



The Times

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Foundation Academy has fifth-graders thinking about college

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SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

TRENTON -- The atmosphere is typical for an active school building:

Fall leaves adorn the classroom windows.

The distant sound of children laughing and the shuffling of feet can be heard upstairs.

Teachers converse in hallways about lesson plans and the next day's schedule.

But at Foundation Academy Charter School on South Broad Street, one thing immediately stands out.

Splashed against the halls and classroom walls are life-size, bold and brightly colored college logos and mascots, representing various higher education institutions from across the country.

It's all part of a summer-long initiative known as the College Branding Project.

"Everything our students see needs to contribute to our mission of preparing them for the nation's finest institutions," said Principal and Associate Head of School Greg Weiss.

"In urban education, expectations are not always set high enough," he continued. "It's certainly possible, but we felt this was one of many strategic ways of doing it."

Foundation Academy is a charter school -- meaning it's an alternative to traditional public schools but funded with taxpayer dollars. Such schools are part of the state education system but can be run by any individual approved by the Department of Education.

At Foundation Academy, roughly 192 students from Trenton in grades 5-8 are served.

Each of their classrooms, decorated in a theme of the teacher's choosing, usually reflects where that instructor went to school.

"I just love it because the colleges, the images, are right in front of the children's faces," said teacher Jennifer Rack in the University of North Carolina room. "That goal is constantly surrounding them every day, no matter what room or part of the building they're in."

In the science and math rooms, giant logos for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology cover what otherwise would be a bland, beige wall.

Touring the facility with four schoolchildren, Weiss turned the logos into a lesson, asking, "What does MIT stand for? I'll give you a hint. M is the letter of the state's name."...

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