



#### 📍 Jacquelyn Davis

*“All children deserve to have a passionate and high-quality principal.”*

Jacquelyn Davis is always starting something. Before starting law school at Georgetown, it was Hands on D.C., a yearly work-athon to fix up public schools and fund college scholarships. The all-volunteer organization is now in its 13th year.

Then, while teaching a law course at a DC high school, Davis and other GU students found that “the kids were so smart but weren’t being provided the skills they needed to get anywhere,” she says. “We said, ‘Something must be done. Let’s start a charter high school!’” They did: Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter School in Southeast, whose curriculum centers on law and government.

Davis turned down a clerkship with a federal district judge to lead the school’s initial marketing, external affairs, and fundraising. She was training 300 volunteers to tutor and mentor its teens when a group called New Leaders for New Schools got in touch. It was considering a DC program. If so, would she be its director?

“My first response,” she says, “was no way: ‘I’m tired—I want a normal job.’”

Instead, New Leaders became her normal job. Early in 2003, Davis selected ten top teachers and administrators to undergo NLNS training, an intense year that immerses would-be principals in best practices, coursework, and leadership development. The program coaches and mentors them for another three years on the job.

“We want schools where 90 percent of students are at grade-level proficiency,” Davis says. Some District schools now are at 7 percent: “We have a long way to go.”

NLNS’s work is helping to turn the tide. One of its 36 new principals had the biggest improvement in DC school attendance last year, and NLNS principals on average already outperform others in student test scores.

“Jac is amazing. She models problem-solving and takes time to help me be strategic, business-minded, and efficient,” says Roslyn Rice, principal of H.D. Cooke Elementary. “She gives great advice and doesn’t seem to sleep.”

Davis misses teaching, especially those “aha moments,” but says “here I can multiply those moments across the city.” DC children benefit from that for life.

