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KIPP helping students get to college

By Thomas A. Pritchard

The ability of our nation's public education system to produce well-educated employees has been a growing concern for business leaders across the country. The national statistics are grim: 9-year-olds in low-income communities are already three grade levels behind their peers in high-income communities; 50 percent of these students will not graduate from high school by the time they are 18 years old; and only 20 percent will make it to college.

Metro Atlanta students face similar challenges.

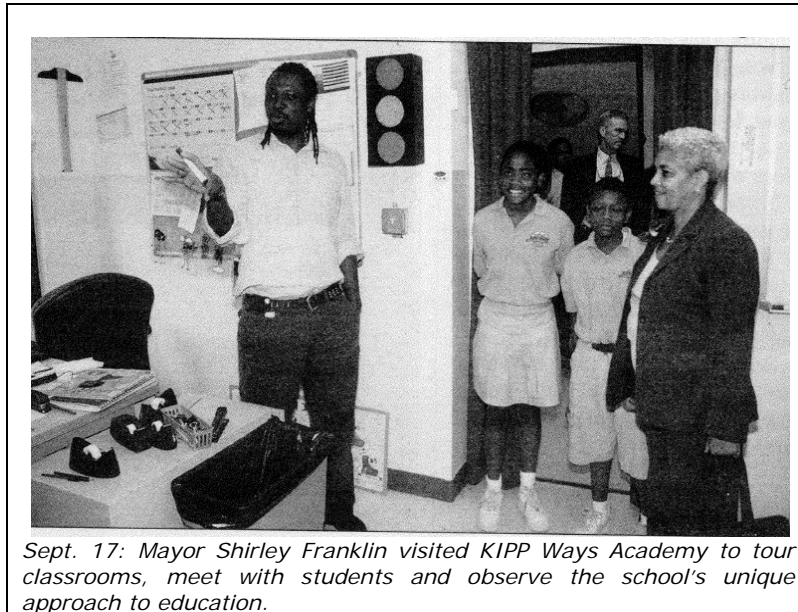
KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) is helping to address this problem nationally and in Atlanta. KIPP is a not-for-profit network of 66 free, college preparatory public schools in 19 states that serve 16,000 mostly low-income and minority students. KIPP's matriculation rate is 80 percent for graduates who have reached college age— four times the national average.

Here in Atlanta we have two KIPP middle schools, KIPP WAYS Academy in the Atlanta Public Schools District (APS) and KIPP South Fulton Academy in Fulton County, which were both started in 2003. These open-enrollment, public schools teach more than 600 students who are traditionally underserved (99 percent are African-American and 75 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price meals). Both KIPP schools were recently named among the top "No Excuses Schools" by the Georgia Public Policy Foundation for the academic achievements of their students, and KIPP WAYS was named the No. 1 school in the state of Georgia in this category.

What's the secret to this success?

While each KIPP school is run locally, three basic principles apply to all: a shared commitment between each student, parent and teacher that all children will (not can) learn; high-quality, well-trained teachers and school leaders; and a "no excuses" approach to education that emphasizes hard work, long hours and high expectations. KIPP students attend school from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., along with Saturday classes and an extra three weeks in the summer.

Not only is the KIPP model successful, it is replicable in scale. Working in close collaboration with local school districts, our goal is to open more KIPP schools in the metro Atlanta area over the coming years. A third middle school, KIPP STRIVE Academy in APS, is scheduled to open in 2009. KIPP is partnering with local school districts to show what is possible by transforming public education in Atlanta for the city's most deserving



Sept. 17: Mayor Shirley Franklin visited KIPP Ways Academy to tour classrooms, meet with students and observe the school's unique approach to education.

students.

To accomplish this worthy mission, we need the continued and growing support of Atlanta's civic, business and philanthropic leaders. Together, we can help thousands of low-income Atlanta students achieve their goal of graduating from college, and help our city build a workforce that can compete on a global scale for many years to come.

Pritchard is the founder and president of E2 Capital Group, a private investment firm, and is the chairman of the KIPP Metro Atlanta board of directors.