

KIPP: An Innovative Network of College-Preparatory Charter Schools

by Mark Katz, PhD

THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN who once believed college was beyond their reach now know it's well within their grasp, thanks to the Knowledge Is Power Program, or KIPP. And there's research to prove it: Studies show that in inner-city neighborhoods, where the majority of children from low-income families don't go on to college, those enrolled in KIPP schools do attend college.*

The brainchild of two Teach for America alumni, KIPP began in 1994 in Houston, Texas. Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin were teaching fifth grade at an inner-city elementary school where students were performing well behind peers attending schools in more affluent communities. To help remedy matters, Feinberg and Levin created a classroom in which children attended school nine hours a day, two Saturdays a month, and during the summer. Reading and math scores improved dramatically.

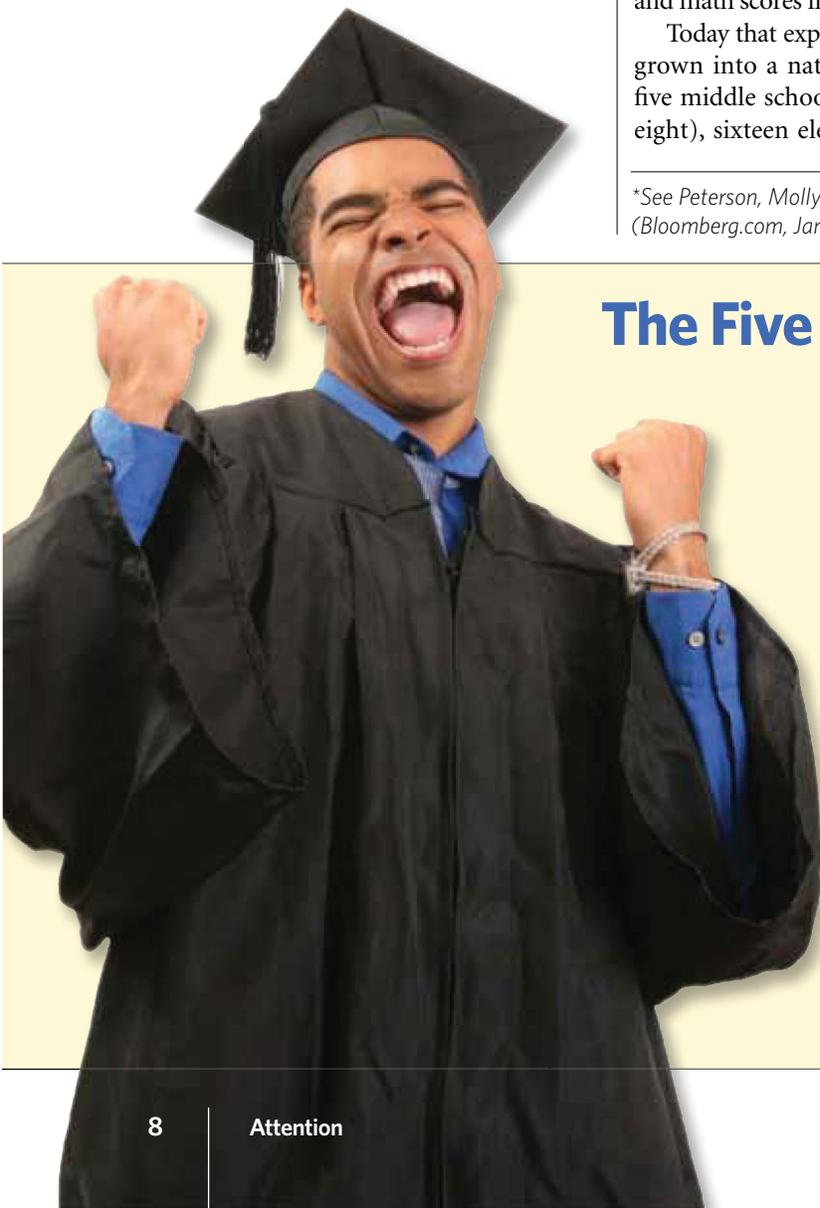
Today that experimental classroom has grown into a national network of fifty-five middle schools (grades five through eight), sixteen elementary schools (pre-

kindergarten through grade four) and eleven high schools (grades nine through twelve) in nineteen states and the District of Columbia. KIPP schools now serve more than 21,000 students.

All KIPP schools are guided by five core operating principles, referred to as the Five Pillars: High Expectations, Choice and Commitment, More Time, Power to Lead, and Focus on Results.

"We do whatever it takes to ensure that all of our students are succeeding," says Elena Luna, principal of KIPP Adelante Preparatory Academy in San Diego. "We believe in them. We know if they work hard they can succeed. All KIPP teachers

*See Peterson, Molly. Ivy Leaguers' Class for Poor Becomes 'Platinum' Charter Schools (*Bloomberg.com*, January 20, 2010) and the 2008 KIPP Report Card, available at kipp.org.



The Five Pillars Guiding KIPP Schools

High Expectations

The bar is set high for KIPP students, academically and behaviorally, with no excuses, regardless of background or previous life experiences. KIPP aims to close the achievement gap for underprivileged youth by establishing rigorous academic standards and a culture of high expectations. KIPP tells all students that college is in their future.

Choice and Commitment

KIPP schools create a strong partnership between parents, students, and teachers. All are asked to sign a learning pledge, also known as the "Commitment to Excellence," which requires that each agree to do whatever it takes to help students learn.

More Time

Believing there are no shortcuts to success in competitive high schools and colleges, the days are long and the work is hard. KIPP students typically start school at 7:30 AM and finish at 5:00 PM, attend occasional Saturday classes, and go to school several weeks during the summer. The additional time allows for more focus on core classes (math and reading) in order for students to make greater strides academically.



feel the same way. Eventually, our students learn to believe this too.”

It’s no surprise that Elena is familiar with the work of Carol Dweck, who recently spoke at a KIPP conference of principals and other staff. Indeed, KIPP is a perfect illustration of Dweck’s findings regarding the benefits derived when students, teachers, and parents subscribe to a malleable, as opposed to a fixed, view

of abilities. Those with fixed views, says Dweck, believe our abilities are what they are, and there’s not much we can do about it. Those with malleable views believe we get smarter when we try as hard as we can, don’t give up, and treat our mistakes as learning experiences.

Committing to excellence

Parents, teachers, and students all sign “Commitment to Excellence”

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Power to Lead

KIPP principals are carefully selected and extensively trained before assuming leadership. As leaders, they have the freedom and flexibility to manage resources in ways that maximize learning.

Focus on Results

Academic progress is continuously measured to ensure that all students are progressing. Those who are not making progress receive extra help.

