



Beating the Odds



February 2016

Introduction

A recent Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) report noted that in 2013 only 19% of US-born Black citizens 25 years or older had earned a college degree. Earning a college degree is the surest way out of poverty and is essential with the changing labor market and global economy. By 2020, two-thirds of our jobs will require some college experience according to the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce.

As we celebrate Black History Month, African Americans make up 49% of Washington, DC's population and the 76% of the students in DC public charter schools, compared to 67% of students in the traditional school system.

DC public charter schools are paving the way for African American first generation college students through its large network of successful schools that offer academic supports such as extended day, Saturday programming, or tutoring that ensures every student is prepared for college and beyond.



Snapshot of Washington, DC

- Almost 29,000 African American students attend public charter schools.
- 72% of DC public charter school African American students graduate high school in four years compared to the city's average of 62% for African American public school students.

Proficiency Rates

- 48% of African American DC public charter school students in Grades 3-8 approached, met or exceeded expectations in English Language Arts on the statewide assessment (PARCC). The District's average is 41%.
- 51% of African American DC public charter school students in Grades 3-8 approached, met, or exceeded expectations in Math on the statewide assessment (PARCC). The District's average is 42%.

Achievement Prep Public Charter School - Founded 2008

Grades: K-8

Number of Schools: 2

Number of Students: 648

Percentage African American Students: 99%

Economically Disadvantaged: 70%

PARCC Assessment Percentage Approached, Met, or Exceeded (Combined Grades 3-8):

ELA 58%

Math 71%

Program: College prep and character development

Tier: 1



“The road to college begins in Kindergarten” is Achievement Prep’s mantra. Walk down any hallway of an Achievement Prep school and you will be guided by college banners and the classroom names of Platinum teacher’s alma maters. Students are called “scholars.” Each cohort of Achievement Prep scholars is named for the year they will graduate from college.

Achievement Prep was founded in 2008 with 68 4th and 5th graders by Shantelle Wright, who was one of three school leaders in the United States to win the Accelerate Institute’s prestigious Ryan Award that honors transformational school principals in urban environments. Her vision was to close the achievement gap and to give families east of the Anacostia River every opportunity that their more affluent peers have west of Rock Creek Park.

In its fourth year of operation, the school was one of 18 schools across the nation recognized by New Leaders for New Schools for its breakthrough student achievement gains as an EPIC Silver Gain School. The DC Public Charter School Board’s School Quality Reports (PMF) has rated it as a Tier 1 school every year since the School Quality Reports were launched in 2011.

Four years later, Achievement Prep has grown to serve 648 students in grades K-8 on two campuses in Ward 8. Achievement Prep combines rigorous academics and character development in an extended day with double instructional blocks in English Language Arts (ELA) and math. Tykivis Hunter, a 4th grade student, says, “we have nice teachers. It’s fun to learn. There’re no fights. There’s just learning all day.”

The longer students stay at Achievement Prep the more they learn. Extended time gives students two more years of learning for every four years they stay at the school. The proof is in the PARCC. The percentage of eighth graders who approached, met or exceeded college and career ready standards more than doubled in ELA to 97% and jumped by 32 points in math to 88% compared to fourth graders.

Shantelle Wright wakes up every morning "with the commitment to redefine what it means to be a high-performing school. Our families deserve opportunities that truly match those in the wealthiest parts of our country." Her school is a part of the Building Excellent Schools Network, an organization that develops talented school leaders and helps them grow their organizations.

In the fall of 2016, the Achievement Prep network will open its pre-school program and bring together all of its schools on one state-of-the-art campus, serving PreK3 - 8 grade and offering 300 additional high-performing or Tier 1 seats to families in Washington, DC. "We can't experiment with the lives of children who need this opportunity the most," said Mrs. Wright at a Fordham Institute panel on expanding high quality charters. "We have to be sure we can get it right from the start." This attitude toward growth will serve the students in Washington, DC well as Achievement Prep continues to expand its offerings to families.

"I tell my staff every day, we are doing three generational work. We change the life of our scholars. In turn, we change the lives of their parents and of their future children. Achievement Prep scholars will change the world."

