

PEOPLE

The 3-minute interview: Jennie Niles

By: [LEAH FABEL](#)
Examiner Staff Writer
August 19, 2009

People might've scoffed a decade ago at the idea of a high-performing public school in D.C. But educators such as Niles are turning that reputation around. She's the founder and head of school at E.L. Haynes Public Charter in Petworth, where 80 percent of students passed the city's math exam this year, and 66 percent passed the reading exam.

What makes E.L. Haynes successful?

We have high expectations for every single child, and we work really hard to use data in a variety of forms to understand what kids know and what they don't know, and then tailor our instruction so we're teaching them what they do need to know. And that allows them to learn really quickly. We also have a year-round calendar with eight weeks of additional programming and optional before- and after-school programs. We have an optional 1,000 hours.



Jennie Niles is the founder and head of E.L. Haynes Public Charter school in D.C.

What have been your greatest challenges?

Finding facility space is always the greatest challenge.

And what have been the moments of greatest pride?

Scores are these abstract numbers, but when I think that this year our sixth-graders scored 93 percent proficiency in math, but four years ago they scored 30 percent proficiency — and it's the same kids. So their lives have transformed. They used to sit in a room where one in three of them were proficient in math, and now virtually everyone in the class is. That changes their demeanor, and their self-confidence — and it's for a whole group.

What's your best advice for young professionals living in the city wondering where to send their kids to school, or if they should move to the suburbs?

There are really wonderful schools, both in D.C. Public Schools and among the charters. And I think that every year we're getting better and better. Visit the school, see what they're about, meet the principal and see what trajectory the school is on. — Leah Fabel