

# PATHWAY TO SUCCESS:

KIPP Columbus takes seriously its mission to send kids to and through college



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KIPP Columbus achieves extraordinary outcomes for its students, predominantly students in poverty and students of color—a fact worth celebrating by itself. In 2015-16 in Ohio’s Urban Eight cities, KIPP Columbus was in the top five percent of all schools (district and charter) on student growth and among the very best (top 3 percent) in Columbus. But it’s not just KIPP’s academic data that are impressive. KIPP Columbus, led by Hannah Powell and a visionary board, has a rare knack for forging powerful partnerships at every turn—ones that strengthen KIPP students, their families, and the entire community near its campus. This year, KIPP launched an early learning center in partnership with the YMCA of Central Ohio to serve infants, toddlers, and pre-school aged youngsters. In a neighborhood lacking high-quality childcare and early learning opportunities, it’s an investment not just for KIPP students, but for the community at large. KIPP Columbus also partners with the Boys and Girls Club of Columbus, Battelle Memorial Institute, and other community organizations.

This profile is about KIPP graduate Steve Antwi-Boasiako, an immigrant and first-generation college student now attending Vanderbilt University, whose entire family has been uplifted by the school. His story illustrates the depth of KIPP’s commitment to students’ long-term success. The “KIPP Through College” program tracks data on what colleges turn out to be a good fit for students (many of whom are first-generation college-goers), assists families with applications and financing information, and even partners with 83 colleges and universities nationally so that cohorts of KIPP students improve their odds of successful completion. In a world where just nine percent of low-income students attain a four-year college degree, KIPP students’ attainment rate (44 percent) is truly remarkable, and even ten percentage points higher than that of the population at large (34 percent). In reading Steve’s story, KIPP Columbus’s mission to “prove what’s possible” truly comes to life. Indeed, his remarkable trajectory reminds us that not only will students meet our expectations when we place them high, but will often exceed them beyond our wildest hopes.

— JAMIE DAVIES O’LEARY  
Senior Ohio Policy Analyst  
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# PATHWAY TO SUCCESS



Steve Antwi-Boasiako

Steve Antwi-Boasiako has left an indelible mark at KIPP Columbus. When he enrolled in the public charter school's founding class in 2008, the 9-year-old had been in the country just a year. He had left his mother in Ghana to join his father, an émigré who wanted an American education for his children. Father and son saw each other for the first time when Steve and his sister walked off the plane.

Though he was a determined student, Steve had such weak English skills that when he took the sixth-grade Measures of Academic Progress reading and math assessment—a diagnostic exam—he couldn't have scored lower, testing in the first percentile.

Dustin Wood, then a KIPP teacher and now KIPP Columbus's Director of Operations, remembers following standard KIPP practice and sharing the results with Steve. He explained that if one hundred students had taken the test, ninety-nine would have scored higher.

"I don't remember the exact words he said," recalled Wood. "But he wasn't discouraged. He was going to make a point to beat the other 99 percent. A lot of other kids would have crumpled [the paper with the test results]. He used it as a motivating factor."

Two years later, in eighth grade, Steve did exactly what he had vowed, scoring in the 99th percentile in both reading and math on the MAP test. With KIPP's help, he was accepted at Columbus's elite St. Charles

Preparatory School and went on to graduate in 2016 with a 3.8 GPA. Intent on scoring well on the ACT, Steve took the college admission test five times, raising his score from a 24 to 31, besting the class average at his private college-prep high school by two and a half points.

Courted by both Vanderbilt University and The Ohio State University with full scholarships, Steve chose Vanderbilt. He wants to become an anesthesiologist and return to practice near his family in Columbus.

Steve and KIPP Columbus both have made remarkable achievements in a breathtakingly short span. Part of the national Knowledge is Power Program network of nearly 200 urban college-prep schools, the school parted ways with its original school leader just three months into the first school year in 2008. Hannah Powell, a Teach for America alumna, stepped in with a fierce determination that was apparent even to an academically overwhelmed and culturally befuddled child.

"She took charge," said Steve, who was perplexed by American school routines like walking in straight lines. "I remember she knew what she wanted to do. She said, 'We're going to behave, and we're going to learn.' She put everything in order. She had the vision."



Powell, who directs the only set of KIPP schools in Ohio, got to work immediately on improving school culture. “She was keeping an eye on everyone,” Steve explained, until she was certain that teachers had control and expectations were understood.

Students had 2.5 hours of homework each night. “The teachers gave us everything we could handle,” Steve said. “When I got to St. Charles, the homework wasn’t as much.”