BASIS DC Public Charter School - Founded 2012

Number of Public Charter Schools: 1 in DC

Grades: 5-11 (moving up a grade each year until grade 12)

Number of Students: 551

Percentage of African American Students: 42%

Economically Disadvantaged: 17%

PARCC Assessment Percentage Approved, Met, or Exceeded (Combined Grades 3-8):

ELA 90%

Math 86%

Program: accelerated college prep

Tier: 1

Michael and Olga Block, two iconoclastic academics, did not have any K-12 experience when they started the first BASIS school 17 years ago in Tucson, Arizona. As a University of Arizona economics professor from Stanford, Michael Block saw first-hand that his foreign students were better prepared than their American peers. Olga, a Czech native and former dean of Charles University in Prague, experienced the same disparity when she enrolled her own daughter into an American public school.

With no viable options for Olga's daughter in Tucson, Michael and Olga used the new Arizona charter school law to create an alternative, a school that would offer the serious intellectual rigor of a well-rounded challenging liberal arts education. Their formula for success was pretty simple: hard work, great teachers who have a passion for what they teach, and a demanding curriculum benchmarked to the highest international standards. Seventeen years, 23 schools, and nearly 15,000 students later, BASIS schools are among the best schools in the world.



CEO Peter Bezanson says, "we define opportunity for our students in global terms, and we do so in part by creating a diverse learning culture in which a multitude of perspectives are challenged and tested in an environment of informed thought and collegiality."

BASIS DC opened its doors in 2012 to more than 400 students in grades 5-8 in the heart of downtown Washington just footsteps from the National Archives and the National Portrait Gallery. The idea was to find a central location, a place accessible to students from all eight wards -- a beacon of what public education could do in America. As a result, BASIS DC's student body, of which 42% is African American, is pretty evenly distributed among every zip code in the city. BASIS DC will graduate its first class of seniors next year in 2017.

The BASIS curriculum combines the liberal arts of Europe with the math and science of Asia to provide an education that rivals the best school systems in the world. As early as fifth grade students take Latin, Classics, art and music history, English literature, and English language. BASIS believes an understanding of grammar and logic is important too. Middle school students are introduced to high-level content, taking three years of physics, chemistry and biology before they ever see an honors or AP class in high school. By the time a student takes an AP Biology exam, for example, he has five years of that subject under his belt. Everyone must take the AP Calculus exam in order to graduate. Most students go beyond AP Calculus to take various theoretical mathematics courses in high school, however.

John Wiggins, a junior at BASIS DC, is taking AP Chemistry, AP Calculus AB, Spanish IV, AP Literature and Composition, AP US History, AP Physics, and AP Environmental Science. He received the AP Scholar award by the College Board for earning a score of 3 or higher on three or more AP exams. He's taken seven exams so far: AP Government, AP World History, AP Biology, AP English Language, AP European History, AP Micro and AP Macro Economics. John lives in Ward 8.

"BASIS DC is academically rigorous. It has a lot of opportunities for students to learn a lot about everything," said John. "If you want a school with a huge challenge, then BASIS is the school for you."

John is in the throes of college planning, but BASIS makes it easier by building it into the schedule. He meets one-on-one with Jill Fonda, the college counselor and AP Chemistry teacher, once a week at lunchtime to go over his college lists, make sure he's on track with SAT prep and summer programming applications. Last year, John was part of the Smithsonian's Q?Crew, a group of teenagers who volunteer 100 service hours at Q?rius, a hands-on education center at the National Museum of Natural History.

The college counseling program at BASIS begins in the 9th grade. While the lower school takes pre-comps, 9th-11th graders take mock AP exams in the morning and visit local colleges in the afternoon. Ninth and 10th grade students are required to attend monthly college counseling meetings and are encouraged to attend college info sessions if there is space available. Several dozen prestigious colleges and universities have visited BASIS DC this year including Stanford, UC Berkeley, Bard, Dartmouth, Swarthmore, and the University of Chicago.

