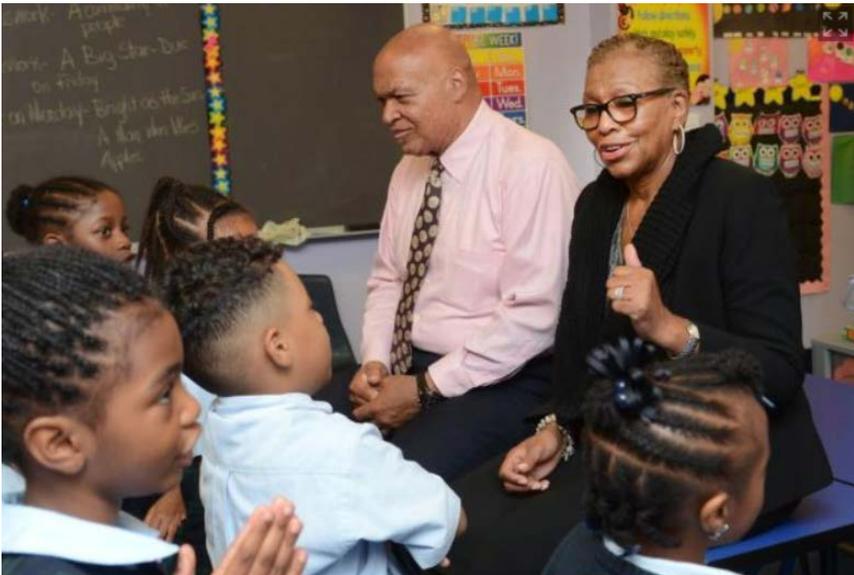


At 75, founder of groundbreaking Brooklyn school Janie Whitney is still fighting for children

BY [Ben Chapman](#), [Lisa L. Colangelo](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS / Saturday, June 6, 2015, 6:06 PM Share this URL: <http://nydn.us/1G2AChU>



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Janie Whitney (R), founder and CEO of the Trey Whitfield School and New York Daily News Hometown Hero greets kindergarteners with her husband A.B. Whitfield who helps to run Trey Whitfield School located at 17 Hinsdale Street on Friday, June 5th 2015 in East New York, Brooklyn.

Whitney has been nominated for a Daily News Hometown Heroes in Education award for her tireless efforts at the school, which after three decades, has become a beacon of hope in an economically challenged area.

Whitney, a Brooklyn native, left the world of finance to create the Bethlehem Baptist Academy in 1984.

She believed the neighborhood needed better schools, and resolved to open a low-cost private school serving the crucial grades of pre-K through eight.

"I thought that there was a need for a better school," said Whitney. "The dropout rate was tremendous." She convinced her lifelong partner A.B. Whitfield to come to work as the school's chief operating officer and principal. Whitfield had already been a teacher in city schools for two decades following a stint as a pro football player.



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"I believe all children can learn," said Whitney, revealing the guiding mission behind the 300-student Trey Whitfield School in East New York.

The couple's school took off, but in 1989 their son Trey died in a boating accident at age 18. That year they renamed their academy in his memory as the Trey Whitfield School.

Whitney knew the importance of a solid preschool foundation decades before Mayor de Blasio's push for universal pre-K.

Students as young as three are taught to read with an emphasis on phonics at Whitney's school. Early reading is the cornerstone of the academic philosophy.

"At that age they are like sponges," Whitney said. "They can absorb so much more."

Whitney was also an early adopter of a no-nonsense approach to student discipline later employed by much larger charter school operators such Achievement First and Success Academy.

Students in Whitney's school all wear uniforms and are kept to a strict code of conduct.



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"We demand respect and responsibility and our children excel," Whitney said.

Along with a rigorous academic schedule, students can partake in extracurricular activities that include dance, music, track and field and robotics.

Trey Whitfield students go on to some of the top city high schools including Brooklyn Tech, Bronx High School of Science and Stuyvesant High School.

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"It's a grueling job," said Whitney of running a school where students continually beat the odds. "But I love it."