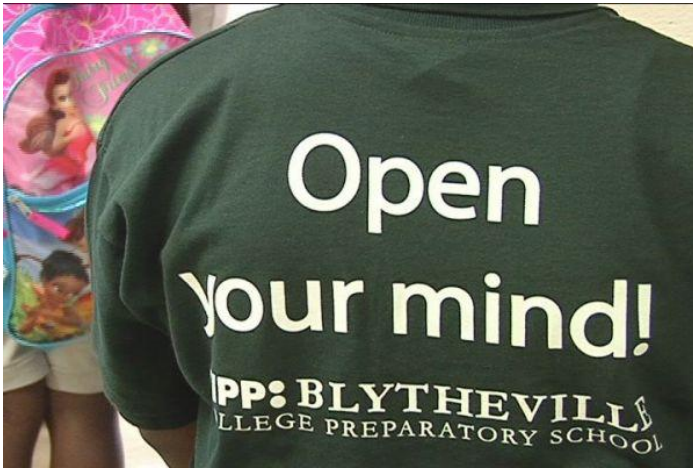


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The KIPP School in Blytheville offers an educational opportunity

By Keith Boles



BLYTHEVILLE, AR (KAIT) - The KIPP College Prep Charter school in Blytheville, offers Mississippi County students an alternative to regular public school.

Getting ready for college in fifth grade is a challenge no doubt. But KIPP students don't say "If" I go to college" but "when". The hallways are decorated with maps and banners from colleges across the nation.

Maisie Wright, the school director in Blytheville spoke about their philosophy. "It's one of the first things that they learn when they come in is that they will have the skills that will make them successful in college and life after that."

Kipp, the "Knowledge is Power Program" is a nationwide school program. The school in Blytheville opened last year. Another school in the delta is located at Helena. Students come from all over the county including Osceola to attend. There is no charge for the school it is public like a regular school but considered a Charter School.

One initial change incoming students face is school nearly year-round.

6th grader Dewhon Priget said, "I really like going to year-round school because I will get smarter and I can go to college once I get all the knowledge in my head."

Students attend from 7:30 to 4 on weekdays, there are Saturday programs that include trips to colleges or museums and 3 weeks of school in July. In June, they travel.

Wright, "One week in June the students go on end-of year field lessons. So the fifth grade goes to Washington D.C. and the sixth grade goes on a hiking and camping trip to Utah."

The school is operated very crisply and tightly organized. All students wear uniforms, the 5th grade wear blue shirts, the sixth grade wear green. The students must earn the right to wear the colors. Until they do they wear white polos. The teaching and learning style is very formal.

Wright, "Because of that structure we are able to do things that are very out of the box with our students."

Like a class experiment in egg parachuting. Students lined up outside while a teacher tossed their particular egg with Wal-Mart sack parachute off the roof. Each egg had a descriptive narrative that was read before the egg was tossed.

The school is growing as each class ages. In order for the students to move up the school adds a grade. This year they added a sixth grade and more teachers. The class of 2018 will be setting the standard. Currently they are not adding lower grades. In fact they are going to have to soon find a larger building.

Wright, "So when they get to 9th grade we'll open a high school for them and they will start that."

It's a tough demanding program that requires commitment from those who want to learn and move ahead in life. But the kids love it.

Sixth grader Sirae Watson loves the challenges that the school presents. She said she had a math problem once that took a half an hour to figure out, but she did. I asked her what the best thing about the school was to her.

Watson, "The best is that we are a team and family."

The school still has a few openings for 5th grade and is taking names for a waiting list for 6th. The names are put into a bucket and names are drawn for new student openings.

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