"Stanford called us. They knew that we were coming to DC and they want to have a relationship with us," said Jill. "Admissions offices all over the country are very excited that there is a BASIS school in DC. They already have a relationship with BASIS and are impressed with the quality of students that BASIS produces. When I tell them that we pull from every zip code, their eyes grow wide."

"I love our kids and advocate hard for them," says Jill. "It's a really personalized approach. I really get to know them, their hopes and dreams. I find out what it is they think about, what drives them. My "counselor letter" that accompanied one student's application to Columbia's summer journalism program was three pages long. I know these letters can be the tipping point."

Jill keeps parents in the loop with an informative newsletter that lists college visits both on and off campus, summer programs, volunteer activities, parent workshops, and scholarship opportunities. The 246 students in the 2015 senior class across the network earned over \$29M in merit scholarships to colleges and universities in the US and abroad. That's \$119,595 for each graduate.

DC Prep Public Charter School - Founded 2003

Grades: PK3 – 8

Number of Schools: 5

Number of Students: 1,320 (+ unaudited from Anacostia)

Percentage of African American Students: 90%

Economically Disadvantaged: 68%

PARCC Assessment Percentage Approced, Met, or Exceeded (Combined Grades 3-8):

ELA 78%

Math 85%

Program: Focus on rigorous academics and character education for success in high school, college and beyond

Tier: 1

From the moment they enter as 3-year old preschoolers, DC Prep students, or “Preppies” as they are affectionately called, have one goal: To succeed in a competitive high school and college. More than two-thirds of the nearly 300 eighth-grade graduates have been offered slots at selective high schools, including some of the most elite independent schools in the nation. Schools like Choate Rosemary Hall, Sidwell Friends School, Phillips Academy Andover, and Phillips Exeter Academy have awarded Preppies more than \$7M in scholarship support.

“I’m a proud DC Prep parent. My middle daughter started here in the fall of 2010,” affirmed Clarice Ulu. “I grew up in public housing, the youngest child of eight kids and a single mom. I didn’t hear anything about college until I was in high school. DC Prep talked about going to college at an open house that I attended for my granddaughter. I was so impressed that I enrolled my middle daughter the next day. She now attends Choate. It’s \$65,000 a year. She has a 4-year scholarship. She was also accepted into National Cathedral, Maret, and Deerfield. She’s been on the Dean’s List since she started. She’s learning Mandarin and wants to study abroad in China.”

DC Prep opened its first school, the Edgewood Middle Campus, in 2003 with 100 fourth and fifth graders and the dual mission of academic rigor and character development. Angel Hendricks, founding faculty member of Edgewood Elementary Campus and current Campus Dean of Student Support, puts it this way: “It’s always great to be smart and work hard, but we need to learn how to work with other people to reach the goals that we have.”

Native Washingtonian Emily Lawson founded DC Prep “to bridge the educational divide in Washington.” She said, “Growing up in Washington, I was outraged by the disparity in opportunities among children living 15 minutes away from each other. Founding DC Prep was the best thing I could think of doing to address this terrible inequity.” Historically, 98% of DC Prep students are African American, and more than 80% are eligible for free and reduced meals (FRM).

Four schools, 1,500 students, and twelve-and-a-half years later, DC Prep is the highest-performing network of public charter school in the District of Columbia for the fourth year in a row. More than 95% of DC Prep’s first five alumni classes have graduated from high school, compared to 65% of students District-wide. Four DC Prep campuses scored in the top 10 citywide for the low-income subgroup on the rigorous PARCC assessment. It has plans to grow to 10 campuses serving 3,500 students. This dramatic scaling up is possible because DC Prep’s crack leadership team brings together brings together high-capacity experts in business and instruction.

CEO Emily Lawson has an MBA from Harvard and worked at Boston Consulting Group for three

years before she founded DC Prep. Her chief of staff Beth Berwick has an MBA from Yale. Katie Severn was an award-winning teacher and principal for 10 years before she became DC Prep's Chief Academic Officer. COO Katie Rouse has an MBA from Harvard and worked for Bain & Company.

