



YOUNG PIONEERS

Ninth graders Walner Duran and Michelle Mendez love being a part of the first class that will graduate from KIPP Academy Lynn Collegiate High School.

KIPP Academy Lynn “Founders” earn their future home

BY PAUL HALLORAN

Their athletic teams will be known as the Panthers, but students at the new KIPP Academy Lynn (KAL) Collegiate High School might more accurately be called the Pioneers.

They are the 96 ninth-grade Founders of KAL Collegiate, and they share a common thread: a clear vision for college graduation, and the determination to do whatever it takes to get there - from making the commitment to a non-traditional high school experience, to attending school at a temporary space while they await the completion of their new school, now under construction in the Lynn Highlands.

These founding students share a set of core values, on which their school is based: *Courage, Excellence, Grit, Team & Family, and Zest*. Most of them have been at KIPP since they joined KAL Middle School in fifth grade. Many of them shared a common thread back then, too: the desire NOT to attend KIPP, and their family's insistence that they do.

This was the case for KAL Collegiate ninth-graders Walner Duran and Michelle Mendez. Mendez recalls how she felt as a potential fifth-grade KIPPster on Lottery Day in March of 2006.

“I was nervous for two reasons: If my name got picked, I didn't know what I was getting myself into. And if I didn't get picked, I knew my mom would feel really sad,” she said.

Mendez and her mom moved here from the Dominican Republic when Michelle was six. They would not have

imagined at that time that Michelle would attend middle school for 10 hours a day, be an honor roll student for four consecutive years, and be determined to attend Columbia University in the fall of 2015. Nor did they imagine Michelle would be one of 96 students making history by founding a new KIPP high school.

“I want to go to New York City because we went there on our seventh-grade trip, and I really liked it. I remember someone once told me – if you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere – and so I will,” Mendez said.

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Duran learned about KIPP through his sister, Wildy – who was a member of KAL Middle School's founding fifth-grade class in 2004. As a sibling, Duran didn't have to go through the lottery process. Still, he was apprehensive.

“I was intimidated by the work and the long days,” he said.

Four years later, he looks back on his experience at KIPP as a positive. “It sounds cliché, but I would tell a fifth-grader

coming to KIPP it might seem all bad, but it's good for you.”

A stellar student, Duran takes pride in being a KIPP Founder. When asked what he thought about the new building slated to open in August 2012, he gave a simple and enthusiastic thumbs up.

“The reason we founded the school is to keep our promise to our kids of college graduation,” says Founding Principal Drea DeAngelo.

With 109 KIPP schools serving more than 32,000 students in under-served communities nationwide, the graduation rate for kids attending KIPP is quadruple that of their peers. But that still isn't high enough.

“Our goal is for our kids to graduate from college at the same rate as kids from affluent communities – 82%. We will continue to found excellent schools until we reach that goal,” said Caleb Dolan, Executive Director of KIPP Massachusetts.

They are well on their way, with the new facility in Lynn opening next fall (to ultimately serve 850 students in grades 5-12), and an additional charter approved to build a K-8 KIPP Boston.

For now, however, the 480 students at KIPP's two schools in Lynn continue to climb the mountain to and through college, all the while embodying *Courage, Excellence, Grit, Team & Family, and Zest*.

For more information about KIPP Academy Lynn visit www.kipplynn.org or call 781-592-1937.