



Companies That Care

Center for Companies That Care Education Initiative

Prepared To Fail

Finish high school. Participate in community service. Develop solid work habits. Graduate from college. When kids follow this path, they are prepared for adulthood and guaranteed a certain standard of living. For adolescent students in Chicago's Woodlawn, Englewood, and other low-income, inner-city neighborhoods, far too many obstacles await them. As a result, of those students who start high school, only 45% complete it. The college completion picture is even more bleak. Of those who enter 9th grade at a Chicago public school, only 6% will go on to finish college by age 25.

Most of us can't imagine the "family of demons" these young people face, says Ken Hutchinson, Director of College & Community Partnerships at Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men, located in Englewood. For decades, these students have grown up surrounded by drugs, gangs, violence, and a decayed environment (dangerous vacant lots, substandard housing, and an absence of local businesses). Homicide is the leading cause of death for this population. Unless their circumstances change dramatically, predicted life expectancy for an African American man in these neighborhoods is 58.3 years, less than that of the average person living in Bangladesh.

These teens also lack the firm foundation that prepares them for college success. It is hard to focus on school when facing so many pressures and challenges at home. Most live in female-headed households, with total annual incomes of less than \$18,000. They also lack college-educated role models; higher education is foreign to their families as well. Finally, lacking strong academic preparation, the majority of Chicago Public elementary school children test poorly, when compared with their peers from across the nation. A large proportion of Chicago Public School system students, especially boys, do not perform at grade level (for example, 80% of 9th graders entering Urban Prep read at the 6th grade level.)

For those who overcome these obstacles, the transition to college is difficult. Many are homesick, having never ventured outside of their neighborhoods. Others are uncomfortable being in the minority for the first time. These young men must also study harder to overcome their inadequate high school education and find additional resources (asking Teaching Assistants for help with coursework, writing assistance, etc.). They have one chance to make it through college and no safety net. These young men need to be convinced that college is worth the investment.

Closing the Achievement Gap

In 2001, after the Chicago Public School system distinguished itself as the worst in the nation, the Gates Foundation stepped in and funded the conversion of five large, poorly-performing high schools into 20 small schools with a college prep focus. At the same time, the charter school movement was gaining momentum and the Renaissance Urban School Initiative was unveiled to add more small schools. Students excelled in these new learning environments; real change was taking place.

Two innovative small schools now lead young African American men down the path to college graduation - Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men (located in Englewood) and Woodlawn High School campus (a University of Chicago Charter School, part of the University's Urban Education Initiative, located in Woodlawn).



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Tim King, former head of Hales Franciscan High School, a respected Catholic high school for African American boys, gathered a group of African American education, business, and civic leaders to discuss the plight of Chicago's inner-city African American boys. Out of this discussion emerged Urban Prep Academies, a nonprofit organization (with King as the founder and Chief Executive Officer) determined to reach the boys who are the most likely to fail and provide a curriculum which will result in collegiate success. **Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men**, the Chicago Public School system's first and only charter high school for boys, opened in September 2006; 160 African-American, ninth-grade boys are currently enrolled.

School reform expert, Timothy Knowles, Director of the Center for Urban School Improvement at the University of Chicago, leads the new **Woodlawn High School campus**. With the success of the other University-operated charter schools, Woodlawn was chosen as the newest site and opened in 2006. Despite a school day that is 3 hours longer than the typical Chicago Public school, and an expanded school year, 500 applications were received for the first 160 openings. The school enrolled 50 students in sixth grade and 110 students in ninth grade for the '06/'07 school year. As students progress through the grades, the school will grow until it reaches its full enrollment of 590 students (grades 6-12) in the '09-'10 school year.

Both schools share a common goal – to ensure that 100% of their students will succeed in college. They accept students, regardless of their tested eligibility, from across Chicago, although both schools tend to have large numbers of boys from the local neighborhood in their student bodies. The schools incorporate a rigorous college prep curriculum, community service, after school activities, and a formal mentoring program. Urban Prep also incorporates a professional internship and post graduate support into the curriculum as well; Woodlawn students work under University professors to conduct local community-based research.

One Company – One Student

This fall, Center for Companies That Care, a Chicago-based, national designated 501c3 organization, is implementing a four –year pilot program – matching Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men and Woodlawn High School 9th graders with corporate mentors to help them finish high school and graduate from college. A group of employees within a company will formally mentor one student through high school graduation (during the pilot), and ultimately, through college.

Working with the leadership of Urban Prep and Woodlawn High School, Marci Koblenz, Founder and President of the Center for Companies That Care, is developing a mentoring curriculum that includes education (for mentors and students), an internship program, college support component, group events, celebrations, and evaluation. Companies That Care, specializing in workplace recognition, workforce education, and corporate community service project facilitation, will prepare mentors to teach interviewing skills, general work skills, computer proficiency, resume writing, money management, college application preparation, presentation skills, assistance with research projects, and more. Students will have the opportunity to leave their neighborhood to intern at their corporate mentor's Chicago area location. Mentors will also help students to select a college, search for financial aid/ scholarships, and accompany them on a group bus tour of Midwest colleges. Students will welcome their mentors for special school events (Bring your Mentor to School Day, etc.), and participate in group cultural and sporting events.

Center for Companies That Care is currently recruiting corporate mentors, and will implement the program in the Fall of 2007. Funds are needed to develop the mentoring program's learning modules, support staff salaries (for time spent directly facilitating the program), to underwrite the college tour, and for program evaluation. At the 2011 Commencement ceremonies, you will know the corporate mentors



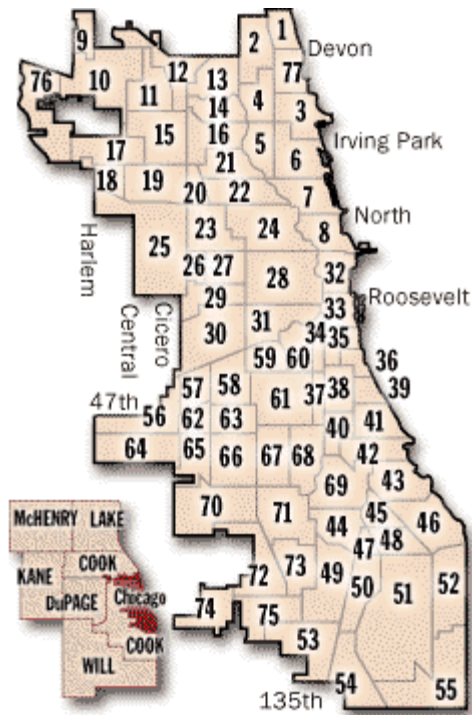
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by their loud cheers. As the young students accept their high school diplomas, and leave for college we will have succeeded. Many young low-income teens will realize that they have corporate friends lighting the path.

Chicago Neighborhoods

#42 Woodlawn

#68 Englewood



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