



The Princeton Club of Rochester

Israel Ortiz Senior, Greece Arcadia High School

Commanding a leadership role to positively impact race relations poses many challenges that the Princeton Prize recognizes students for championing. Recently honored as a black scholar, Israel is accomplishing great things despite overcoming a lifetime of personal challenges of his own. To say he is “resilient” is an understatement, and speaks to the heart of his deep personal commitment to improving race relations by fostering unity and compassion despite adversity.

Israel created the group Advocates for Resilience (AFR) at Greece Arcadia to help make teachers and professionals in the school setting aware when students are facing hardships, trauma and adverse situations as well as providing support to those students. Israel says one of the goals is to build empathy and understanding across nationalities and races to shared struggles. He wants students of all ethnic backgrounds to know they have a safe place to find assistance:

“We want to provide a place for students to go when they seek the help of others but don’t know where to get it by providing them resources to help students in and out of school. In addition to that, we will hold weekly meetings where kids can get together to talk about their concerns, their challenges and the strategies they’ve learned.”

That struggle is not lost on Israel. He has overcome life threatening illness, loss and family violence, and he exemplifies students achieving remarkable success despite overwhelming struggles. He says AFR is already changing how teachers and administrators view their students.

“The people involved are of all different nationalities and races and we all understand each other and everyone else and we always have each other to fall back on. By working within our school district and outside of the district, one of the goals of AFR is to build community, empathy and understanding. Telling our stories breaks down social barriers, emotional walls, and provides common ground. It gives a different perspective into the lives of students and makes faculty more understanding of the constant adversity we as students go through when stepping out of the school’s front doors.”

Sally Brothers, Greece Arcadia teacher and mentor to Israel, describes the many contexts in which Israel and his AFR are already earning the attention and respect of educational professionals across the region. With Israel in the lead, AFR has already been invited to be a pivotal part of the professional staff development training at both Greece and Brockport school districts, with numerous upcoming presentation and performance commitments. Recently, for example, Israel delivered at a Black History Month celebration a powerful performance that Sally Brothers describes as *“an open letter to the audience aimed to bring perspective to the challenges young men of color face in hopes of bringing more awareness of systematic racism.”*

Israel, we hope you continue to lead and set powerful positive examples throughout your life. We have also heard from reliable sources that your goal is to someday become Rochester’s mayor. Our community would certainly be in good hands if that dream comes true.