

## St. Martin “Class of 2017” Bound For Glory



Seventeen of the first 18 graduates of a revived parochial middle school — all from families of modest means — are headed for college prep schools next year. Khadeem Cohens chose Hopkins over Choate.

The eighth-graders at St. Martin DePorres Academy, including Cohens (right photo) and Myeshia Brumell (left photo), received their acceptances to private high schools over recent weeks.

The news thrilled the school’s leaders, and served as a vindication of their “everyone can succeed” approach to urban education.

The eighth-graders are told every day that they belong to St. Martin’s “Class of 2017,” not the “Class of 2009.” That’s because the school emphasizes from newcomers’ first day of fifth grade that they’re headed for college. Then the school makes extraordinary efforts to steer them on that path.

St. Martin De Porres was for decades an educational lifeline in the Dixwell neighborhood. Volunteers raised the money to reopen it four years ago. It’s linked to a national Catholic educational movement called [NativityMiguel Network](#) designed to lift urban kids out of poverty through rigorous, college-focused primary education.

The 68 fifth-through-eighth graders who attend St. Martin DePorres in a renovated former church building on Columbus Avenue comes almost exclusively from lower-income, black and Latino families. Most are raised by single moms, [who in between their jobs make a point of volunteering at the school.](#)

The students attend school from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. They do between two and three hours of homework a night. They take seven academic subjects at a time, while participating in sports, cooking classes, and clubs.



And for two years before they leave, they visit prep schools and work on applications under the guidance of Allison Rivera (pictured). They'll get free tuition at the high schools, in part thanks to contributions from St. Martin's.

(For some previous stories about the school, click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).)



Branden Rose, who's from Newhallville and plans to become a pediatrician (his mom's a nurse), was wearing his Notre Dame High School sweatshirt at school Thursday.

Rose (pictured) visited the school so often that he grew comfortable in the place; it was like a bigger version of St. Martin De Porres.

Classmate Khadeem came to feel that way about Hopkins. He studied there during the summer as part of the elite school's "Breakthrough" program. So when he was accepted to both Choate and Hopkins, he selected the school where he felt most at home.

Chanttal Cabral is headed to a boarding school, [Westover](#).

"When Ms. Rivera told me how hard it was going to be, I had huge doubts," said Chanttal. "When I saw the application, I wanted to quit." She pushed ahead, with her fellow students' encouragement.

Myeshia kept checking the mail in recent weeks. The letter from Mercy High School was late. "What if I don't get in?" she kept asking Rivera. "You're going to get in," Rivera assured her. The letter, when it arrived, confirmed it.



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Myeshia plans to become a social worker. She has had her eye on that career for years, inspired by how a social worker helped her wrestle with her own feelings about being adopted.

Myeshia, whose mom is a library assistant at Yale, recently read John Steinbeck's Depression-era classic *Grapes of Wrath*. Then she traveled to D.C. with her classmates to witness Barack Obama's inauguration. She saw a connection.

"It was a good book to read now, going through a recession," she said. "I didn't think our times now were as bad as then. If we don't get it together it could be. With the help our new president, we can get money into people's hands."

Meanwhile, with the help of a loving school infused with high standards, Myeshia is on the path to a bright future.

