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# First-graders to recite 'Dream' speech for Obama

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT    FEBRUARY 28, 2012

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A group of about 20 first-graders from the Orchard Gardens K-8 pilot school in Roxbury plan to visit the White House today to perform Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech for President Obama, city school officials said yesterday.

The trip to 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. was arranged by Governor Deval Patrick after he was impressed by the students when they recently recited the speech for him at the



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**President Barack Obama speaks in the State Dining Room of the White House.**

State House, according to a spokeswoman for Patrick.

The governor is also impressed with gains in student performance at Orchard Gardens in recent months as it tries to improve from consistently being ranked as one of the lowest-performing schools in the state.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for these kids,” Patrick said in a statement. “I am so proud of the educators and students at Orchard Gardens for the progress they have made academically.

“I know President Obama will be blown away when he gets to see their talent and enthusiasm on full display at the White House,” the governor said.

The students’ teacher, Darlene White-Dottin, and their principal, Andrew Bott, will accompany them on the visit.

Since it opened in a new building in 2003, the school has struggled. Five different principals tried to turn around the school’s fortunes during its first seven years. The school’s teacher turnover rate exceeded 50 percent, and its educators were primarily new to teaching, officials said.

But after being designated as one of a dozen turnaround schools in Boston at the start of the 2010 school year, the school has seen significant improvement.

There has been heavy recruitment for experienced teachers to replace about 80 percent of its previous staff, instructional changes, and an expanded academic day at a

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*‘I am so proud of the educators and students at Orchard Gardens for the progress they have made academically.’*

school where its leaders say more than one-quarter of its approximately 760 students are learning to speak English and the same percentage require personalized education plans to meet special needs.

In addition to a more rigorous curriculum, students have more offerings in the arts and for physical activity, officials said. Middle school students now stay at the school until 5:15 p.m. to take advantage of extra learning time. There is more parental involvement and numerous beneficial partnerships with local organizations.

*Matt Rocheleau can be reached at [mjrochele@gmail.com](mailto:mjrochele@gmail.com).*

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