These ladies eat data for breakfast and one of the most exciting ways DC Prep uses data is to power PrepNext, DC Prep's alumni support program. Director Jimmy Kelly calls PrepNext "DC Prep's unconditional commitment to alumni from 9th grade until they graduate from college." He explains, "We use data to drive all of the work that we do. We use it to develop academic interventions for our students. We use it to drive the kind of engagement we have with our scholars. We've improved our results pretty dramatically over the last several years." In fact, Raise DC's Data Spotlight Awards just awarded the program \$10,000 for its innovative use of data.

Alumni Support Associate Maria Lawson was the valedictorian of DC Prep's first 8th grade graduating class in 2007. PrepNext was created during her junior year of high school while she was at Banneker. Commenting on a college tour she took with the program, "PrepNext is the pathway



to open up the doors of colleges you didn't even know existed." Maria graduated from Gettysburg College in 2015 with a BA in English. Four PrepNext counselors serve 300 alumni enrolled in 40 high schools and 50 colleges. These counselors have captured 98% of DC Prep alumni enrolled in high school and 70% of alumni enrolled in college. PrepNext is a high-touch "out-of-school wrap around service" that provides loads of one-on-one counseling, tutoring, SAT and college application workshops, college tours, and a summer program. Counselors have student data login information for the vast majority of alumni so that they can review grades bi-weekly and keep students on track.

In 2015, PrepNext counselors completed more than 1,000 face-to-face student meetings, and logged more than 1,800 student engagements. "Our kids are spread out all over the place," says Jimmy. "We have to be face-to-face to go beyond the surface of 'Yes, things are great.' We try to identify the key check-points to avoid getting in the hole." He knows first-hand the struggles that first-generation college goers face. "I myself am a first-generation college graduate. High schools are a bit bigger. Our kids don't necessarily connect with the adults. They don't understand that every grade goes on your transcript. They don't know what to do if they are failing a class. It's hard for them to filter social media. We help them create the time and space and process at a high level. We have to meet them where they are and help them engage. Students who are more involved, feel more belonging and connection and do well."

"There's a lot of heart break. We are learning every day. We invest a lot of time and energy and love. But the process is challenging. We're growing. There's not a magic solution. We have to maintain a really strong relationship with the students and their families."

Eagle Academy Public Charter School - Founded 2003

Grades: PK3-3

Number of Schools: 2

Number of Students: 920

Percentage of African American students: 95%

Economically Disadvantaged: 100%

PARCC Assessment Percentage Approced, Met, or Exceeded (Grade 3):

ELA 49%

Math 56%

Program: Early childhood, STEAM curriculum, physical education, and aquatics

Tier: 1

When you walk into Eagle Academy's Congress Heights campus in Ward 8, you better prepare to be hugged and greeted with a big warm smile. Eagle Academy is all about building community and engaging parents. Cassandra Pinkney, the tireless founder and executive director, knows that the evidence base on preschool education supports what is in her heart from 30 years of working with new mothers and young children – that early childhood programs can't prepare low-income African American for Kindergarten alone. They need the support of families and communities.

Angela Salter, Eagle Academy's director of community relations, explains, "I do so much for the parents because if they're okay, our kids are okay. If one of our social workers tells me that a family needs something, I go out on a hunt. I always get what I want. I don't give anyone a chance to say no." Her family and community engagement programs read like the activities from the most active PTA's west of Rock Creek Park. From the annual Congress Heights Day Parade, the Fall Festival, and Turkey Drive to the Mother's Day Tea, Father's Day Griller and Toys for Tots/Holiday Gift Giveaways, Eagle Academy has energized the Congress Heights community. "We had 350 mothers in big hats at our Mother's Day Tea last year," recounts Angela.



Eagle Academy makes learning fun. Its hands-on approach to math, science, and the arts is rooted in the belief that kids learn best by exploring, discovering, and collaborating. "Children come first. We do everything we possibly can to give them the most rich and robust education possible. I never stop to find ways to make learning fun and to show that life is bigger than Southeast. I'm working on a Saturday academy to get them out of the building for experiences outside of the classroom," says Cassandra. Founded in 2003, Eagle Academy was the first charter school in DC with an early childhood education focus. Cassandra Pinkney, who had toiled away for three years

as the early childhood and special education coordinator for DCPS said, "Eagle Academy was the result of my desire born out of my frustration and disappointment with traditional public schools." It opened its doors for 117 children in grades PreK-3 in the "big blue castle" across from the Navy Yard in Southeast, co-locating with another charter school.

