

From Teaching Artist to Classroom Teacher, Ms. LaKeisha Knows DCP's Impact Best



LaKeisha (center) with scholars (students) and faculty at GLA West's Culminating Event.

With the value of dance education often underestimated, many young people miss out on the opportunity to learn dance in school. That's why former DCP Teaching Artist Ms. LaKeisha Dean is grateful to work at a school that sees its value. Not only does Global Leadership Academy (GLA) West in Philadelphia — where LaKeisha has taught dance for the last five years — offer in-school performing arts classes, but the school also supports her vision to offer more. When LaKeisha got promoted to the Theatre Arts Educator and Coordinator of Special Programs, she knew that bringing in additional arts programming would be beneficial for her scholars (how GLA refers to its students). She looked no further than Dancing Classrooms Philly.

"I went to Dancing Classrooms Philly first because I knew it would be transformative," LaKeisha shared. "This year, we're coming back from COVID and having to connect and make eye contact again. I wanted to start the school year off [with a DCP Ballroom residency] to help them bond with their classes and as an entire fifth-grade unit." LaKeisha learned first-hand how impactful this residency program is during her experience teaching with DCP from 2016-2018. She credits the program's effectiveness on its unique ability to move scholars out of their comfort zone and teach them how to get comfortable with getting uncomfortable — a skill they'll use in many aspects of their lives. "I know one day it'll click for them: they have to push through discomfort. They're not always going to be comfortable in everything they do. Maybe they won't think, 'I

did this with Dancing Classrooms Philly,' but subconsciously, they'll know, 'I've been through this before. I've pushed through, and I made something incredible because of it,'" LaKeisha explained.

Dean faced her own challenges with leaving her comfort zone at the beginning of her career. Although she graduated with a B.A. in Dance from Slippery Rock University, she stumbled into dance education by chance. Upon graduating, LaKeisha had her sights set on working as a performer, whether that was on Broadway, on cruise ships, or as a concert dancer. Teaching dance wasn't something she saw herself doing, even when an exciting job opportunity fell into her lap. Katina, LaKeisha's older sister, owned a dance studio and asked LaKeisha to teach in her place while she was on maternity leave. 'I don't want to do this,' LaKeisha recalls thinking to herself repeatedly.

It's not that LaKeisha didn't imagine she'd enjoy teaching; she didn't recognize that she had the necessary expertise until she gave in and saw how much she had to share. By pushing through discomfort and overcoming self-doubt, she discovered a passion that led her to continue teaching dance 13 years later. "I fell in love with seeing kids so excited to be with me and so excited to move in any way. It blossomed from there," Dean said, bursting with enthusiasm. That passion also led her to pursue an M.A. in Dance and Related Studies at Florida State University, where she researched dance administration and the lack of B.A. Dance programs at HBCUs.

From teaching dance to GLA's fifth graders since they were in first grade, LaKeisha has seen how dance has enhanced their learning experience throughout the years. While Dean acknowledges that having performing arts classes doesn't lead to every scholar achieving straight A's, she sees them more engaged and ready to learn in other subjects after returning from dance class. LaKeisha strongly advocates for school curriculums to include any arts programming but emphasizes DCP's power to strengthen peer-to-peer connections. "Dancing Classrooms Philly is a wonderful tool if you don't have any arts programs, or even if you do. It's hard to find a program where [scholars] can connect and see each other. They learn about intimacy and how to be gentle, kind, and courteous," she explained. "We are raising the future leaders of the world, so we have to make sure we're catering to their whole selves. To all administrators everywhere: Dancing Classrooms is the way!"

Global Leadership Academy West's first DCP Ballroom residency concluded with a [Culminating Event in November](#). Both the program and the event were everything LaKeisha hoped they would be. An audience of teachers, administrators, and parents had a blast dancing alongside GLA's fifth-grade class. The third and fourth graders, who were also in the audience, enthusiastically supported their peers and grew excited about participating in the residency when they're in fifth grade.

Dancing Classrooms Philly is excited to continue its partnership with GLA West and to offer its young scholars an unforgettable experience that'll help them build the skills they need to take the lead in their lives. Thank you, Ms. LaKeisha, for bringing our program to your scholars and advocating for our mission and work.