

IN BRIEF

Replicating success

No urban school system is serving all its kids well. But it is likely that every one has some, if not many, schools that do well by low-income children. The challenge, of course, is to create more successful schools and ensure that they thrive.

Replications, Inc. and the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) are nonprofit organizations founded by educators who wanted to help good schools multiply in low-income neighborhoods. Their approach to “going to scale” is to use the essential characteristics of successful existing schools to start new ones—mainly middle and high schools—and then nurture and advocate for them within the school system.

Instead of developing its own school program, Replications uses a variety of existing schools as models, including Chicago’s Noble Street Charter High School. It strives first to replicate the “host” school’s culture.

KIPP, which has its own set of school operating principles, starts with leadership.

The Replications way

Replications President John Elwell says that when he first set out to replicate good schools, he didn’t expect to focus on culture. “You would have these schools that were outstanding, but no one was learning from them,” he recalled. As he cataloged what those schools were doing, he found himself writing down rules and features such as motivational signs and chants that made students behave well, not necessarily outstanding curricula.

“Once the culture takes over,” he says, “then you can build your instructional program. If you start with an exciting curriculum based on, say, airplanes but have not figured out how to make kids sit down, you’ll never get to airplanes.”

“A replicable school culture is made up of rules, rituals, traditions and practices that can be identified, refined and articulated as milestones for a new school to achieve,” the organization explains on its web site. “We call these elements ‘essential features.’ They may range from components of the curriculum to the behavior permitted in hall-

continued on back

The KIPP way

“It all depends on the leader,” says Darryl Cobb, KIPP’s training director, who is based in Chicago. “A great leader is required to have a great school.”

KIPP looks for excellent educators whose style fits the communities they will serve, and then it puts them through an intense training regimen. It begins in the summer with a month of course work on what it takes to launch and run a nonprofit enterprise, not just a school.

As heads mainly of charter schools, KIPP principals need to know, among other things, how to manage a complete budget, not just part of one, how to interview staff and select well, how to work with a board, how to market the school and recruit students and how to raise money, Cobb notes.

Conducted at the business school of the University of California, Berkeley, courses deal with educational, organizational and operational leadership. In the fall, the so-called Fisher Fellows, named after KIPP’s leading benefactor, spend one month each in two to three KIPP schools and make shorter visits to

continued on back

Replications, Inc.

- **FOUNDED:** 1998
- **FOUNDER:** John Elwell, former director of alternative schools in New York City’s District 3

SCHOOLS

NUMBER OPENED: 23
NUMBER CLOSED: 0 but a few have “gone south”
TYPE: Middle or high schools
GOVERNANCE: Regular public schools
CHOICE: Students choose the school
SCHOOL SIZE: 225 for 6 - 8, 435 for 9 - 12
LOCATIONS: 21 in New York City, 2 in Baltimore
MODELS: 6

External evaluation:

A study by the Arete Corporation of 2004 test scores at Replications’ first eight schools found that students made more progress than did peers in nearby schools.

But 6th grade was an exception: All Replications schools experienced declines in reading, but in most they were significantly less than declines in the comparison schools.

KIPP

- **FOUNDED:** 1994
- **FOUNDERS:** Michael Feinberg and David Levin, Teach for America alums

SCHOOLS

NUMBER OPENED: 45
NUMBER CLOSED: 0 but 2 have withdrawn from KIPP and 1 is “merging”
TYPE: All but 3 are middle schools
GOVERNANCE: All but 5 are charter schools
CHOICE: Students choose the school
SCHOOL SIZE: 320 for 5 - 8
LOCATIONS: 15 states and Washington, D.C.

External evaluation:

A 2005 study by the Educational Policy Institute (EPI) found that 5th-graders at 24 KIPP schools showed “substantially greater” progress on a nationally normed test than what is considered normal for their grade.

“These findings are significant and lead us to believe that the KIPP schools are doing something right for low income and minority students,” said EPI President Watson Scott Swail. “However, the next step requires us to collect student-level data to allow for a true comparison of academic progress across KIPP schools and with students from other public schools.”

