

November 28 - December 4, 2007

A Hidden Treasure Revealed in North Lawndale: KIPP Ascend Charter School



Students at KIPP enjoy Career Day



(L-r) Ann Ziegler - Sara Lee CFO, Dana Murphy - Brookfield Zoo, Pam Prosch - marketing, Billie Drakeford - DePaul Steans Center, Jason Stevens - Morningstar, Stacy McAuliffe - Boston Consulting Group, Marlon Smith - Goldman Sachs VP

By Julius Goodman

On Friday November 16, over 25 career professionals assembled for Career Day at KIPP Ascend Charter School, located at 715 S Kildare, on the Sumner campus. Destiny White, a seventh grader said, "I am in an 8th grade math class. When I first came to this school, I did not like math and now math is my favorite subject! Today is career day and all our students are meeting different people in different careers."

Careers represented included an impressive mix of professionals. Rev. Phil Hilliard, from the team that installed the computer system used to build the B2 Stealth Bomber, was in attendance. Sateria Venable, the first African- American female graduate of Carnegie Mellon's School of Architecture, and Ann Ziegler, CFO for Sara Lee Food and Beverage were also in attendance.

Fifth- through eighth-grade students spent the week learning about how to dress professionally, ask appropriate questions, and give firm handshakes. Career Day was just one of many "extras" KIPP Ascend students enjoy on a weekly basis.

Carol Hill, director of development believes that the school is special. "The name KIPP stands for Knowledge Is Power Program. We believe that children can increase their life options through the power of knowledge. KIPP Ascend is a college-prep middle school. Most children come to this school reading two to three grade levels behind. In June 2007, 100 percent of our first graduating class of 8th graders went to top high schools in the city, and top boarding schools in the region," said Hill.

Founded in 2003, KIPP Ascend Charter School is a free, public, open-enrollment, college-prep middle school serving 320 students in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood.

100 percent of KIPP Ascend's students are African-American or Hispanic, and 90 percent qualify for the federal free and reduced-priced meals program. Students spend 70 percent more time in class than traditional public schools, and are subject to high expectations with a relentless focus on results. KIPP Ascend is proving that the achievement gap can be closed for traditionally underserved students.

Out of the 463 schools in Chicago with 8th graders that took the ISAT exam, KIPP Ascend was one of eleven schools ranking first, each reaching 100 percent achievement in math.

Eight of these schools have selective entrance requirements, while KIPP Ascend's doors are open to any student. In addition, KIPP's composite scores for reading, math, and science were the highest in the 24th Ward and in North Lawndale.

Though most entered KIPP Ascend with scores below grade level, all 51 graduates are now attending college-prep high schools such as Lake Forest Academy, Noble Charter, Lind Bloom, The Latin School, and North Lawndale College Prep.

KIPP Ascend is one of 57 KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) schools serving over 14,000 students nationwide. While fewer than 20 percent of low-income students typically attend college nationally, KIPP's national college matriculation rate stands at nearly 80 percent for students who complete the eighth grade at KIPP.

In addition, KIPP alumni have earned over \$12 million in college scholarships. KIPP's success in raising student achievement in low-income neighborhoods has been heralded by national media moguls such as the Oprah Winfrey Show, 60 Minutes, The New York Times, Washington Post and ABC World News Tonight.

KIPP Ascend gives hope to students traditionally "left behind," by putting in the time, effort, and commitment to help them succeed.



School Leader Jim O'Connor said, "It's exciting to watch the trajectory of our students' lives change, as they gain access to the skills needed to qualify for the best educational institutions this nation has to offer." How does KIPP do it? "There are no short cuts, no excuses," said Hill. "Be the constant, not the variable. All children will learn."

We are a team and a family and above all, work hard and be nice. That's the KIPP code and it works!" For more information on KIPP Ascend, visit: www.kippascend.org or contact Carol Hill, Director of Development (773) 533-1770.

Julius Goodman is poet and motivational speaker. He is also a graduate from National Louis University with a degree in Behavioral Science.