anticipate their needs on a daily basis." Raisa is a role model and advocate for each and every young lady at Girls Prep.

### **Lisa Ellis, Guidance Counselor, MC2 STEM High School, Cleveland, OH**

"While many of the students of MC2 STEM High School suffer injustices, one person in the school always seems to have an answer for helping students deal with those injustices." Lisa has helped the school community persist through challenges big and small. From starting a yoga club to help students alleviate stress to starting a Gay Straight Alliance to support LGBTQ youth to coordinating counseling sessions to help students process the senseless violence in their community, Lisa is always looking for ways to change her community for the better.

### **TJ Pavlov, Social Science Teacher, Chicago Tech Academy High School, Chicago, IL**

Mr. Pavlov brings an entrepreneurial, creative, and collaborative approach to his work at Chi Tech, the only fully project-based learning public school in Chicago. "In his three years at Chicago Tech, TJ Pavlov has transformed his teaching practice, the practice of other teachers and the opportunities that are provided to students that are usually forgotten about in the educational system." Pavlov dove in to his school's new instructional approach, testing out big project ideas without a fear of failure. His creative planning engaged students deeply in their learning. For one such project, Mr. Pavlov's kids stayed late most days to build an educational model of the brain. Though the project didn't work out as expected, it helped students re-think the notion of learning, success, and failure, and inspired other teachers to take bigger risks in their planning.

## Student Finalists:

### **Thabitha Kobia, 8<sup>th</sup> Grader, Discovery Charter School, Newark, NJ**

Thabitha, whose family emigrated from Ghana four years ago for increased educational opportunities, "continually inspires with her efforts to make our community and the world a safer, more peaceful, and accepting space." Earlier this year, Thabitha presented to her classmates on her personal experience with bullying, laying her own heart bare in an effort to inspire others to treat their peers kindly. Additionally, Thabitha and a friend started a foundation to "bring hope to the world one person at a time." Thabitha's foundation will send resources to Africa while also engaging in service locally.

### **Naudia Loftis, 12<sup>th</sup> Grader, St. Martin de Porres High School, Cleveland, OH**

Naudia is a role model to her peers and community. She mentors middle school students about making smart decisions. And as part of Naudia's senior capstone project, she chose to research black on black crime. The culminating action in this project was a "Value Our Lives" rally that she organized. "Naudia believes that an end to black on black crime will come from young people, like herself, engaging in peaceful protests and speaking out against violence to people of all ages."

### **Mujahir Lesure & Mustafa Jones-Norton, 12<sup>th</sup> Graders, Newark Collegiate Academy, Newark, NJ**

Mujahir and Mustafa organized a peaceful student protest to stand up against teacher firings in their school and to discuss rules across their local network of Schools. "Using social media, text messaging, and word of mouth, they were able to bring together the entire student body to have their voices heard."

STC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that connects educators and leaders within its cross-sector network of urban schools to share innovative and effective practices. The network includes 153 charter, district, independent and faith-based schools in 15 cities — all of which serve predominantly low-income students and students of color. "We are honored to collaborate with RFKennedy Human Rights to celebrate students, teachers, and school leaders who have created ripples of hope in their schools and communities," said Michael Druckman, executive chair of Schools That Can.

For information about the STC Forum and RFK Urban Education Awards, go to [bit.ly/STCForum2016](http://bit.ly/STCForum2016). For general information, go to [www.schoolsthatcan.org](http://www.schoolsthatcan.org), follow @SchoolsThatCan on Twitter, and like STC's page at [www.facebook.com/SchoolsThatCan](http://www.facebook.com/SchoolsThatCan).