In eight years, KIPP’s footprint near the low-income Linden neighborhood (its original location) has grown from that initial class in a former Columbus City Schools elementary building to a 130-acre college-like campus, built into the undulating grounds of a former city-run golf course. With ultra-modern, gleaming facilities, including a stand-alone science center, the four-building complex is unlike any charter school in Ohio. With new grade levels being added each year—the first high-school class of ninth-graders enrolled in August—the plan is to serve 2,000 Pre-K-12 students by 2020, up from this year’s 1,100.

While the KIPP Columbus faculty once had to go door-to-door to recruit students, the school now admits students based on a lottery; there are waiting lists for every grade, and the total list likely will top 2,000 would-be students this year. As with other KIPP schools, which have a national reputation for ensuring that high-needs students excel, nearly 90 percent of KIPP Columbus students are minorities and 100 percent qualify for free meals, which are

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— STEVE ANTWI-BOASIAGO

*KIPP Columbus elementary and middle school campus*

prepared on-site by a chef. Breakfast and lunch include fresh fruits and vegetables every day. Young students may participate in an afterschool program run by the YMCA of Central Ohio, and the Boys and Girls Club of Columbus offers programming for older students.

As compared to the performance of both traditional public and public charter schools, KIPP’s success is impressive. In 2014-15, it ranked in the top five of all schools in the state for academic growth. In 2015-16, KIPP and virtually all Ohio schools saw their state report card grades drop precipitously after the introduction of new, more rigorous tests. Along with more than a third of school districts in the state, KIPP got a D on the “Performance Index,” which measures absolute student proficiency.

On overall student growth, KIPP got an A, continuing its strong record of ensuring that students learn more than a year’s worth of material in spite of beginning significantly behind. Many educators would argue that growth is the most meaningful measure for schools serving high-needs students.

Steve credits KIPP, St. Charles, and his family for his academic success, noting that his parents allowed him to be at KIPP more than he was at home, often not returning until after 7 p.m. (Afterschool programming now ends at 6 p.m.) He also proudly notes that he never missed a day of school in his four years at KIPP or his four years at St. Charles.

"I could guarantee [he] was going to be in that seat every day," said Alex Thanos, who taught seventh-grade history and is now the school leader of KIPP's high school. "Every day he would do what was expected. I have no reservations about his going to a top-tier school and thriving."

In 2012, Steve's path to college was financially bolstered when he was one of six 8th-grade students in the large national KIPP network to receive the Doris Fisher KIPPster of the Year award, which came with a \$10,000 scholarship that he collected after graduating from high school.

Jim Lower, now principal of the all-male St. Charles, still remembers meeting Steve for the first time. "He's one you don't forget because he's knocking you out with his delivery," Lower said. "He stood there and talked about his experience at KIPP and how much he enjoyed it. He was so passionate and so well-spoken, especially for a young man in eighth grade. We were very fortunate that he chose St. Charles. He could have chosen many high schools."

Steve received financial aid to attend St. Charles and also benefitted from the state-funded EdChoice Scholarship, which subsidized his tuition because he lived in a neighborhood where he would have been assigned to a poor-performing public school.

Lower, who taught Steve Algebra I, said he was sure the transition to St. Charles was not always easy. "Steve is one of the best," Lower said. "He has a standard he wants to be held to. Even as he was getting knocked around and challenged by our school and curriculum, it's not within him to give up."

Steve said he excelled at St. Charles because of the school's "brotherhood." "We tended to be our brother's keeper."

Zel Demere, a friend at St. Charles who is majoring in molecular and cellular biology at Johns Hopkins University, said he often gave Steve rides home. "We're both African," said Demere, who was born in

Ethiopia and is two years older than Steve. "And we both came from not great neighborhoods. I'm sure that compared to some other friends at St. Charles, our lives were harder. But Steve was just a hard-working dude. He just overcame it because he wanted a better life for himself."

Cole Basler, another St. Charles friend who attends Ohio University, recalled that when his father asked for a tutor for his son, a teacher suggested Steve. "I would have trouble with my Latin homework, and he would be able to help me," Basler said. "I was also struggling in physics and chemistry. He helped me with that, too."

Steve's father, Akwasi Antwi-Boasiako, said that the first school he chose for his son and daughter, Georgina, after their arrival in Columbus turned out to be a failing charter school. Unhappy with the program, he said that when he heard about KIPP, he called the school and asked how he could enroll his children.

Though Georgina should have entered

sixth-grade, Antwi-Boasiako held her back so that she and Steve both could attend KIPP.

"Every day they had homework," said Antwi-Boasiako, who works at a computer warehouse and has become a naturalized citizen, as have Steve and Georgina. "You had a teacher to call. She or he could explain things. I loved that. It helped a lot."

