



Grantee Profile

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| Organization: | YES Prep - Houston   |
| Program:      | Charter School   |
| Grants:       | >\$7.1 million - multiple grants                                       |
| Activities:   | Enrollment expansion and data-driven system for Performance Management |
| Impact:       | ~2,100 students  |

## YES Prep: Achieving 100 Percent College-readiness in Houston's Low-Income Urban Core

Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Rice, Stanford, Texas A&M, University of Texas, Vanderbilt and Yale are just some of the more than 215 colleges and universities across the nation that have already accepted YES Prep graduates. That doesn't seem remarkable until you consider that most YES students enter the charter school in the sixth grade at least one grade level behind in math and English; yet 100 percent of YES Prep graduating seniors are accepted into college and 91 percent of YES alumni have received or are working on their degrees.

The charter school's exceptional track record with a student population that is 80 percent economically disadvantaged, 95 percent minority, and 88 percent first generation college-bound is summed up by the school's commitment to do "Whatever It Takes" to help students succeed.

Founded in 1998, YES Prep is a free, open-enrollment public school system that prepares its students for college graduation through a comprehensive and rigorous academic model that mandates a longer school day, Saturday classes, a summer school program, and acceptance by a four-year college in order to receive a high school diploma. Teachers, students and parents actually sign yearly contracts that help foster the YES Prep culture of excellence. Currently, five YES Prep campuses in the Greater Houston area serve 2,100

low-income students from 80 zip codes and 22 school districts in Harris County. Students are selected by lottery and the wait list varies between 400 to 500 students.

Among the school's accolades, YES Prep is the only charter school system in Texas to earn the two highest Texas Education Agency ratings of Exemplary or Recognized for nine consecutive years. It is the only Houston school to be included in Newsweek's Top 100 High Schools list for the last two years, ranking 38th in the nation in 2007. Recently, US News and World Report also ranked YES Prep's Southeast campus 38th in the nation (using a different ranking system). And YES Prep has made the Texas Business and Education Coalition Honor Roll, a list of the top eight percent of public schools in Texas.

### Supporting Innovative Models in Quality Education

When the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation began conversations with the leadership of YES Prep in 2005, the foundation was impressed by the charter school's innovative model, consistently high success rate in student achievement, and commitment to expanding its enrollment while improving its performance management system. The foundation

has since awarded four grants to YES Prep totaling \$7.15 million towards those goals.

The first grant for \$1.8 million, in 2005, focused on expansion to fill out campus enrollments and increase the number of YES campuses. Each campus begins with the opening of a sixth grade class and grade levels are added each year as the campus matures. Only one of five campuses is fully grown with all grade levels 6-12. A second series of grants, initiated in 2006, totaled \$1.35 million and was dedicated to a unique co-location project, enabling YES Prep to open its fifth campus inside an existing Houston ISD high school. The largest grant, \$4 million, was given in 2007 to build an infrastructure to monitor performance quality across the growing school network and to continue enrollment and campus expansion plans.

YES Prep's long-term goals are to have a financially sustainable charter management organization within the next five to seven years; and ultimately to serve 10,000 students annually.

### **Expanding YES Prep's Nationally Recognized Model**

YES Prep holds community information sessions to ensure parents and students know what to expect and what is expected of them before submitting and application into the open-enrollment lottery. YES receives about three applications for every available spot. In 2005, the charter school embarked on a strategic growth plan to enroll more low-income students at a quicker pace into its highly successful and atypical 6-12 model.

Most days, school runs from 7:30 A.M to 4:30 P.M. After the morning meeting, students and teachers get to work. The core academic classes are divided into two two-hour blocks; one focused on humanities classes such as English and social studies, the second focused on math, sciences and technology. The extended study blocks enable students to concentrate and explore the connection between the grouped subjects. The student-teacher ratio averages 24:1, and the sixth and seventh grade classes are team taught to allow

more personalized attention for children lagging in reading and math.

In addition to core academics, students broaden their learning experiences with elective classes, enrichment activities including athletics and clubs, and one Saturday a month they attend off campus classes geared toward community service and volunteer projects. The summer program sustains learning momentum year round. And to instill good study habits and responsibility, any student who hasn't finished homework by the end of the school day must stay until 6 PM and be picked up by a parent.

YES Prep has equally high expectations of its exceptionally dedicated teaching staff. School leadership has put a great deal of study into the qualities that make effective teachers in YES's system and selects accordingly. It conducts its own teacher training and equips staff to be accessible and responsive to students after hours. Another benefit of the 6-12 model is that teachers have seven years to build strong mentoring and tutoring relationships with students and older students are encouraged to become mentors and tutors to the younger students.

Funding from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation is supporting YES Prep in its expansion, adding grades to existing campuses and translating its model across a broader system, including plans to transform its southeast campus, where there is a long wait list, into a modular "super campus" around YES Prep's Community and Athletic Center. The foundation has also enabled another exciting YES innovation and groundbreaking collaboration. The co-location a YES's fifth campus inside Houston ISD's Lee High School is providing unique opportunities for both school systems. While the schools maintain separate staff, curriculum and classes, there are opportunities to share facilities such as the computer and technology electives and explore possibilities for migrating best practices between the two systems.

YES Prep had done some initial work on a performance management system, but recognized the technology had deficits in collecting and

tracking data. Significant funding from the Dell family foundation aimed at Performance Management is providing the opportunity for YES Prep to develop a first-class integrated performance measurement system with technology that will deliver the best possible value and infrastructure for future expansion.

YES is beginning the first phase of the project, performing the necessary assessments and analysis over the next 12 to 18 months to define a roadmap for implementation.

## **Outlook**

In May 2008, the largest class of seniors to date will graduate from YES Prep. With support from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, when the existing five campuses are fully grown YES will serve about 4,000 students. The charter school's ultimate goal is to add campuses to serve 10,000 students, without compromising the culture of excellence or quality of education on which its results, and reputation, are built. YES believes that with a school system serving 10,000 students annually, it will triple the number of low-income students graduating from college. It is hoped that through the character instilled by YES's community service program, those graduates will come back home to improve the quality of life in their communities and dramatically change the economic profile of Houston's urban population. For additional information, visit [www.yesprep.org](http://www.yesprep.org).