

Media Contact:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Deborah O. Farmer

Email: deboraho@brownfarmermedia.com

Phone: (773) 310-7701

**URBAN SCHOOLS ARE LACKING KEY COMPONENTS FOR SUCCESS,
EDUCATION LEADER DAMIEN HOWARD HAS THE INNOVATION TO SOLVE THAT**

CHICAGO, IL (Aug. 2, 2019) — Former special education teacher, Together Chicago's Director of Education Initiatives and Chief Servant Leader of Clever Characters, Damien Howard is no stranger to the harsh realities that plague inner-city, urban schools. The same schools that serve majority low-income, minority populations.

For 13 years, Howard taught special education in urban settings, primarily for CPS. But after seeing firsthand the disparities between urban and suburban education, combined with the dissatisfaction and lack of innovation within his peers, Howard had an awakening.

"As educators, we have the ability to be servants...We have the opportunity to change lives...When I look at my colleagues, I don't see fulfillment...These are the people who are responsible for educating our youth. Then we ask, why are our students underachieving?" Howard states.

Howard realized his skills and passion for education could expand beyond the classroom. July of 2017 Howard launched his business, [Clever Characters](#), with four Chicago high school students. Clever Characters is a national urban education reform service company, working with schools in areas of character development and mentorship.

In just 2 years Clever Characters has made major impact and improvements to the schools it has worked with. Schools that utilized Clever Characters' services saw:

- 12% increase in GPAs
- 67% decrease in failing grades
- Increased capabilities in social emotional learning (SEL)
- Overall improved behaviors

When it came to building Clever Characters as an organization, Howard needed to identify the problem areas of the current education system. How is it so broken? Why is it so broken? Howard narrowed it down to 3 key areas of "brokenness":



- Lack of innovation
- Unfulfilled teachers
- Broken School Culture

When teachers are overwhelmed with standardized test preparation, Howard claims, structured SEL skill development suffers or is non-existent. When teachers are unfulfilled, that dissatisfaction bleeds directly into the classroom environment and negatively impacts students. When teachers and students alike can't identify what their values are, they will struggle to imagine innovative practices to empower their work.

Howard wants his leadership efforts to empower those around him, to create an organization of leaders alike. He says his title, "Chief Servant Leader" is intentional—he does not want to be the CEO or the boss, but rather a chief, a servant, a leader. "So many people articulate grandiose aspirations for themselves and visions that are magnificent. I don't want to be one of those people who's just about self service." Howard says.

Howard is not alone in this fight, he turns to fellow leaders, motivational speakers and books for inspiration. Naming motivational speaker Jim Rohn, Pastor T.D. Jakes, radio host David Ramsey, and mentor Mark Chassman as some of his inspirations, Howard is constantly working on his own character development. Howard believes leaders need to be consistent. "With consistency and repetition, things can stick."

The timeline for the education reform turnaround is unclear. But either way, in his final thoughts, Howard quotes Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there *is* such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action."

