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Building the Next Dalton

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By Andrew Marks

...With \$40 million in start-up capital and a first-year operating budget of \$7 million, Claremont could afford to devote significant resources to staffing. On the other end of the spectrum, Harlem Academy's start-up costs were just \$500,000.

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—Vincent Dotoli

Founded by Vincent Dotoli, former middle-school administrator at Buckingham Browne and Nichols School in Cambridge, the Harlem Academy seeks to provide the academic rigor and small class size of a private school at an affordable tuition. "I want to prepare these kids to succeed at the top secondary schools and universities. Maybe that's a given at Collegiate, but for an inner-city kid of modest means, that's significant," says Dotoli, who has a waiting list of 60 students and plans to reach an enrollment of 130 K-through-eighth-graders in five years.

Harlem Academy uses the sliding-scale tuition model developed by the Manhattan Country School, charging between \$500 to \$12,000 per year, depending on a family's income level. The goal is to have tuition income account for half the school's operating budget. (Currently,

tuition covers 10 percent of the budget.) Eventually, Dotoli thinks Harlem Academy's high academic quality will attract students able to afford full private-school tuition. "The ideal mix would be a diversity of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds," he says.

In the meantime, Harlem Academy is trying to keep staffing costs down by blurring the line between administration and teachers. "We only have one employee who does not have a regular role with students," notes Dotoli, who often answers the main phone line at the school. That contrasts with a nonteaching staff of 25 at Claremont. Dotoli's school spent \$19,000 per student last year. "But just by growing from 26 students in the first year to 44 students in September, we have been able to put together a budget at about \$16,000 per student for this year," he says. He'd like to see economies of scale continue to bring that number down. But within the next two years, Harlem Academy will outgrow its current space, and the cost of a new facility will eat up those savings, and then some.



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OPERATING BUDGET

Claremont School, 110 students	\$7 million
Tuition	\$26,500
IDEAL School, 17 students	\$1.5 million
Tuition	\$25,560
Harlem Academy, 44 students	\$700,000
Tuition	\$500–\$12,000

LIBRARY

(An unnamed school's) 9,000-book library	\$500,000
(Harlem Academy's) 2,000-book library	\$20,000

RENOVATION

Claremont School's renovation bill	\$25 million
Cost of building a pool in Claremont's basement	\$800,000
Harlem Academy's renovation bill	\$180,000