

UME Preparatory Academy's Parent Equipping Program, According to Our Charter

As a vital component of the university method of education, the Parent Equipping Program is a unique facet of UME Prep Academy best understood by examining it in light of the Academy's unanimously approved charter with the state of Texas. What follows, is a section by section compilation of everything contained in the charter, which is UME Prep's legally binding contract with the state, regarding the intent, scope, and nature of the Parent Equipping Program; section headers, outline structure/numbering, etc. are all taken directly from the Academy's Charter (which can be accessed via a link on our website). Please note that any highlighting, annotations, etc. were not in the original charter, and please also note, that, where necessary, additional text has been included either before or after information regarding the Parent Equipping Program to more readily aid your review.

Statement of Need (Section 1)

Josh McDowell and Bill Hostetler have claimed that "the most important change in education in the last fifty years has not occurred in schools; it has occurred in the minds of **parents who no longer take responsibility for their children's education.**"¹ This statement rings true with the members of UME Prep's board.

The need for more parental responsibility and involvement in education is no secret, and there is no need to list even a sampling of the mountain of research as evidence. The NCLB Act *already* recognizes the value of parent participation in the formal education endeavor as is evidenced in its parent-involvement initiatives for schools, districts, and state education agencies. We prefer to focus instead on a few statements made in the introduction of a U.S. Department of Education report on "Engaging Parents in Education" that assert that "a strong connection between parents and educators does not come about automatically" and that "both parties [school and parents] may need to learn new roles and skills and develop the confidence to use them."²

Unfortunately, many parents today are struggling to devote the time necessary to involve themselves in their children's educational journey. They fail to grasp the importance of their role in raising their children to be successful students in the 21st century, or they lack the knowledge, the confidence, or the circumstances they need to do so effectively. As the Department of Education puts it,

*Although NCLB recognizes that parents are an important resource, mining that resource can be difficult. Parents who are committed and confident enough to get involved, make the necessary time to do so, recognize intuitively where and how they are needed, are prepared to meet the need, and are ready to step up as leaders – these parents are like gold: highly valuable, but far from common.*³

¹ Hostetler, B., & McDowell, J., *Right from Wrong: What You Need to Know to Help Youth Make Right Choices* (p.41). Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994.

² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, *Engaging Parents in Education: Lessons from Five Parental Information and Resource Centers*, Washington, D.C., 2007.

³ Ibid; emphasis added.

UME Preparatory Academy's Parent Equipping Program, According to Our Charter

One result is that “many [states, districts, and schools] find it challenging to increase the rates and types of parent involvement.”⁴

In response to this need, UME Prep plans to develop a Parent Equipping Program (PEP), led by the Dean of Parent Programs, that will offer to interested parents the information and support they need

- To create a home environment that enhances the cultivation of a strong academic work ethic in their children,
- To function more effectively as a learning coach for their children in specific academic disciplines, and
- To communicate more productively (and proactively) with school staff.

In short, the PEP is intended and will be designed to help UME Prep meet the challenge of increasing the rates, types, and quality of parent involvement.

UME Prep also recognizes, however, that not all students will come with the same academic abilities or background and that not all parents will be able to actively participate in their child's educational experience.

Together, these three key structural elements find expression through the following major program components:

- **A rigorous academic instructional program** permeated with high expectations.
- A blend of face-to-face and computer or technology-aided classroom instruction, using **reduced instructional hours arranged in a generally traditional university-model scheduling format.**
- An optional **Parent Equipping Program (PEP)** coupled with a **Tutorial and Guided Studies (TaGS)** program, mandatory for students as indicated by their revealed need.

In order to get a clearer picture of how these three elements work together, one can consider a typical university schedule where a student might take three classes on one day and perhaps two classes on another day in a MWF and TTh format. A college student is not typically enrolled for 7-8 hours a day like a typical elementary, middle, or high school student. Instead, college students are in class for less time, and then expected to complete higher levels of homework or projects in preparation for their next class time. They are expected to have a quality work ethic and be diligent in their studies. At UME Preparatory Academy, *students will be enrolled for a minimum of 4 hours (240 minutes of instruction) a day*, and the time they are not in class, they will be doing additional school work, as directed by their teachers, ideally under the supervision of their parent or legal guardian. ***We will help equip the parents and legal guardians (through the Parent Equipping Program) to engage their children according to the grade and subject where their child is enrolled.*** For almost two decades, we have seen this approach succeed in the private school arena. And for those students who do not have enough help at home and who are struggling, we will have a well-designed Tutorials and Guided Studies (TaGS) program on-campus that students can attend in order to ensure that all students are successful.