REPLICATIONS *continued from page 1*

ways to fixtures of every classroom to the rhythm of the scheduled day. By making these elements of a school's "personality" explicit and concrete, Replications, Inc. is able to create these key elements in new settings, and replicate the decorum, seriousness of purpose, emphasis on creativity and adherence to the curriculum."

The replication process begins when the future founding principal of a new school goes to work in a host school full time for a year. "The idea is to pick up the culture," says Elwell.

A project director supplied by Replications then helps the new principal hire staff, and together they lead the staff in planning in minute detail the start-up of the new school, noting such items as the location of the phone jacks and the name of the school furniture salesman. The school starts with one grade level and adds another one each year.

Major challenges

"We're good at launching schools," says John Elwell of Replications, Inc. "All of our start-ups are really good. But then reality kicks in. The district has its own needs and [for example] sends us more kids."

Elwell says that as a "keeper of the flame," his organization helps deter the new good schools from "reverting back to regular schools." And the school networks "are a bit of a bulwark" against bureaucratic intrusions. They also promote internal accountability among the schools, he adds. Replications now is planning network parent councils "that will allow us to use the power of parents to protect all the schools in a network."

But that's not enough, Elwell now believes.

"What we're talking about in New York City is taking an organization like mine and having it manage the schools once the Gates money goes away." (In September, 2003, Replications received a \$4.8 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to open eight new high schools in New York City.)

KIPP is focused on other challenges: "finding great people to start schools and getting the word out to more families about the opportunity a KIPP school presents," says Stephen Mancini, the KIPP Foundation's director of public relations. "We can't start schools fast enough,"

Replications shares the concern about school leaders. Its current strategic plan calls for a partnership with New York City's principal leadership academy and fine tuning its own training program.

The kids and their parents show up in August for orientation so they know from the first day of school what is expected.

Throughout the year, principals and

teachers from schools built on the same model meet in each other's schools for professional development, curriculum planning and the like.

KIPP *continued from page 1*

other high-performing schools. In January they come to Chicago for a two-week boot camp that brings in lawyers, public relations specialists and other such professionals to talk about relevant issues. Then the fellows go to their communities to build a school from the ground up.

But they are not completely reinventing the wheel. KIPP has five so-called pillars that define the basic structure of every school, and the KIPP Foundation, which has a staff of 50, can provide examples of programs and curricula that have been successful. The foundation also provides ongoing support of varying degrees.

KIPP has two schools in Chicago—KIPP Ascend in Austin and KIPP Chicago Youth Village Academy in the old Williams Elementary on the Near South Side, which was one of the first schools closed by Schools CEO Arne Duncan. However, the Near South Side KIPP pro-

The KIPP 'pillars'

KIPP says the pillars of its program are the DNA of the network and that their schools are cousins, not twins. Here are the five pillars that schools must adhere to.

- **High expectations.** Expectations are clearly defined, and students, parents, teachers, and staff are expected to create and reinforce a culture of achievement and support through a range of formal and informal rewards and consequences for academic performance and behavior.
- **Choice and commitment.** Students, their parents, and the faculty of each KIPP school choose to participate. Everyone must make and uphold a commitment to the school

and to each other to put in the time and effort required to achieve success.

- **More time.** Schools have an extended school day, week, and year. By KIPP's count, their students spend 62 percent more time in school than do students at neighboring schools.
- **Power to lead.** Principals have control over their school budgets and personnel. They are free to swiftly move dollars or make staffing changes, allowing them maximum effectiveness in helping students learn.
- **Focus on results.** KIPP schools focus on high student performance on standardized tests and other objective measures. Students are expected to achieve a level of academic performance that will enable them to succeed at the nation's best high schools and colleges.

gram will cease operating at the end of this school year, and students will be allowed to attend a well performing, district-run middle school in same building.

The KIPP school in Williams had low

enrollment and, as a supposed contract school—it never got a contract—could not get all the flexibility it needed to adhere to KIPP guidelines, says Stephen Mancini, the foundation's public affairs director.

www.catalyst-chicago.org

for back issues and extra resources