



Urban Prep named 'Person of the Week'

Friday, March 12, 2010



Urban Prep founder and CEO Tim King stands with members of the senior class.

Entire Graduating Class of Urban Prep Charter Academy Accepted to College

By Susan Aasen and Sadie Bass

Chicago's Urban Prep Charter Academy has a mission -- for its students to graduate and succeed in college. Now, for the first graduating class at the high school, mission accomplished.

All 107 seniors were accepted to a four-year college, a significant accomplishment considering they are from one of the toughest neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago.

These are not so-called gifted kids at a private school. The public high school is open to all, choosing students by a lottery.

"It doesn't just happen that public urban schools graduate all of their students and get them into college," said Tim King, the school's founder.

Just four years ago, when King started the school, only 4 percent of the class was reading at grade level.

So how did they overcome the odds? King created a school that excused nothing -- and expected everything.

Each new freshman starting school gets his own wristwatch to keep track of time.

"Kids would be late and say they didn't know what time it was," King said. "Part of our creed reads [that] 'we make no excuses,' so we wanted to remove that excuse."

Students attend school from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30pm. That's 72,000 more minutes in high school than most other students -- almost an extra school year.

"They are in a double period of English each and every day," King said. "Four years of math, four years of science, four years of social studies, three years of foreign languages."

"It's an eight-hour day so it's basically preparing us for having a job," said Ahmad Wright, a student at the school. "I think that's a plus and a motivation."

"If that's what it's going to take to get to where we want to be," student Marlon Marshall said, "then I am willing to deal with it."

Urban Prep Charter Academy is the first all-male charter school in the country.

The school isn't limited to African American students, but it reflects

the makeup of the neighborhood.

"Data in Chicago show 2.5 percent of African American boys in Chicago public schools will make it through college," King said, adding that he's painfully aware of the challenges the students face.

Uniforms for Respect

The young men at the academy wear suit jackets and ties as signs of respect.

"It distinguishes us. We stand out in the crowd," said student Jerry Hinds. "Freshman year, maybe, people had problems with it at first. But after a while, you see the bigger picture. ... These uniforms show that, oh, he's wearing a tie; oh, he wants to do something with himself."

And the first graduating class has a ritual: When students are accepted to college they receive a special tie of red and gold for their accomplishment.

The school's budget is supplemented by private donors to pay for extra expenses like uniforms. But for the students, the next hurdle is the cost of college.

"Students paying for college is one of the big potholes," King said.

To help with the challenge, the school has each family fill out financial aid forms and requires them to attend workshops.

"They have thus far received over \$2.2 million in scholarships and grants," King said.

"We defied odds," Marshall said. "We proved statistics wrong and we made so many people proud of what we decided to do and the life we decided to live."

"Four years from now, we will be celebrating their graduation from college," King added.

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