Since that time Eagle Academy has added grades 1-3 and opened two campuses on New Jersey Avenue Southeast and on Wheeler Road in Congress Heights. It now serves 920 children in grades PreK-4, 774 at The Eagle Center at McGogney campus on Wheeler Road, of which 98% are African American and 100% economically disadvantaged. Ward 8 champion Marion Barry was instrumental in helping Cassandra remove the former DCPS Gladys McGogney School from its surplus building status and navigate the red tape so that she could get the stunning renovation and expansion done in time for the 2012-2013 school year.

Cassandra's vision for The Eagle Center at McCongney to serve as a center for the Congress Heights community has come alive in a bright new shining structure of polycarbonate multi-wall sheets, glass and steel. "It glows at night!" exclaims Cassandra. The Eagle Center, which was recognized by the Northern Virginia Chapter of the American Institute of Architecture (AIA) with an "Award of Excellence for Institutional Architecture," routinely hosts ANC meetings and even sponsored a Ward 8 Candidate's Forum. There's even a grandparents volunteer program where the elderly community members, according to Angela Salter, "Love, give warm hugs, tie shoes, and wipe noses." Cassandra notes, "There have been no break-ins, no graffiti, no nothing. We take the community in."



Eagle Academy offers free dental care and encourages good health and nutrition. They hired a chef to cook in their newly renovated kitchen and will eventually serve dinner. Cassandra is constantly pushing the envelop of what she can do with her school to transform the lives of her students, their families, and the community they live in. According to Cassandra, "African Americans die 6 to 1 to their Caucasian counterparts," so she made the new swimming pool a centerpiece of Eagle's physical education instruction. She told East of the River magazine "In the African-American community we do not swim, aren't interested in swimming, are fearful of swimming for one reason or another. This year we emphasized second and third graders swimming. They did well although not all of them participated in the swim program."

Her aquatic director Bobby Broome explained, "There are a lot of parents in the black community who tend to be apprehensive about swimming. You hear their children say 'I'm gonna drown' at a very early age. Where did they learn these words? One of those things we deal with [in the program] is peeling back those layers of fear." Cassandra and her team spend a lot of time educating parents through programs like her "Fireside Chat" videos or monthly "Chat and Chews." Angela sums it up, "At Eagle Academy, it's about consistency, support, dedicated staff, and above and beyond, it's about our parents. It's all about family. In everything we do, it's all about family. From the STEM program to special needs and the phenomenal smile on the face of the receptionist."

Friendship Public Charter School - Founded 1998

Grades: PK3-12

Number of Schools: 11

Number of Students: 3,720 (+ unaudited number of students from Armstrong and Online)

Percentage of African American Students: 98%

Economically Disadvantaged: 100%

PARCC Assessment Percentage Approved, Met, or Exceeded (Combined Grades 3-8):

ELA 40%

Math 50%

Program: College prep

Tier: 2

Friendship Public Charter School is one of the largest and is the oldest network of charter schools in the District of Columbia. In fact, about 10% of all charter school students in DC attend a Friendship school. Almost all Friendship students are African American and economically disadvantaged. Three out of four come from the poorest neighborhoods in Wards 7 and 8.

Donald Hense, the founder of Friendship, and backbone of the charter school movement in DC, sees his schools as way to lift children out of poverty. His vision is born from his direct experience as executive director of Friendship House, a venerable social services institution that ministered to hundreds of local families in need for more than a century.



The execution of Hense's vision was bold from the start. Shortly after the passage of the DC School Reform Act, his schools were among the first crop of public charter schools in the nation's capital, opening two elementary schools with 1,200 students in 1998, a middle school with 724 students in 1999, and a high school with 423 students in 2000. It wasn't long before he had a 5% share of all public school students and a seat at the policy table. His fight to achieve charter school equity is legendary. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools inducted Donald Hense into their Hall of Fame in June 2011.