The school may develop any number of additional student activities or family and community services, but these three key structural elements represent the essential core of UME Preparatory Academy. **More importantly, together these components will help our students become more capable and independent while simultaneously acquiring firm grounding in core academic knowledge and so will enhance the academic outcomes for students at both the pre-collegiate and postsecondary levels.**

⁴ Ibid.

UME Preparatory Academy's Parent Equipping Program, According to Our Charter

Enhanced Academic Outcomes for Students: Indirect Impact

The University-Model of Education employed by UME Preparatory Academy offers additional indirect promise for enhanced academic outcomes and benefits for students.

Potential Impact for Parents. As noted above, ample research supports the common-sense principle that, in general, children perform better and learn more when they enjoy the active support of their parents. UME Prep seeks to incorporate parents into the educational process in a positive and proactive way; this is one of our model's greatest strengths. Such a goal—when realized in harmony and accordance with state guidelines—has broad implications relative to Texas' mission for its public education system and for educational quality overall. This component, integral to the University Model of Education, will directly enhance the academic outcomes for many of our students. It will also afford UME Prep the opportunity to serve as a laboratory for developing effective Parent Equipping Programs that, once fully articulated, can be made available to other schools, regardless of student population and demographics or campus location and type. In this way, UME Prep hopes to enhance indirectly academic outcomes for students within our community and across the state.

Vision (Section 2)

The Players

Of course, the child does not stand alone, nor could he or she be expected to achieve much without adult guidance. Parents have an early and especially profound impact on the beliefs, values, life habits (character qualities), and general linguistic fluency of a child and therefore on his or her later options, choices, and achievements, both in school and beyond. Parents are the first and most influential teachers a child will have, and the home is his or her first classroom. The impact of the home on a child's success in and beyond his or her formal academic education cannot be overestimated: many of the differences in achievement among children in the same classroom can be traced back to the influence of parent training. Soo Kim Abboud and her sister, after describing the disproportionate academic success that Asian-American students experience, make this point explicitly: "The reason that Asian students outperform their peers in the classroom has nothing to do with how they are born and everything to do with how they are raised."⁵

⁵ *Top of the Class: How Asian Parents Raise High Achievers—and How You Can Too* (New York: Berkley Books, 2006), p. 2; emphasis is original. Sociologist Richard E. Nisbett also emphasizes the connection between cultural values and practices on the one hand and academic achievement on the other, in *Intelligence and How to Get It: Why Schools and Cultures Count* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2009), especially in chapters eight and nine. Given that the family is the first and most significant means of enculturation, by implication this highlights the impact family values and practices have on educational accomplishment. One can also infer much the same from the National Endowment for the Arts Research Report #47, *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (2007, Retrieved from <http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead.PDF>; last accessed January 15, 2010). On p. 11 the study notes that "American families are spending less on books than at almost any other time in the past two decades," and that "[t]he number of books in a home is a significant predictor of academic achievement." A reasonable assumption here is families invest money in those things that they value, so by implication one that spends less on books is less likely to value reading than one that spends more. A second reasonable inference is that the children of families that value reading typically enjoy higher rates of academic success.

UME Preparatory Academy's Parent Equipping Program, According to Our Charter

By intentionally incorporating more parental involvement into the process, our innovative model exemplifies sound educational philosophy and sound (if informal) pedagogy at a level that is often inaccessible to more conventional models of education.

Schools also contribute in significant ways to a child's training, but their role is more focused and limited.

The Process

UME Preparatory Academy's general school structure reflects the beliefs and values described briefly above. **Utilizing an innovative design—the University Model of Education (UME)—that clearly distinguishes us from more conventional schools, we seek to work in close partnership with parents; we see our institution as only one of the critical players in the process.** The values, beliefs, character qualities, and linguistic fluency that parents instill in their children forms both the foundation and the context for the knowledge and skills we strive to impart. We believe that the parent-child and school-parent relationships must be cultivated throughout the years of pre-collegiate education in order to derive maximum benefit from the process. **Because of that, UME Preparatory Academy has built into its basic institutional model a program—the Parent Equipping Program (PEP)—designed to help and encourage parents to participate actively and productively in the education of their children.** The school, through its policies and practices, works to reinforce the same values, character qualities, and intellectual abilities that we encourage parents to teach in the home and assumes an even more active adult leadership role, through programs like the **Tutorial and Guided Studies (TAGS) program**, when poor student conduct or academic performance reveal a need for such added attention.

