



# W E D N E S D A Y

# JOURNAL

*of Oak Park and River Forest*

Tuesday, September 11, 2007

## The actual proves the possible

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In Oak Park the achievement gap is significant. On the most recent Prairie State Achievement Exam, 81 percent of white students scored at grade level in reading and 86 percent scored at grade level in math. For African-American students, those numbers are 33 percent and 32 percent respectively. To close this large achievement gap, something dramatic must happen. While hiring a more diverse staff will help, we need to make larger changes. I know of a school that has eliminated the achievement gap, and I propose that Oak Park adopts what is working at this school.

The school is a non-selective middle school in Chicago's Austin neighborhood where 100 percent of the students are African-American or Latino, and 90 percent qualify for free/reduced lunch.

The first graduating class, which scored in the top 1 percent of 401 non-selective CPS schools on the 2007 ISAT, had 97 percent of students at or above grade level on the ISAT. This same class of 51 students earned over \$1.1 million in scholarships to top high schools like Fenwick, Lake Forest Academy, Francis Parker, and Latin.

The only requirement for the school: finish the fourth grade. There is no test for admission.

So how does this school do it?

- Students are in school over 70 percent more than CPS students (9.5 hours each day, every other Saturday, three weeks in the summer).
- Students complete two hours of homework each night.
- Parents commit to signing completed homework each night.

If Oak Park is serious about eliminating the achievement gap, they will implement these strategies for students in need.

The school is called KIPP Ascend Charter School (715 S. Kildare) and part of a network of 57 KIPP schools across the country that are eliminating the achievement gap. Find out more about volunteering at our school at [www.kippascend.org](http://www.kippascend.org)

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