

Hi,

I want to start off and say thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my story. My name is **Kankou Keita**, I came to the United States when I was six years old, with no educational background . I was home schooled by my mother who barely knew any English. After 2 years of being home schooled I was placed in the third grade at Burnt Mills Elementary School. Due to my lack of English, I was behind all the other children. I felt lost and confused; I didn't even know my ABCs. I felt embarrassed to go to school, and because I knew only a few words in English, I had no friends. I felt alienated, like an outsider. It got to the point when I told my parents I didn't want to go to school anymore.

The next year, I was transferred to Broad Acres Elementary School, and was placed in the METS program. Although the METS program was set up like a classroom, the way the teachers taught were completely different from a regular classroom. The environment that the METS teachers provided was warm and comforting, because now I could relate to people who were like me, each of us had a different story, but we all became so close, teaching each other things that the other didn't know. We were a family. Within a few months into the program I started improving. I learned the alphabet and the numbers. But I think the proudest moment was when learned to write my own name.

I spent fourth and parts of fifth grade in the program. Towards the end of fifth grade I had improved so much that my teacher put me in a regular class. This time I wasn't as confused as I was a few years back. The teachers were so amazed by my improvement, that at our fifth grade graduation, I gave a speech on my success and improvement. Both my parents and my teachers, Mr. Scherer and Mrs. Maldonado were very proud of me. So you see, the program gave me the chance to succeed, the chance to open up and be myself, and make friends. But most importantly, and I truly believe this, it made me the person I am. Today, I am currently attending Howard Community College. I am vice president of the African Student Association (was president for a year). I've won tons of academic awards. I've volunteered at two hospitals and one nursing home. I am a private tutor for middle school children. And soon, I plan to attend the nursing program at University of Maryland Baltimore or Towson University. So I hope that my story will inspire the Board of Education to keep the METS program, because without the program I wouldn't be where I am today. With additional support and resources all ESOL students will be able to perform at high levels. We usually come back and serve the community to show our appreciation to those who helped us. Thank you.