Former DC Councilman Kevin Chavous said, "Donald's tenacious and unwavering advocacy helped to create the District's unique facilities allowance for each charter school. And, when that allowance was under attack by the Mayor, Donald used his influence and aggressive voice to help keep that allowance in place."

Hense likens the charter school movement to the civil rights movement he cut his teeth on and attributes the fire in his belly to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his alma mater. "At Morehouse College, which I attended in order to follow in Dr. King's footsteps, we were taught to seize, not fear, opportunities. Securing an education for all of our children is a goal every bit as righteous as those for which Dr. King gave his life more than 40 years ago. Failure to graduate from high school denies children access to college, the passport to the middle class."

Friendship has stamped that passport for several thousand low-income students since its first graduating class in 2003, consistently graduating about 90% of its high-school students on time in four years, compared to less than 60% of African American students District-wide. But high school graduation is not enough for Friendship. Acceptance into a two- or four-year college is mandatory. On average, more than 80% of Friendship graduates go to college, compared to 46% of low-income students nationwide.

Hense and his team have employed several strategies to pave the way for college success. There's a 90-minute block schedule in the core subjects of math, English, science, and history, so students can go deeper into their subject matter. Half of Friendship's high school students take at least one AP course during these blocks and Friendship picks up the tab on the AP exams. Friendship Collegiate Academy was recognized by the College Board in 2008 as one of three "AP Inspiration Award" recipients for expanding access to AP classes to low-income students.

Friendship was also one of 17 secondary schools in the nation to participate in The Woodrow Wilson Early High School Initiative, a dual-enrollment program, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, where high school students can take college courses at UDC and the University of Maryland at no cost.



One student who participated in the program said, "There have been times when I thought about quitting, but there are motivations from teachers and family. I see another homeless person and I do not want to give up. Giving up is way harder than trying. We have relationships with people at the school. They tutor us after school and they know who can help us outside of school."

Friendship helps its students with the financial piece of college as well. It is one of six schools in DC to partner with the College Success Foundation, which has awarded more than 799 DC Achiever Scholarships of \$10,000 a year to Friendship Collegiate juniors. Add the DC Tuition Assistance Grant and you have college expenses covered in many cases. An extraordinary 30

30 Posse scholarships have been awarded to Collegiate seniors since 2006. Posse scholars enjoy all tuition expenses paid at selective partnering colleges and universities like Bucknell, Lafayette, Grinnell, and the University of Wisconsin. Scholars go to school and meet weekly in a group or “posse” of support. Posse scholars graduate at the rate of 90%.

Friendship boasts a robust alumni program with a network of 1,700 graduates strong and growing. The alumni program stays in touch with former Friendship students, creating a powerful social network to support students throughout their college years and beyond. It also offers several dozen summer internship opportunities. Columbia University computer science graduate Percee Goings reports, “I work with second through sixth graders at Chamberlain through the Smart Cookies program for gifted kids. I get a lot of business experience because I’m working directly underneath the executives.” He also created an internal staff portal. He goes on to talk about his work ethic and drive, “I don’t think I’ll ever feel completely accomplished. When I’m getting close to achieving a goal, I erase that goal and set a higher one.”

The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. Even though Donald Hense is retiring at the end of the school year, he will continue to raise the bar for African American children in the District of Columbia and remain as chairman of the board of directors and a mentor for Friendship students.

“When founding Friendship, my vision was to ensure that urban youth have every educational opportunity afforded to their counterparts in suburban public and private schools,” said Hense. “As I look back on the took decades since opening, we’ve been extremely successful in preparing our scholars for life at the next level, helping them secure their college acceptance letters, scholarships and diplomas. Our students have earned more than \$60 million in college scholarships making it possible for them to attend the schools of their choice.”

