

The Baltimore Brew

Taylor Ransome tackles his first teaching job: as a Baltimore City public school teacher

Alexandra Wilding August 20, 2010 at 10:35 pm [Story Link](#)



[Photo by: Allie Wilding](#)

[Taylor Ransome is brimful of optimism . . . but is he ready for his first day as a Baltimore City public school teacher?](#)

[The idealistic 23-year-old from suburban Virginia is an honors graduate from James Madison University whose only classroom teaching experience so far is a six-week training stint this summer.](#)

[Starting August 30, though, Ransome will be teaching middle school students at National Academy Foundation Preparatory School, the former Dunbar Middle School, which closed this summer amid declining enrollment and poor test scores. Now Dunbar students will be facing an unfamiliar staff as the National Academy Foundation begins a new chapter managing the East Baltimore school.](#)

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“Failure isn’t an option,” said Ransome. “If something doesn’t work in the classroom, I will improve it. I’m thinking all the time about what I can do to be successful as much as I can as a new teacher.”

The numbers for Dunbar show some of the challenges he and the other new school staff face. The middle school saw significant declines in its 2010 MSA scores between 6th and 7th grade students (The new 7th and 8th grade class at NAF Prep). While 51 percent of 6th graders were proficient in math in 2010, only 22.5 percent of 7th graders were proficient in math, many of whom will likely become students in Ransome’s 8th grade science classes at NAF Prep.

Ransome knows he has challenges ahead.

“There’s going to be a lot of pushback because the students aren’t ready for it. The culture of the school has to be changed,” he said.

Despite some trepidation about his new job, Ransome said he’s eager for it to start.

“I feel pretty much as ready as I can be,” he said. “I’m anxious about starting. I’m ready to set up shop, and see what this teaching thing is all about.”

Testing his cousins, and himself

So what led the new teacher to NAF Prep? Ransome graduated from JMU in June with a degree in biology and a minor in secondary education after receiving a four-year, full-ride scholarship. His road to teaching in Baltimore began during a summer training institute with the Baltimore City Teaching Residency (BCTR) program.

As a kid growing up outside Richmond, Ransome used to play a game with his younger cousins called “school.” He, of course, played the teacher, and used an old briefcase of his father’s as a prop. He would create tests for his cousins using magazines and an encyclopedia, and help them to figure out the answers if they got stuck.

As a middle school student himself, though, Ransome said he was “an absolute nightmare” until his mom enrolled him in honors classes.

“I would do bad things like skip school to do extra work on a school project,” he said. When his mother found out his perfectionism was verging on obsessive behavior, she “gave me the business.” Ransome is the first to admit that he was, in those days, “pretty much, a knucklehead.”

Though inexperienced, Ransome also seems uniquely equipped to handle the unusual circumstances that surround his new role. When he steps into the classroom on Monday he’ll bring with him not only a lifelong passion for teaching, but also an understanding of hard work.

But Ransome had a mentor, Brian Curtis, a school guidance counselor who taught groups of kids how to juggle and encouraged them to think about college.

Closest thing to a super-hero

Then, in 8th grade, Ransome's parents divorced. His father moved out, and they didn't speak for almost a year. Ransome said he had no other male figures in his life, but was determined to take on the role himself.

Throughout high school, Ransome worked hard to maintain good grades. One of the top students in his class, he was selected as a Centennial Scholar at JMU where he received free tuition in exchange for maintaining a 3.0 GPA and performing community service.

He wanted to be a pediatrician because he was "fixated on money," though, in time, he would "clear away the cobwebs" and change his career path. The switch occurred after he began working with young people at Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Ransome immediately knew he wanted to teach after seeing the looks on the kid's faces after tutoring.

"I used to love super heroes and comic books because they are always helping people," he said. Being a teacher "is the closest thing to a super hero there is."

He chose Baltimore because of its proximity to his family in Virginia, but also, he said, he has a lot of energy and wanted to work in an inner-city public school system such as Baltimore's.

"I knew I wanted to be a teacher when I figured out that I could teach someone and they could teach me," Ransome said. "That's gratification you can't get from being a doctor."

First face-off with a student

This summer, he spent the mornings teaching summer school and the afternoons in classes with other Baltimore teachers learning how to be an effective teacher.

From BCTR training, Ransome took away the importance of being flexible and patient.

"You aren't going to get everything on your first try while trying to juggle everything from your lessons to your classroom culture," he said "Eventually things will come around."

During the training, Ransome taught summer school under the guidance of an experienced teacher at Edgecombe Circle Elementary School. He taught 7th grade math classes of 12-20 students, each divided by gender. He learned that each student requires a different approach when it comes to discipline. He said he liked to have fun with his students, but was ready to lay down consequences if they challenged him, which did happen.

Ransome described an incident in which a female student slammed a book down on a desk, which he wouldn't tolerate. After disciplining the student, the two were eye-to-eye from then on.

"Effective teachers build relationships. If inner-city kids don't trust you, they won't learn," Ransome said. "You have to provide a consequence...I'm not going to spoon-feed my students."

When Ransome goes to sleep these days, his classroom is on his mind. When anxiety creeps in, he's got a useful mantra: "If I can help one kid, I've done my job."

Ransome will continue taking evening BCTR classes throughout the year that will help him and other new teachers in their content area, as well classes on how to integrate reading and writing skills into every content area.

Ransome, however, has gotten a jump-start on his involvement in the school. He is already planning organizations he wants to establish at NAF Prep, one called "Homework and Hoops" that would combine homework time, basketball, and mentoring. Another would bring guest speakers into his classroom from various professional fields.

As long as he stays open to new experiences and learning, he said, he can't go wrong.

"Ineffective teachers think they can't learn anything new," he observed. "The worst teacher is the one just getting a paycheck."