

## KIPP enlists UH in graduation program

By JENNIFER RADCLIFFE, HOUSTON CHRONICLE

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Hoping to boost college graduation rates, the KIPP charter school chain will partner with 10 universities across the country next year to increase support for low-income students.

The first partner is in Houston, the birthplace of the Knowledge is Power Program. KIPP will join forces with the [University of Houston](#).

"Kudos to the University of Houston for stepping up first," KIPP co-founder Mike Feinberg said. "Not only are they acknowledging that they want to be part of the solution, they're also acknowledging that there's a problem. Just acknowledging that there's a problem is half the battle."

KIPP started in 1994 to better prepare low-income, minority students for college. The model expanded rapidly as a public charter school system and now has 27,000 students in prekindergarten through high school nationwide.

A recent study showed 40 percent of KIPP Houston students have earned a bachelor's or associate's degree and another 27 percent are still in college - leaving about one-third without degrees.

These new partnerships should help eliminate roadblocks that stand in their way.

UH will begin working with KIPP families as early as middle school, said [Djuana Young](#), executive director of the university's office of the admission. Students will be coached on what to expect and how to navigate the red tape that comes with obtaining financial aid and enrolling in classes.

### **Guiding the way**

"Some students do get lost, get frustrated with the processes they have to go through," Young said.

As part of the deal, UH is agreeing to increase the number of KIPP students enrolled 50 percent by 2014. Currently, 79 KIPP Houston High School graduates attend UH and about half of this year's 130 seniors plan to apply.

UH will help those students obtain financial aid and pair them with mentors. College students will be encouraged to observe and student teach at KIPP Houston campuses.

Because many KIPP students are the first in their families to attend college, their parents are reluctant to let them leave the city. UH is a perfect fit for these high achievers, Young said.

"I'm impressed with the KIPP students who are already coming," she said. "We're talking about students who are excelling academically. They're going to add to the diversity of our campus in a lot of ways."

About 22 percent of UH's roughly 39,000 students are Hispanic. Thirteen percent are black, 20 percent are Asian and 34 percent are white, Young said.

Jessica Rattini, a KIPP Houston graduate, found the move to UH overwhelming.

"I got culture shock myself," the 22-year-old said. "Initially I didn't want to ask any questions because I didn't know what to ask."

Her parents never attended college and were busy working so Rattini had to figure everything out on her own. She graduates next month, but vows to stay involved to help other KIPP students survive college.

According to [U.S. Census](#) data, only 30 percent of all Americans aged 25-29 have earned college degrees. That number drops to 8 percent for students in the bottom economic quartile.

### **Tweaking curriculum**

By 2015, at least 10,000 KIPP students are expected to be in college.

"On any given day, there's 1,010 reasons why low-income children don't complete college," Feinberg said. "The partnership is saying 'Let's stop the finger-pointing.'"

KIPP will use what it learns through the program to tweak its curriculum so that its graduates are better prepared to succeed in college. Other public school systems and colleges could also create their own partnerships.

"It's important as a beacon and a model for the rest of the country to follow," Feinberg said.

KIPP has also signed partnerships with [Tulane University](#), [Colby College](#), [Franklin & Marshall College](#) and [Davidson College](#). More Texas colleges are expected to join soon.

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