The Potential Problem and Our Solution

All parents face their own set of unique circumstances and challenges as they seek to raise and educate their children. As such, **parents are not always able to fulfill their educational responsibilities at home as effectively as others. In order to address this need, UME Preparatory Academy will develop and implement two major support programs, the Parent Equipping Program (PEP) and a Tutorial and Guided Studies program (TaGS).** The PEP will be designed to help parents understand and apply values and practices that encourage growth in positive character traits and foundational intellectual skills that support higher academic achievement. **It will also help improve school-family communication and coordination so that both parents and classroom teachers can work together more efficiently and effectively as co-stakeholders in the instructional process. Thus, the PEP is designed to help students indirectly by helping their parents in their role as learning coaches.**

b) Discuss the educational innovations that will distinguish this school from other schools.

UME Preparatory Academy will continually develop new and increasingly effective ways of educating the young. Our perspective is fundamentally innovative and opportunistic; the rapidly-changing world in which we live demands such an approach. Already there are a number of innovations at the very foundation of UME Prep which set it apart from most others. There are three distinguishing elements of the University-Model of Education that function together to develop a well-rounded, college-ready, productive member of society. These three key structural elements are:

UME Preparatory Academy's Parent Equipping Program, According to Our Charter

- A rigorous academic instructional program permeated with high expectations.
- A blend of face-to-face and computer or technology-aided classroom instruction, using **reduced instructional hours arranged in a generally traditional university-model scheduling format.**
- Adult guidance in the development of the academic work ethic (and study skills) which is facilitated by both the
 - **Optional Parent Equipping Program (PEP)** designed to encourage and equip parents, as well as the
 - **Tutorial and Guided Studies (TaGS)** program, necessary for students as indicated by their revealed need.

Parent Equipping Program: This is another **one of our more innovative components.** It is in essence an adult education program designed to help equip and encourage parents to become more effectively involved in their child's education. It is unique in that it is a proactive and relatively intense approach to not only involving parents, but also giving them conceptual and practical tools that help make that involvement more productive. As discussed in both Section 1 and immediately above, there is now wide recognition that positive parental involvement is one of the greatest untapped assets currently available to all schools, public or private. Often, as the Department of Education has pointed out,⁶ confusion on the part of both schools and parents regarding the best ways for parents to be fruitfully involved is a major problem. The PEP is designed to address this problem head-on and provide interested parents with the tools they need to develop a more effective school-parent partnership to the benefit of their children.

Student Goals (Section 4)

- a) **Describe the ways in which the school and community members will work together to ensure continuous academic growth for all students.**

Because UME Preparatory Academy highlights the personal responsibility of the student to a greater extent than do more conventional approaches, and employs a somewhat more compressed course schedule, the University Model utilized by UME Prep **naturally emphasizes and encourages a high level of cooperation between the school and other stakeholders, especially parents.** **In this model, the parent acts as a learning coach at home. In order to assist parents in fulfilling that responsibility more confidently, effectively, and efficiently, the school will offer a Parent Equipping Program.** This program will assist *interested* parents (it is not required) by providing them with practical help regarding the kind of home environment that most encourages academic achievement, specific ways in which they can coach their child in various disciplines and types of projects without, in effect, taking over the child's work and learning responsibilities, and productive ways of working with teachers and other school staff.

In addition to helping students develop a stronger academic work ethic, this close cooperation between school and parents will also facilitate

1. Earlier intervention when academic or conduct problems surface,
2. Greater coordination between school and parent efforts to address special student needs or interests, and

⁶ See, for example, footnotes 11-13 in Section 1.

UME Preparatory Academy's Parent Equipping Program, According to Our Charter

3. Greater parent and student independence in using community resources to amplify and extend the total educational experience since our schedule structure provides the family with more time to do so.

Educational Plan (Section 5)

Parent Equipping Program and Tutorial and Guided Studies

The development of a strong work ethic is one of our three most fundamental objectives. And, as discussed above, the use of the university-model instructional delivery format, designed to help students develop this work ethic, is one of our most innovative features. Because of that, we offer support for, instruction in, and opportunities for students to practice the key elements of a sound work ethic as a vital component of our educational program.

This support takes two basic forms. The first is indirect and optional. Believing that parental support and involvement offer benefits difficult to replicate through other avenues,⁷ we will offer a **Parent Equipping Program (PEP)** designed to help interested parents acquire knowledge and develop skills that will help them be better able to support their children's educational efforts. As currently conceived, the PEP will have three major emphases: 1) preparation for academic success in general, 2) practices and procedures supporting study in specific academic disciplines or grade levels, and 3) parent-school communications and cooperation. The PEP is described in greater detail below (cf. Section 5. d. and n.).

- a. Describe the educational program to be offered, including special education and bilingual education/English as a second language (BE/ESL).

