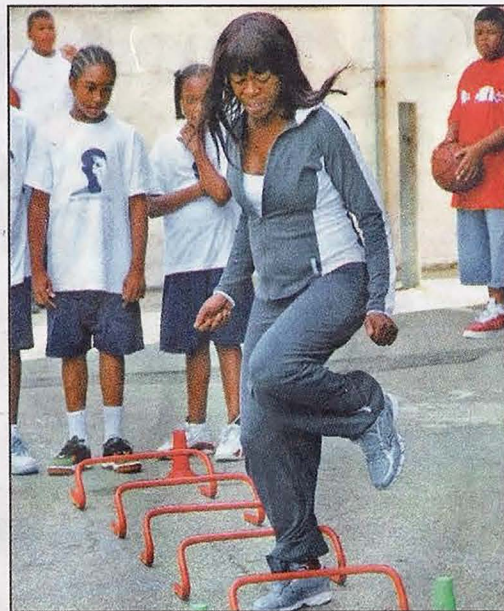


Olympic track gold medalist Diane Dixon, far right, and street hoops legend Pee Wee Kirkland, third from right, poses with students and administrators from the Trey Whitfield School. Photos By Ted Levin



Olympic track gold medalist and Brooklyn resident Diane Dixon shows kids how to leg it through an obstacle course.

Winning with Trey Whitfield

Kirkland, Dixon team up with Brooklyn students

By Stephen Witt

What do Olympic gold medalist Diane Dixon and street hoops legend Richard Pee Wee Kirkland have in common?

Both volunteer their time and energy to one of the city's most thriving private schools located along the hard-scrabble streets of East New York.

The Trey Whitfield School, 17 Hinsdale Street, has more than 400 pre-K through eighth-grade students — with 100 percent of them on or above grade level, compared to the public school average of about 49 percent.

Co-founded in 1983 by Janie Whitney and run by former NFL Football Player and longtime educator A.B. Whitfield, the school has educated a socio-economic strata of mainly African-American children.

This includes from foster kids to children of city police officers to the offspring of Dixon and Kirkland and other star athletes.

The school is so well run and popular in some sectors that Will Smith recently had his kids going to the school while filming a movie in the city.

And it is at the school that Dixon and Kirkland help out in everything from speaking and mentoring the students to helping out in the physical education programming.

"I stumbled upon here because I had a client in the

area and was disappointed with the city schools," said Dixon, who attended Brooklyn Technical High School and gold medaled in the 1984 Olympics and silver medaled in the 1988 Olympics — both in the 4-by-400 meter relay.

Dixon explained that at the time, her now 11-year-old son, Dior, wasn't doing as well as she would have liked in public schools and was wringing her hands on what to do about it.

"When I walked into the school I noticed the smell. It smelled really good. It was very quiet and serene, and I had an opportunity to meet Mr. Whitfield who knew me when I was competing when I was young, and the connection was made," recalled Dixon.

"I sat here almost in tears. The city school system wasn't working in my son's favor. It may work for some kids but it wasn't working for him. Dior has matured here as an individual and I might have lost him to peer pressure," she added.

Kirkland's 13-year-old son, Richard, Jr., found the school much the same way, but first had to find himself.

Known for inventing the crossover dribble, Kirkland originally from Harlem, is a



Street hoops legend Richard Pee Wee Kirkland poses with his son, Richard, Jr.

street legend gaining fame at the legendary Holcombe Rucker Rutker Park, where NBA players come to play street ball every year.

Although drafted by the Chicago Bulls and playing briefly with the Seattle Supersonics, Kirkland turned to a life of crime before turning his own life around.

"Since correcting that mistake I've been traveling around the country speaking to young people trying to motivate their lives by using my life as a mirror to show them what not to do as opposed to what to do," said Kirkland.

A.B. Whitfield said the school is for the better having Kirkland around and close by.

"He understands the streets. He understands the inside. He understands the good and bad of society. He's been there. He can tell

the real story and kids listen because he's been there. What I like about him is he's made something positive. He's a great father and family man, and raised a great kid," said Whitfield.

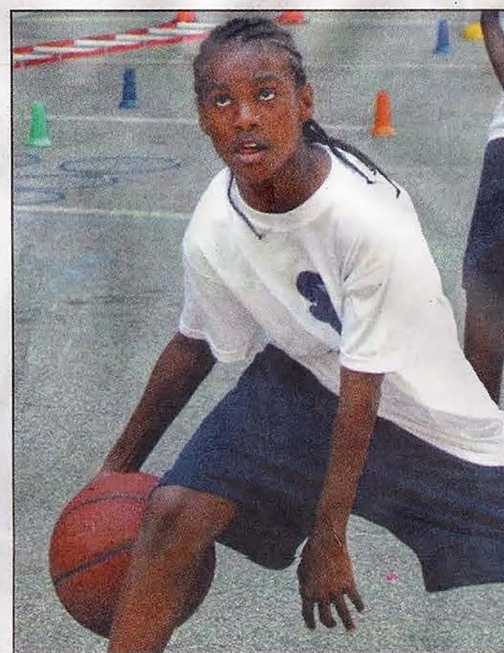
Mentoring aside, Whitfield, Dixon and former WNBA Player Kym Hampton have been helping run a physical fitness camp in the schoolyard as part of the Try Whitfield summer school program.

Dixon said the camp focuses on a skills curriculum called BCARPS, which stands for balance, coordination, agility, reaction, power and speed.

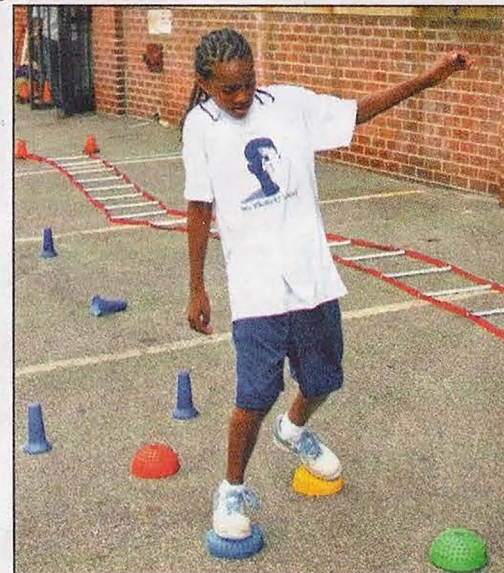
"We have different color coordinated sports stations. We set them up and have the kids go through a variety of exercises. There's a lesson, there's a procedure, there's equipment and extended lessons. After that we have a Q&A where we discuss the programs and skills and focus on it, so they know exactly why we're trying to get them to be — better students," said Dixon.

"It's important to learn about skills, because it helps you with the developmental process. It's more than physical fitness. It's not real sports specific. It's more about skills and assessment," she added.

For more information on the Trey Whitfield School, log onto www.treywhitfieldschool.org or call 342-7722.



Richard Kirkland, Jr. shows how to handle the ball.



Richard Kirkland, Jr. on the obstacle course.