De Blasio catches Raider pride at Port Richmond High School

By ANNA SANDERS

Mayor Bill de Blasio caught some Raider pride during the first day of class at Port Richmond High School.

Two students even gave the mayor his very own Raider jersey.

"I'm going to get Raider spirit, I can feel it!" de Blasio told Principal Timothy Gannon with a smile when he arrived at the school.

The mayor and Chancellor Carmen Farina visited Port Richmond High's college and health centers with school leadership and Assemblyman Michael Cusick (D-Mid-Island).

The Wagner College Raider Center and Student Health and Wellness Center are part of what make Port Richmond High one of the city's 130 "Community Schools." They provide wrap-around services to eliminate learning barriers faced by otherwise underserved students.

"The notion of reaching a child at every part of them and everything they need to excel -- that's what I think of when I think of Community Schools," de Blasio said at a news conference after seeing the two centers.

De Blasio met several students in Wagner's Port Richmond Partnership Leadership Academy, a three-year program meant to teach students skills to help them succeed in college.

Wagner President Richard Guarasci explained that the college is developing a similar program for middle schoolers at I.S. 51 in Graniteville.

"We're moving our way all the way down to your pre-K," Guarasci said.

The Department of Education said that so far 4,016 Staten Island kids have registered for the mayor's signature universal pre-K program. (Families can continue to find seats through October by calling 311 or visiting nyc.gov/prek)

On the tour, de Blasio asked the Port Richmond High students about their internships and experiences with the Wagner program. Port Richmond High junior Nick told him about choosing quotes to be featured in the Mandela Garden at Wagner College last summer.

"Our job was to pick different quotes from different leaders," Nick said. Those were then inscribed on clay plagues, painted and put in the garden.

De Blasio joked that Nick, an intern for Cusick, shouldn't use the assemblyman as a role model.

"I just thought someone needed to tell you," de Blasio said to laughs. "I don't know if that came across the wrong way."

Five of the seven students de Blasio met at the center told him they want to go to Wagner when they graduate. "I know a guy," the mayor said with a smile to Guarasci.

Senior Sabrina is eyeing Yale University, where de Blasio's son Dante just started his sophomore year. "Hopefully next year I see him!" she told the mayor.

Nick said he hopes to attend George Washington University and study political science.

"I want to be a public servant just like yourself," he told de Blasio. "I'm hoping when you're running again for reelection you let me help your campaign out here on the Island."

De Blasio smiled and said, "We're not going to talk about that right now."

When Cusick reminded the room that Nick works for him, de Blasio took the cue and reconsidered his earlier joke.

"I see Mount Rushmore with an additional face: Mike Cusick," the mayor riffed.

Back to business, Farina noted that the decade-old Wagner College program has inspired the borough's other universities. St. John's is developing a similar partnership in St. George and the College of Staten Island is working in New Dorp.

"I would love to see this model actually outside of Staten Island as well," Farina said.

The group also saw the new health center at Port Richmond High, which has six mentors and four social workers.

"It is a beautiful, modern facility and the focus is on physical health and mental health," de Blasio explained. "This is one of the things that really typifies Community Schools."

Cusick added, "This is a jewel of Staten Island, Port Richmond High School."

The school was de Blasio's last stop on a five-borough tour for the first day of class Thursday. When the mayor got there, he smirked at the Advance.

"Let the record show I am on Staten Island," he said.