

STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

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Kerease Epps graduated from the IB Diploma Programme (DP) at Morgan Park High School in Chicago, Illinois, US, in 2009. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Social Policy and African American Studies from Northwestern University, Illinois, US. She is currently a Policy Analyst for the Illinois State Board of Education. She looks forward to continuing her work in education, policy, and advocacy and push for culturally responsive spaces so that students of color are equipped with equitable resources for success.

Why did you originally decide to pursue an IB diploma?

I attended Morgan Park's 7th and 8th grade Academic Center. During my 8th grade year, we were given a presentation that reviewed the challenges and benefits of participating in the DP. I was impressed by the students and their experiences and decided at that moment to explore the programme. It was one of the best decisions that I have made thus far.

Participation in the DP allowed me to be surrounded by an amazing group of classmates that challenged and supported me. Additionally, I was exposed to a broad range of rigorous topics and content that were pivotal to my success in college. My best friends and biggest supporters are the friends that I made during that time.

Which of your IB teachers inspired you most?

I think it would be difficult to choose just one when I have several that have left lasting impacts. I would put Ms. Morgan Mudron and Ms. Hilary Juretic at the top. Ms. Morgan was our English teacher who in hindsight exposed us to literature that was challenging and also culturally responsive in a manner that I did not have the language to express at the time. I will never forget reading and dissecting *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys and *The Climate of Fear* by Wole Soyinka. Both texts provided layers of cultural commentary that I would reference time after time in my post-secondary career. She provided us with the tools to not only understand but engage with the text in meaningful ways that would lead to lively conversations.

Ms. Juretic was my theory of knowledge (TOK) instructor and it became my favorite class because of her instruction and facilitation. She empowered us to think critically and challenge ideas that we assumed to be true. In creating this space, we were transformed from

compliant learners to embodying what it means to think critically.

How did you reach where you are today?

After graduating from university, I joined Teach for America in Detroit and taught 4th grade. I then moved back to my hometown of Chicago to become a founding 12th grade History instructor at Hansberry College Prep on the South Side of Chicago. As I learned more about the education gap that many of my students faced, I participated in the Leadership for Educational Equity's Summer Policy and Advocacy Fellowship. As a result of this opportunity, I was able to work at the Chicago Public Education Fund, working alongside top stakeholders in Chicago's education space. I still work in education, now serving as a Policy Analyst for the Illinois State Board of Education where I work directly with the implementation of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), IL- Empower and Charter Authorization.