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## Brooklyn School Gets Financial Aid

By SHELLY BANJO

To David Lerner, a former South Bronx history teacher turned investment adviser, the public education system in New York just doesn't work.

To that end, the founder of David Lerner Associates, a Syosset, N.Y.-based investment firm, has thrown his support behind a different approach to education that works by giving students and parents what he calls true accountability.



drawn by Noli Novak

DAVID LERNER

Next week Mr. Lerner will give \$25,000 to the Trey Whitfield School, a private school in one of Brooklyn's most underperforming school districts. His most recent gift brings his support to the school to \$300,000 since he became involved seven years ago.

The pre-kindergarten-to-eighth-grade school costs \$4,000 a year to attend, nearly a quarter of what it costs to educate a child in New York City public schools, says Mr. Lerner.

"Without accountability, in school or business, you are going to get poor performance," Mr. Lerner says. "Parents sacrifice to scrape together the yearly tuition to attend the Trey Whitfield School, making the child accountable for every moment of the day,"

Trey Whitfield School was founded in a church in 1983 by A.B. Whitfield, a former football player with the Dallas Cowboys and educator Janie C. Whitney, as the Bethlehem Baptist Academy. The couple changed the name of the school to honor their son Trey, after he died in 1989 at age 18 in a boating accident. For more than 25 years, the school says its 450 to 500 students have performed in the top 15% on state reading and math exams.

Mr. Whitfield says after a number of years, the church asked for its property back and to keep the school going, they had to find another property.

Enter Mr. Lerner, who with a number of former athletes, local business leaders and philanthropists, helped the organization raise more than \$1 million to move into a new 60,000-square-foot building. Mr. Lerner had read about the school's achievement and "just didn't believe it, I had to go down there to see for myself," he says.

With six years in its new building, the school is now turning its attention to preparing a succession plan and

building an endowment, Mr. Whitfield says. He has built a succession team of former students and educators and looks to transfer leadership of the school in the next three years.

"I'm never going to retire, but I'm going to take a step back and focus on building an endowment to make sure the school is safe and on solid enough financial ground to exist after we leave," he says.

He also wants to raise money to build a retirement package for teachers "who have been here for more than 20 years," he says. "We owe it to these teachers to take care of them."

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