KIPP DC Public Charter School - Founded 2001

Grades: PK3-12

Number of Schools: 16 in DC

Number of Students: 4,023

Percentage of African American students: 96%

Economically Disadvantaged: 83.9%

PARCC Assessment Percentage Approced, Met, or Exceeded (Combined Grades 3-8):

ELA 53%

Math 65%

Program: College prep + extended time

Tier: 1

KIPP, The Knowledge is Power Program, heralded in the modern education reform movement as we know it, shining a national spotlight on the failure of public schools to teach poor children. When Michael Feinberg and David Levin, the founders of KIPP, appeared on 60 Minutes in 1999, Scott Hamilton and GAP owner Don Fisher took notice -- co-founding the KIPP Foundation, a non-profit with the mission of identifying and training talented school leaders to replicate the KIPP model across the country. There are now 183 KIPP schools in 20 states and Washington, DC that serve nearly 70,000 students.



Susan Schaeffler was one of the first three Fisher Fellows selected in 2000. She opened KIPP DC KEY Academy the following year with 80 students in a church basement east of the Anacostia River. "I founded KIPP DC because I believe that every student in this city deserves access to a high-quality education. We have made tremendous progress as a city over the past fifteen years, but we are still working towards that goal."

Her network of 16 schools in DC now serves more than 5,200 students in grades PreK3-12. KIPP DC has plans to double in size in the years to come. More than 80% of KIPP students qualify for the free and reduced meals program, 72% come from Wards 7 and 8, and 97% are African-American.

KIPP students spend 35% more time in school than DCPS students. More time in school equals more time for reading and math. KIPP Founder David Levin told 60 Minutes, "It's not rocket science. We're just rolling up our sleeves and putting in some really long days of hard work." On Day One, the first thing KIPP students learn is the year they will go to college and the hard work it will take to get there because "there are no shortcuts" for getting to and through college.

KIPP is a school of choice that requires a deep commitment from parents, teachers, and students. They work together and sign a contract, making a promise to do whatever it takes to achieve success in college and beyond. Students stay in school longer and promise to work harder than other students. Parents pledge to check homework every night and get their kids to school on time. Teachers carry school-issued cell phones and are available to families 24/7.

“High expectations”, “more time in school”, and “choice and commitment” are the first three of KIPP’s “Five Pillars,” the core beliefs that every KIPP school rests upon. The fourth pillar, “the power to lead” is nowhere better illustrated than by Mekia Love, the principal of KIPP DC Lead Academy. “I’ve been with KIPP DC for 11 years since the fall 2001. It’s really great that we’ve become a network of 16 schools on six campuses. It underscores our commitment to DC. When we start to educate more families and more kids, the responsibilities and challenges are greater. The bar is constantly rising. How do we make sure this is a school that is just as good as if you lived west of Rock Creek Park, a school where your zip code really doesn’t matter? What will it be like in 2024? What do they need to know now? Our world is shifting. What does it take?”



KIPP is known for its relentless “focus on results” – the fourth pillar – so when it found out in 2011 that only 33% of its 1999 and 2000 8th grade cohorts were graduating from college, KIPP stepped up in a powerful way and created the KIPP Through College Program (KTC). Tevera Smith, who manages the KIPP DC KTC Program, says, “It’s our promise to students. If they graduate from our middle school, they will get one-on-one counseling through college graduation.”

Her team of 12 manages a caseload of 1400 alumni from KIPP DC. Next year it will be 2000 8th grade completers and high school students. An estimated 80-90% of KIPP students are first-generation college students. “Helping students who are first generation is what brought me to KIPP. The process itself is really personal. And it’s not just working with students, but partnering with parents too. We have to make sure it’s a family affair.” Tevera calls the members on her team “college access professionals.” Like her, most of her team members are first-generation college graduates.

The KTC team works with students not only to find a match and fit academically, but also financially. Raising financial awareness is a big part of the program. “Three-quarters of our senior class has filled out the FAFSA,” according to Tevera. KIPP DC students are also able to take advantage of the national network programs that provide social networking support and a college access pipeline to more than 75 colleges and universities including Georgetown, Brown, Pomona College, and the University of Pennsylvania. “The collective nature of our work and knowledge goes beyond just HBCs. There are nearly 4000 colleges and universities in the nation so there is college for every student to get into.” ■