



**In the game of fatherhood, you’ve got to show up to play.**

So, on a recent Saturday, while the NBA remained dark, the lights went up at the basketball gym at JHS 45 in East Harlem, where dads and their kids came to play basketball and to talk about things like faith, integrity and hard work. It was the beginning of “Father Knows Best,” a 7-week curriculum based on the speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King. The FISSL (Faith, Integrity, Sacrifice, Leadership and Legacy) curriculum was developed by former Knicks star Allan Houston and his Legacy Foundation. Over the next two months, partners, including DYCD’s Harlem RBI, the Midtown Community Court’s Dads United for Parenting and El Faro Beacon Community Center will be fostering stronger bonds between fathers and their children.

Houston has been applying a full court press advocating for responsible fatherhood and mentoring through his work in communities around the country, and also at home. As a father of six, he takes being a dad very seriously. So when he arrived at JHS 45, the dads and their kids were impressed with Houston’s laid-back attitude, but they were wowed by his personal commitment to the cause.

“As a father, he seems to be very good with his children,” says participant Shaun Artis, who came from the Bronx with his 11-year-old stepson, Dawon. Houston had one of his daughters with him, and they had a very strong connection, according to Artis, who was also interested to hear that Houston says he learned much of his drive from his own father, who raised him to respect hard work.

Houston spoke to the attendees about integrity. If you’re going to do something, he said, you should do it the right way. As an example, Houston demonstrated the proper form for a free throw and then took some shots. Swish. Swish. Swish. For our young people, this was a great way to demonstrate the link between integrity and success.

That’s what the partners behind this program are good at; using basketball and other activities to bring people—dads, mentors and children and mentees—to the conversation. This wasn’t so much a basketball clinic as it was about learning about life. (Although 35-year-old Artis jokes that he got some tips from Houston that will allow him to dominate on the court from now on; so be warned!)

This first leg of “Father knows Best” in New York City is part of a broader effort called Five Borough Tour. The launch event took place on Saturday, October 15th at the Armory Track and Field Center. Next up: Brooklyn in January. For the next six weeks in East Harlem, Artis plans to come with Dawon. He says he’s already seeing an impact, bonding with his stepson who is listening to him more.

“When they think about dribbling, they are thinking about listening now,” Artis says of the kids in the workshop. Not that any of this is easy, and Artis knows he’s got his own work cut out for him. He has three children of his own, with whom he doesn’t have the same connection as with his stepson.

“I only regret I cannot do this with my own son,” Artis says. “But it’s not a hard regret because I am now working toward making that a possibility.”

Now, that’s a dad with his eye on the ball.