Wood, KIPP Columbus's Director of Operations, recalled that Antwi-Boasiako was at the school frequently. "He was very humbled and very grateful for the experiences his kids were having. Half the time, he just wanted to be able to tell people 'Thank you.' You don't get that (kind of appreciation) much."

Steve and Georgina had a friendly competition in school regarding grades, and Steve insists he had to work harder, that Georgina is smarter than he is. KIPP assisted Georgina as well to choose a high-performing high school, and she was accepted at St. Francis DeSales Catholic High School. Today she attends Ohio State on a full scholarship and plans to major in neuroscience.



Both Steve and Georgina have stayed in touch with KIPP faculty, including Powell and Jess Reback, KIPP's Manager of College Access.

Reback, whose responsibilities include tracking down students who KIPP had in middle school to make sure they have filled out their college applications and FAFSA financial aid forms, recalls that on a snow day last year, she got a text message from Steve asking her for help with his college essays. He went to KIPP and spent the day perfecting them.

"I think it's pretty cool," he said, "that they didn't say, 'You got to high school; now you're on your own.'" "

In his Vanderbilt essay, he wrote, "My journey to be successful was not a one-man expedition. My

teachers, my sister, and parents inspired and helped me persevere through all the challenges that came my way. I now understand the gravity of what it means to achieve the American Dream that my father described so many years ago."

Three years ago, 16 years after her husband left for the States and six years after Steve and Georgina arrived in Columbus, Theresa Antwi-Boasiako joined her family. Two years ago, Nana Agyeman Antwi-Boasiako was born.

"Yes," Steve said emphatically about his brother, "he will be going to KIPP."

## KIPP Columbus

**Home District:** Columbus City Schools

**Enrollment:** 1,128

**Grades Served:** K-3 and 5-9

**Executive Director:** Hannah Powell

**Director of Operations:** Dustin Wood

**Primary School Leader:** Justin Schulze

**Elementary & Middle School Leader:** Ashley Ferguson

**High School Leader:** Alex Thanos

**Mission:** KIPP Columbus will create a system of schools where students develop the intellectual, academic, and social skills needed to understand and take action on issues they encounter in everyday life. By establishing a rigorous, safe, and personalized learning environment, KIPP Columbus will foster a culture of responsibility and service and empower all students to become active and engaged citizens.

**Opened:** 2008

**Percent Economically Disadvantaged:** 100%

**Percent Non-White:** 97%

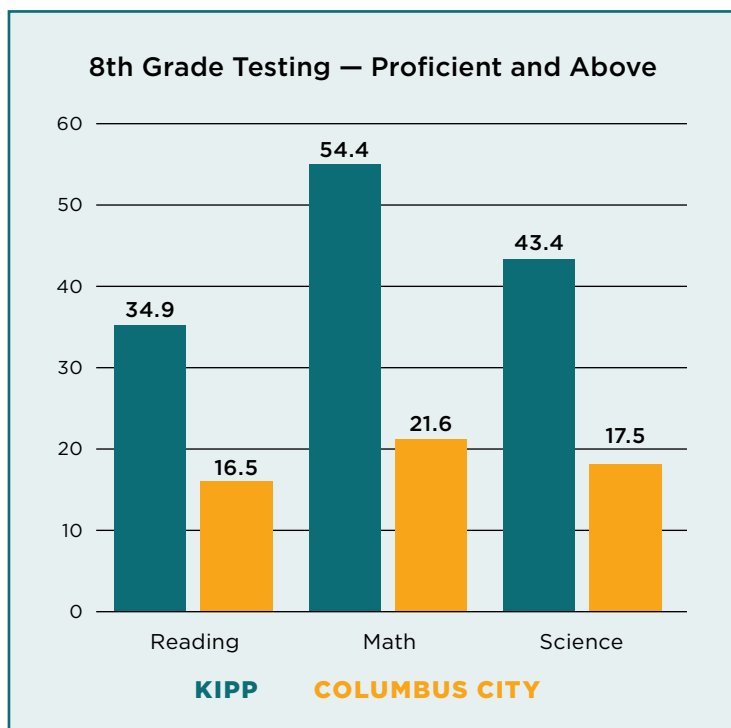
**Performance Index Grade:** D

**Value Added Overall Grade:** A

**Value Added Component Grade:** B

**Other Highlights**

- Received the 2015 Momentum Award from the State Board of Education for exceeding expectations on student growth



Source: Performance data comes from Ohio's 2015-16 interactive Local Report Cards. Enrollment data and grades served are for the 2016-17 school year.

- Ranked in Top 25 "High Performing Schools" (by Thomas B. Fordham Institute) based on 2015-16 report card results
- KIPP Columbus class of 2016 had 90% college matriculation rate and received over \$1 million in scholarships and grants
- Clean and excellent audits from Ohio Auditor of State for the past five years

