

How Latin is Helping Inner City Youths Strive and Succeed

In the last few years, there has been a resurgent interest in making Latin a part of the school curriculum. After all, the benefits seem too good to pass up, particularly those which show that Latin [boosts reading, math, and science scores](#).

It is likely these benefits that attracted a Philadelphia inner city charter school, Boys' Latin, to make the ancient language a cornerstone of their curriculum. And according to [The Wall Street Journal](#), the students are excelling in the study of Latin:

"This month the school received the results on the introductory level National Latin Exam, a test taken last year by students around the world. Among the highlights: Two Boys' Latin students had perfect scores; 60% of its seventh-graders were recognized for achievement, 20% for outstanding achievement; and the number of Boys' Latin students who tested above the national average doubled from the year before."

As *The Wall Street Journal* goes on to explain, the impressive part about this feat is that nearly one hundred percent of the students at Boys' Latin are black males who come from impoverished, troubled backgrounds.

According to [state records](#), Latin instruction hasn't yet raised these disadvantaged students into the 80th and 90th percentile in basic areas like reading, math, and science. In fact, they're still far from it.

What Latin has given the students, however, is a challenge to

conquer, a sense of achievement, and the drive to pursue more schooling instead of simply dropping out of high school.

“‘I invite anyone who doubts what this does for our students to come to a graduation and watch 100 black boys sharply dressed in caps and gowns and proudly reciting their school pledge in Latin,’ says the school’s chief executive officer, David Hardy. ‘Not only is this an unexpected sight, it defies the low expectations society puts on young black men.’”

Thomas Jefferson conveyed a similar thought in an [1819 letter](#) to John Brazer. He noted that the Latin language is not a necessary requirement for all men. He did however note that it is was essential for the following careers:

1. The Moralist – For those interested in philosophy, religion, or other academic branches, Jefferson believed Latin and Greek provided access to “ethical writings highly and justly esteemed.”
2. The Lawyer – Learning Latin, Jefferson noted, gave young men greater understanding of civil law.
3. The Doctor – According to Jefferson, knowledge of Latin gives the physician increased insight into the practice of medicine.
4. The Leader – “The statesman,” Jefferson declared, “will find in these languages history, politics, mathematics, ethics, eloquence, [and] love of country.”
5. The Scientist – Those who know their Latin will have a jump on understanding the terms and ideas which undergird the various branches of science.

In essence, Jefferson believes that those who would aspire to gain a footing in one of these careers must study Latin while still young.

Today’s schools have similar aspirations for students, but recognize that achieving such lofty career goals is a challenge. Is it possible that instruction in Latin is the

extra boost students need in order to aim high and achieve as adults?

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