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## New School Rules: Black Men Change the Face of Education in Chicago

Urban Prep Academies is well known for its moniker '100 Percent Matters'. It's because, in 2010, one hundred percent of the graduating class was accepted into a four-year college or university. The trend has continued, as most recent data with the Illinois Interactive Report Card indicates that 94 percent of its students graduate in 4-7 years; in comparison to the State of Illinois which stands at 86 percent. It is a story of long standing success, made possible by a massive network of educators and students – all lead by one man's vision. That man is Tim King.

Tim King founded Urban Prep Academies as a non profit organization that operates as a network of public schools dedicated to preparing young men for life in college, community and beyond. The idea behind all three schools located in Englewood, Bronzeville and University Village, came as response to the challenges that young Black men are facing in the city of Chicago.

"We had a real issue with graduation rates, high levels of poverty, high levels of contact with the criminal justice system—and I felt very strongly that a way to solve that problem was if we created an organization that was going to be a laser focused on [the youth] population," says King.

King studied abroad at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy and the University of Nairobi in Nairobi, Kenya. He also holds a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center in Washington D.C.

During his time in Kenya he learned how differently the students viewed education, compared to the students in America.

"The Kenyans were much more serious and focused on their education. In the States, many people take their

education for granted and don't really focus as diligently as they should," says King.

When he started Urban Prep, he hoped that he would be able to promote the importance of education with the young people in Chicago. He believes that the experiences he had abroad really taught him the importance of education. Although he's never practiced law, the things he learned during his time at Georgetown University have been yet another key to the creation of Urban Prep Academies.

Many of life's experiences have prepared King for his role at Urban Prep. The most crucial of influences come from his parents. He recalled how seeing his mother, an educator, work with her students.

Then, he watched how his father built his business, from the ground up. Something that greatly helped to shape who King is today.

"On the entrepreneurial side there was no real course that I took in law school or in undergraduate that focused on entrepreneurship," says King. "I got a little bit of the Mom gene and the Dad gene seeing as I'm an educator who started an entrepreneurial endeavor of his own".

Being a pioneer was, seemingly genetic. He wasn't the first in his family to lay the foundation to something great.

"My grandfather started a produce business and he is really credited with bringing to the Chicago market, yams and greens into mainstream stores here," King says.

King recalled how his community also played a significant role in his development. It is a neighborhood known as Phil Hill. A community whose evolution played home to a large number of Black professionals and Chicago elite.

"I had these incredible role models and examples of excellence," says King. "To see that diversity of positive role models is one of the things that I hope we're providing at Urban Prep; providing them with examples of models of excellence that they can aspire to."

Tim basks in the knowledge that it takes a village, he nurtures a network that can be there for students in a variety of ways to enhance their educational experience.

"If you feel the desire to make a difference you shouldn't waste time wondering how, instead take action," Tim suggests. "That can be something as simple as picking up trash. If you're working with young people you never ever know when they are watching."

Plans for expanding Urban Prep Academies around the nation are always at the forefront of King's mind. With the need for quality structured education ever on the rise, it's a welcome solution to the growing problem of educating young Black men.

"I think our growth and expansion will be about bringing our model to other cities around the country and expanding the opportunities from ninth through twelfth grades, to somewhere from K through 12," King says.

Chicago is a big city, where every mile contains a student in need of help. Tim suggests a number of ways people can support youth.

"They can enroll [their student] in Urban Prep, they can work at Urban Prep, they can give money to Urban Prep, they can volunteer at Urban Prep," says King. "Any of those things or any ideas people have to support us; we're open to them."

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