

STUDY
SKILLS

Tony DelaRosa, Ed.M.'18

Moving to a new school in a new state isn't easy for most kids, and it's even harder when it happens in middle school. It certainly wasn't easy for **TONY DELAROSA, ED.M.'18**, after his family relocated when he was in seventh grade from Camp Pendleton in California, where his mother was stationed, to Ohio. But there was a silver lining: The experience later helped him realize how much he wanted to work with young people, especially middle-schoolers.

"I identify with crisis at that age and understand that kids need mentors," he says. "They're craving people who share their passion, and also people who share their skin."

DelaRosa ended up teaching at a middle school in Indianapolis, where he started Indy Pulse, an afterschool spoken word poetry program that has reached about 500 students at six schools. It's become a much-needed safe space for kids to talk about who they are, as well as uncertainty and trauma in their lives. "Poetry," he says, "roots to identity."

Now living in Boston, DelaRosa runs an offshoot of the program called Boston Pulse. Since 2015, young people from Boston schools have performed spoken word at community mic events, for Boston's superintendent and city council, and a couple of times at the Ed School's Alumni of Color Conference, where DelaRosa served this year as tri-chair.

Armed with a \$10,000 4.0 Tiny Fellowship from the 4.0 Schools organization, DelaRosa now wants to bring Boston Pulse to scale.

"Indy Pulse has grown and is throughout the city, but Boston Pulse isn't. We want it to be in all middle schools across Boston," he says, noting that it's formally in two schools and the Pulse curriculum is used in five total.

He also wants to continue mentoring students to take ownership of their own learning, which is why at Pulse meetings, he completely flips the typical classroom.

"I don't do a lot of the speaking; my youth lead it," he says. "If I'm doing the speaking, I'm not helping them."

Instead, students start each session with roses and thorns — the positives and negatives of what's going on in their lives.

"Sometimes the whole session is just roses and thorns, and we do spoken word another time," he says. "Sometimes the students just need to unpack the day." **LH**

LEARN HOW DELAROSA TEACHES SPOKEN WORD TO STUDENTS AT: GSE.HARVARD.EDU/UK

