



Dr. Sarah Allison speaks, and there is an instant soothing emotion that overcomes you. Perhaps it is her Southern twang; indeed, it is as charming as it gets. Much more than a just a kind woman, she has changed Miami-Dade County's Private School universe through her small class approach, paired with Montessori ways and a whole lot of love.

Sarah, the Director of Allison Academy prefers Director as a title. Principal seems to intimidate parents and students, and that is not her way. This legendary woman who has changed the lives of her students opened the doors of what would become her very own institution in 1983 after being pressured by the parents of students that she was teaching. That school now bears her name. Allison Academy just sounded right and everything simply put – ended up falling into place. Her mantra and success story is based around her philosophy: “We give respect, we get respect.” And, is also likely why she has become such a massive winner in her world.

She believes that learning must feel good, similarly to making money, and finds that the optimal way to change is through improving one's self-esteem. Providing the tools and a solid foundation paired with guiding students to succeed through their own efforts, is the key to making individuals feel great within.

As she relaxes with her family in Daytona Beach, giving her grandson driving lessons, Dr. Allison gave us a few moments of her time to discuss what she considers to be her favorite subject: education.

G.B.L: What differentiates your private school from others in Dade-County?

S.A: We have developed methods for teaching reading and math, as well as other subjects, which are very individualized. Students are placed strategically based upon achievement levels, where they are individually monitored. *There are an average of 20 students per graduating class – we believe in small classes, a personalized approach and individual attention. Most of my teachers have been with me for more than ten years and I only have to replace a teacher when someone retires. We are like a family. They all get to know one another and their students well. We all care about our students and their successes.*

G.B.L: Please give us an understanding of how you ended up with your very own school?

S.A: In the early days of my career, I used to have a reading, math and learning center to tutor students, while I was a professor at Nova University. My first students named the school Allison Academy, but I just did not feel comfortable with this name, because it was not about me. But, after three years I adopted the name! Being humble, I found it so egotistical, but everyone thought it was preppy and appropriate, so it became official!

G.B.L: So, when did you transition from learning center to school?

S.A: It was 1983, when I registered with the state to take the first students full time. There were three sets of parents who pushed me to start the school to take their children for the year, so I said

if they would agree to go with my hours! I figured why not, thinking it would only be a short time. So, I took the three students and registered with the state. It was a process, we had to work with the fire department, City, and architects, and the school quickly grew to the capacity of 15 students!

G.B.L: So, you are located on 164th Street?

S.A: I have two buildings, one large and one small that are adjacent. Years back, I was able to buy the building, which had been a social security property. The architect and I came up with a master plan in accordance with state laws. That was in 1994. But, I feel like I own the street! I started on 164th Street in 1970 with my reading center in a store front. Then moved to another larger location on 164th then finally ended up between the first locations. I have been up, down, and around so I am a fixture on 164th!

G.B.L: Was education always your dream when you were young?

S.A: It was in my DNA! My mom taught for 43 years, my aunt was a university professor, my grandfather a superintendent of education, and I had several relatives like my sister who was formally a teacher and media specialist and administrator in Georgia. Several of my cousins are educators too! I am in love with my job for many reasons: there have never been two days alike; never a dull day; students with their imaginations always present new challenges; the rewards of being a part of a student's life and development. It is a growth experience





to be involved with new people. It has been my passion, but it happened naturally.

G.B.L: So, where are you from?

S.A: I am originally from Alabama but have been in Florida for most of my life. I studied elementary education at Auburn, and then I moved to go to graduate school at FSU in Tallahassee, where I got my masters in reading, special education and psychology. Then I moved from North Florida to South Florida in 1966, where I attended Nova University to get my doctorate in early and middle childhood education with a special emphasis in learning disabilities and administration. I also taught at Nova for 15 years in the graduate school.

G.B.L: Do your students wear uniforms?

S.A: They wear uniforms and have the choice of three colors regarding the shirts, all which bear the school logo. Students can choose from forest green, burgundy or white. They can wear khaki shorts, pants or skirts.

G.B.L: What grades do you educate and how do people find out about your school?

S.A: Our program serves 6th to 12th grades and most of the students are through referrals. Because I have been in NMB so long, I

have students of students at this stage! When I started the learning center it was 1970, it has become multi-generational. We have referrals from graduates, families, professionals, and the community.

G.B.L: Obviously, Covid-19 affected all schools. How did you all manage?

S.A: We immediately transitioned to live-online classes, where the teachers met with their students. They signed in on the WebEx platform daily so the students could see and communicate with their teachers, and teachers could see them. There was a lot of communication, attendance was taken, and grades were given. We kept the program of instruction consistent with the same learning patterns the students had when on campus. Most of the students would have private conversations or one-on-one sessions with the teachers as needed, so it worked very well for us. We were able to do this because on average there are only 12-18 students in each class, total over 100 students!

G.B.L: Do you have a cafeteria for the kids to eat lunch at school?

S.A: We encourage students to bring a nutritious lunch from home, but we do have meals delivered for those who do not bring their lunch. We have refrigerators, toaster ovens, microwaves, and even have a kosher microwave! We adapt to the needs of students. It is what we are known to do best!



G.B.L: Are you planning on re-opening in the fall?

S.A: We are open for summer school! Some of our students need that program to be brought up to their potential, others want to get ahead with their required credits. We are implementing procedures to keep them safe by wearing masks, placing desks and tables six feet apart, taking temperatures, and practicing social distancing when students return to school. There are all sorts of new rules and regulations like cleaning every hour but it's worth all efforts to assist the students and keep everyone safe.

G.B.L: What is the application process for someone interested in applying?

S.A: For example, should you want to attend the 9th grade, when the student applies, they fill out and submit their application with their academic records from 8th grade along with their standardized test scores. The previous year tells us a lot, and then we call the parents and students in for an interview. One requirement for acceptance is parental support, so parents are interviewed as well as the students. Raising a child is a group effort. Because

of outside influences we believe in working together with the parents. We just need their support, we do not expect them to teach. We want the right attitude which we mold, too. Our teachers do not yell, nor scream, we believe in teaching students with respect, love, and concern in a consistent, organized, disciplined environment. That is our key.

A vital factor in Allison Academy's success is our staff. Our staff is multi-talented, the science teacher teaches basketball!

The Social Science teacher is also the music teacher and band director, and the psychology teacher is also the dean. The chorus director is a middle school teacher, and the English specialist is the Registrar. All teachers wear many hats!

On behalf of GB Living, thank you to passionate women like Sarah Allison who change the world – one young mind at a time!

For more information, please visit: allisonacademy.com