

(From left) Rayvaughn Hines, Jamaal Minor, Tim King, Cameron Barnes, Marlon Marshall and Ahmad Wright.



MR. KING'S CLASS GOES TO COLLEGE

In 2006, only a few freshmen at Tim King's Chicago school read at grade level. Now all are off to four-year universities.

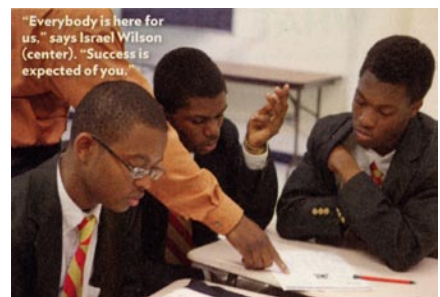
As spring unfolded, a change took place inside Urban Prep, a Chicago charter high school. Each time a senior got into college, he tacked his acceptance letter to a bulletin board and traded his standard-issue red tie for one with gold stripes. By March the halls were lined with university letterheads and filled with young men in striped neckwear. When Rayvaughn Hines learned he could attend the Univer-

sity of Virginia on a full scholarship, "I was jumping up and down," says Hines, 18. At the assembly where he and a few others were awarded their striped ties, the school's stern founder, Tim King, says he was trying to hold it together, "but inside I was weeping with joy."

In 2006 when King opened Chicago's Urban Prep Charter Academy, the first all-boys charter high school in the nation, only 4 percent of the inaugural freshman class could read at grade level. Today, all 107 seniors are on their way to college. Located in one of the city's most violence-plagued neighborhoods, where just recently five young men were shot, Urban Prep serves "a high-need, high-crime area," says King, 42. But

his students' biggest hurdle, says King, may be low expectations. "The data on young black males is dire: In Chicago there is a 60 percent drop-out rate. Only 1 in 40 will graduate from college."

"Urban Prep proves that poverty is not destiny," says U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who is



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familiar with the school, which will soon be replicated at two other Urban Prep charter schools in Chicago.

King's program—with its tough academics, longer school day, formal uniforms, parent participation and intense focus on college—is innovative, but he and the faculty give due credit to the boys, who attend despite often unimaginable obstacles. "Students have been robbed at gunpoint and come to school," says English teacher Eric D. Smith. "They've been homeless or at a parent's funeral, and the next week they're at school."

Back when he was president at a Catholic school, King was inspired by an initiative from Mayor Richard Daley that called for "education entrepreneurs." With an original budget of \$2 million (\$700,000 raised from donors), he hoped to make free the kind of education for which most families have to pay. "My parents were able to send me to private schools," says King, the son of a construction company owner and a college vice-president, "I've always thought it unfair that only people with money can choose what schools they send their children to."

For Yolanda Wright, raising three teenage boys after her ex went to prison, Urban Prep "provides young black men with an education,

"This shouldn't be the exception; this should be the rule"

- Tim King



something no one can take away from them." Her son Ahmad, who will attend Purdue next year, adds proudly that "the rigor of the curriculum sets us apart."

So do their matching wrist-watches a gift to all incoming freshmen to make sure they are on time to class and crested blazers. "I don't like what we have to wear. I'd rather be in jeans," says Israel Wilson (accepted at Morehouse College). But the uniform "symbolizes that we're here on business."

The school's work isn't done yet: All Urban Prep grads will have a faculty member to check in with next year. "Getting into college is nice," says King, "But we won't be finished until they graduate from college."

For more information on Urban Prep, contact:

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WE BELIEVE.

WHAT THEY DO RIGHT

"I wanted a college-prep education in a public school," says King. Here's how, in part, he achieved it:

- The school day lasts eight hours, and students take double periods of English, plus science, math, social studies and foreign language.
- Pupils recite a creed, which includes the phrase "I Am College Bound," each morning. "If you say

that every day for four years, you begin to think, 'Okay, I'm college bound,'" says senior Israel Wilson. (Right: their acceptance letters.)

- Teachers are available to talk by cell phone day and night.
- "We call students 'Mr. Smith' or 'Mr. Johnson,'" says King. "It's a sign of respect that creates the idea they are special, they are going somewhere."

