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KIPP launching its first elementary school

By Maria Saporta

KIPP Metro Atlanta — a charter school nonprofit organization that has been focused on middle school and high school students — will launch its first elementary school in July.

A \$10 million capital campaign for the new KIPP Strive Primary school already has raised \$8.5 million. It has received a \$5 million challenge grant from the Kendeda Fund, and it recently received a \$3 million donation from the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation — which is part of the Robert W. Woodruff family of foundations.

But in order to secure all of the Kendeda challenge grant, KIPP will need to raise another \$1.5 million.

“We are just overwhelmed by the support we have received from both the Kendeda Fund and the Whitehead Foundation,” said David Jernigan, executive director of KIPP Metro Atlanta. “They are making a long-term investment in our students.”

KIPP Metro Atlanta already operates three middle schools and one high school within the Atlanta Public Schools system. (It also operates a fourth middle school—KIPP South Fulton Academy, which is outside the APS district.)

Jernigan explained that KIPP (which stands for Knowledge is Power Program) had begun nationally as a middle school program serving students from fifth to eighth grades.

“We came to the realization that waiting to fifth grade was a little too late in closing the achievement gap,” Jernigan said.

By starting charter elementary schools, KIPP will offer students the opportunity to get a “seamless” education from kindergarten to high school graduation. In Atlanta, KIPP serves a population that is more than 90 percent African-American and 75 percent qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program.

“Our ultimate goal is college matriculation,” Jernigan said. “We will start in kindergarten working towards that vision. We set that expectation.”

The KIPP Strive Primary school will begin with 100 kindergarten students in July, and it will add a grade each year—ultimately serving 500 students. In July 2013, KIPP will open its second elementary school—KIPP Vision Primary; and plans are under way to add a third elementary school once its charter has been approved.

Currently, KIPP Metro Atlanta serves about 1,200 students. The goal is for it to operate eight schools serving 3,300 students by 2018.

The \$10 million capital campaign will go toward constructing a new building on the same campus of the KIPP Strive Academy. It will include 20 classrooms, a media center, a music room, an art room, a computer lab, a science lab, a cafeteria and a kitchen.