

The Power of High Expectations



UMKC Institute for Urban Education Commits to Improving Schools in the Core

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A recent report issued by the U.S. Department of Education and Johns Hopkins University warned of the high numbers of so-called “drop-out factories”—schools with less than a 60% graduation rate. What the study doesn’t mention is the incredible drop-out rate among teachers, which is nearly 50%.

“More than 80% of teachers are white suburban females,” says Jennifer Waddell, Ph.D., associate director of UMKC’s Institute for Urban Education (IUE). “Many of them are culturally unprepared to deal with the needs of their students.” In the urban setting, a number of students are homeless, living in poverty, or

“We’re keeping top graduates from leaving our area while helping to meet UMKC’s mission of urban engagement and the Chancellor’s commitment to making Kansas City one of the 25 most educated cities,” says Jennifer Waddell, Ph.D., associate director of UMKC’s Institute for Urban Education (IUE). “What we’re doing is not just making better teachers. We’re training leaders to be better people.”



Students participating in the UMKC Institute for Urban Education begin spending time in urban schools during their first semester. Second-year students MacKenzie Higgins of Lee’s Summit, Mo., (left) and Harrison Neal of Kansas City, Mo., (right) gain valuable teaching experience in local elementary schools.

learning English as a second language. Waddell says this lack of teacher preparedness negatively impacts the schools, setting up both teachers and students for failure.

The goal of the IUE is to recruit, educate, and train the best and brightest of urban students as teachers committed to urban education—teachers who understand not only subject matter, but also their students’ cultural challenges. Currently working with the Kansas City, Kan.; Kansas City, Mo.; and Hickman Mills districts, and with 41 students enrolled, the program emphasizes math, science, and literacy education. Eight of the current students are men. Many are the first in their families to go to college. But the IUE program goes beyond the basics.

“We have very high expectations of students,” Waddell says. “They engage in a great deal of real-life experience in the community. They are immersed in Kansas City’s nonprofit community, enhancing their cultural awareness and understanding the network of resources

available to students and families in our community. That is in addition to 1,300 hours working in urban classrooms.”

Adding to the heavy curriculum workload, students participate in non-paid internships with various community agencies. They must also maintain a 3.0 grade-point average.

In return for paid tuition and a living stipend, students agree to teach in one of the participating districts for four years. Equally important to the success of the teacher is the ongoing support system and mentoring offered during his first years of teaching.

Waddell is clearly proud of her students. “We’re keeping top graduates from leaving our area while helping to meet UMKC’s mission of urban engagement and the Chancellor’s commitment to making Kansas City one of the 25 most educated cities,” she says. “What we’re doing is not just making better teachers. We’re training leaders to be better people.”

For more information, go to iue.umkc.edu.

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