

# Blytheville Courier News (Blytheville, AR) – "Blytheville is one of three communities in Arkansas still under consideration for a KIPP School."

*By Donna Hilton*

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Blytheville is one of three communities in Arkansas still under consideration for a KIPP School.

KIPP, which stands for Knowledge is Power Program, is a national network of free, open-enrollment public schools with a track record of preparing students in underserved communities for success in college and in life.

There are currently 82 KIPP Schools in 19 states and the District of Columbia.

The only KIPP School in a rural area that is growing is the one in Helena, said Steve Mancini, KIPP's national spokesman.

The two other communities being considered for a new KIPP Middle School are West Memphis and Pine Bluff.

KIPP Delta will select the location of its new school by a competitive application process that will measure such factors as community support, parent demand and availability of facilities and funding. Today, KIPP Delta is making available a request for proposals (RFP) to leaders and organizations in these three Delta communities through its Web site at [www.kippdelta.org](http://www.kippdelta.org).

Maisie Wright, one of 17 KIPP Fisher Fellows for 2009-10 will be the leader of the new school, Mancini said.

The Fisher Fellowship offers educators a year-long program which prepares them for founding new KIPP schools. The fellowship involves intensive summer coursework in an academic setting, residency at KIPP Schools and individual coaching from experienced KIPP staff.

Wright most recently served as a math and science teacher at KIPP Delta College Preparatory School in Helena.

Most of the teachers at KIPP schools are part of "Teach For America," a two-year program to help bring the most talented young teachers into underserved areas.

"I am so pleased that Maisie Wright will be the leader of Arkansas's first KIPP Delta school outside of Helena," said Scott Shirey, executive director of KIPP Delta Public Schools. "Ms. Wright was an outstanding teacher at KIPP Delta College Prep and she has the skills and knowledge to ensure that all of the students at her new school will reach their academic potential."

Wright's training will help KIPP Delta reach its goal of having 12 KIPP schools in up to four Arkansas Delta communities by 2019, which will collectively double the number of college-ready seniors in the region. Wright got her start in education as a corps member with Teach For America in the Delta after graduating from Cornell University in 2006.

"I'm honored to be accepted into the Fisher Fellowship, where I will receive invaluable training and mentoring to lay the groundwork for opening a high-performing public school in the Delta," Wright said.

"I am looking forward to the year ahead and to building my school from the ground up in 2010."

"After a seven-year track-record of success, we are thrilled that KIPP Delta is poised to expand outside of Helena," said Teach For America executive director Ron Nurnberg. "Scott Shirey and the other KIPP principals are part of a growing number of Teach For America alumni who are choosing school leadership and the Delta as their long term home."

KIPP Schools share a core set of operating principals known as the five pillars. They are high expectations, choice and commitment, more time, power to lead and focus on results.

KIPP students are in school longer than other students, typically from 7:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. weekdays and some Saturdays, and for three weeks during the summer.

KIPP Delta has raised nearly \$5 million dollars towards its goal of having \$8 million by 2013 to support operational growth for its first phase of expansion.

Recent donations to KIPP Delta include \$1.5 million from the Walton Family Foundation and \$447,500 from the Louis Calder Foundation, which will support the KIPP Delta Elementary Literacy Academy.

The Walton Family Foundation matching grant will help KIPP Delta with start up and infrastructure costs associated with expanding to a wider region, including transportation for students who are in remote rural locations. To help seed further fundraising, The Walton Family Foundation will match any funds that KIPP Delta raises for three years as

long as the match does not exceed the grant amount for that year.

“We wanted to support KIPP Delta’s expansion because of its strong academic success and its talented leaders and teachers,” said Kathy Smith, senior program officer for Arkansas Education Reform Initiatives at the Walton Family Foundation. “We are excited that Wright will be moving into a leadership position and we look forward to seeing how KIPP Delta will transform the educational landscape for underserved students across the region.”

In 2000, Doris and Donald Fisher, co-founders of Gap, Inc., partnered with KIPP co-founders Feinberg and Dave Levin to replicate the success of KIPP’s first two schools by recruiting, training and supporting new KIPP principals.

The 2009 Fisher Fellows class is diverse and has strong education qualifications. About 60 percent of the Fellows are people of color, the most diverse since the program started in 2001. In addition, 70 percent of the total applicant pool identified themselves as people of color, an important number, as 96 percent of KIPP students are African-American or Latino/Hispanic. This class of Fellows also has a record number of alumni from Teach For America (70 percent). All three of KIPP Delta’s current school leaders, including Shirey, are Teach For America alumni.

The new KIPP school will build on KIPP Delta’s growing reputation for academic excellence. KIPP Delta College Preparatory School, the first KIPP school in the region, served 260 students in grades five through eight. In spring of 2008, 86 percent of KIPP Delta College Prep’s eighth-graders scored proficient or advanced on the Arkansas Benchmark Exam in math, compared to 56 percent of students across the state. Last year, KIPP Delta College Prep was one of only three Arkansas schools to be named a 2008 Blue Ribbon School by U.S. Department of Education.

This summer, Amanda Johnson is opening KIPP Delta Elementary Literacy Academy in Helena to begin preparing students for college as early as kindergarten. The new KIPP elementary school will start with roughly 50 kindergartners and 50 first grade students, and add a grade each year to become a full kindergarten through fourth grade elementary school in 2013, which will serve 375 students.

“KIPP Delta is setting a new standard for rural education in the Delta and across the country,” said KIPP Foundation CEO Richard Barth. “With KIPP expanding outside of Helena, there is tremendous opportunity ahead for students in the Delta to reach excellence and climb the mountain to college.”