TEKS EXAMPLES

Composition in English/Language Arts

Our **Parent Equipping Program (PEP)**, an optional information and skills-development program made available to interested parents, gives UME Prep another avenue for addressing priorities and problems in the critical area of composition. The development of linguistic fluency (both oral and written) is one of the two major emphases of the "general principles" component of the PEP. Home-based practices leading to greater skills in composition will likewise be a major component of the PEP's discipline-specific support emphasis. We feel that parents who embrace the role of learning coach in the home will be both better equipped and more inclined to adopt the values and practices we recommend and so will provide their children with further support for the development of writing skills.

⁷ Research has affirmed the great impact that the home environment and factors relating to the home environment have on a child's educational achievement. For example, in "The Benefits of Out-of-School-Time Programs," (from *Principal's Research Review*, 2:2 [March 2007], a publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals) Kirsten Miller notes that "[i]n a meta-analysis of research on school and teacher effects on student performance, Marzano (2000) found that school- and teacher-level factors account for approximately 20% of student achievement, whereas student characteristics—home environment, learned intelligence/ background knowledge, and motivation—account for 80% of the variance in student achievement" (p. 3). The clear implication here is that the home environment and factors strongly associated with the home environment (learned intelligence/background knowledge, motivation) has roughly four times more impact than the school itself on student achievement.

UME Preparatory Academy's Parent Equipping Program, According to Our Charter

- d) Describe strategies to ensure that the educational program will effectively prepare students to enter kindergarten on or above grade level and ensure a successful transition from prekindergarten into grade school.

UME Prep does not plan to offer pre-kindergarten instruction to students (kindergarten will be the entry-level grade). The school does, however, plan to help interested parents prepare their pre-kindergarten children for successful entry into its kindergarten. This will be done through the Parent Equipping Program (PEP). Participation in the PEP will be offered to all parents who have children enrolled in the school or who are planning to enroll children in the school.

As currently conceived, the PEP will have three major emphases: 1) preparation for academic success in general, 2) practices and procedures supporting study in specific academic disciplines or grade levels, and 3) parent-school communications and cooperation.

- General preparation will be focused on matters such as the impact of parental involvement, family values, and individual character on academic success on the one hand and approaches to cultivating a productive academic work ethic, general intellectual ability, and higher levels of linguistic fluency (including especially reading-readiness skills) in the students themselves on the other.
- Parent training in practices and procedures supporting study in specific academic disciplines will include matters such as general and specific (e.g., scientific) research methodologies, effective writing practices (and how parents can help students develop these without, in effect, doing student assignments for them), and the type and degree of parental input appropriate to the various stages of student development.
- Parent-school communications and cooperation will focus on practices and procedures designed to improve both.

With regard to the topic at hand, the school will offer PEP training that is specific to the needs of incoming kindergartners and their parents and designed to help students enter and participate in kindergarten successfully.

- f) Discuss the academic and enrichment support that will be provided to engage or reengage students in school.

Broadly speaking, there are two major types of support that will be offered to engage or reengage students in school. One will be additional assistance offered to the parents of struggling students. This assistance will be designed to help parents provide better academic support and encouragement at home; the school believes that parental support (in terms of both values and practices) is the primary engine for student success (especially in the earlier grades) and so will address the home climate and environment as one of its primary means for helping students be more engaged (and successful) in academic endeavors.

- j) Describe plans to provide personal attention and guidance to all students.

UME Prep's unique emphasis on parental involvement in the educational process (encouraged, but not required) will allow us to offer additional—and unique—personal attention and guidance to not only students, but also parents and *students through parents*. One staff member—the Dean of Parent Programs—will have special responsibility to oversee the Parent Equipping Program (PEP) and to function as a general liaison between parents and the school.

UME Preparatory Academy's Parent Equipping Program, According to Our Charter

i) Describe the extracurricular activities (e.g., athletics, clubs, and organizations), that will be offered.

UME Prep finds value in offering general fine arts and physical education classes for grades K-6th grade but does not plan to offer other extra-curricular activities at these grade levels. These areas serve as the primary outlet for the elementary grades with opportunities for expression through performances, field days, and art exhibits. Families will be encouraged to utilize community resources like YMCA and Upwards sports for further extracurricular activities if such activities are desired.

Once students enter 7th grade, the clubs and councils mentioned above are provided to the fullest extent possible with student involvement predicated on the maintenance of satisfactory academic performance. Due to the value of extracurricular activities, UME Prep will seek to offer them beginning in the first year of operation primarily through membership in the Texas Charter School Academic and Athletic League (TCSAAL). UME Prep does look forward to developing a robust extracurricular program that does not detract from academics or family time, but rather enhances them while developing a well-rounded student.

n) Describe any strategies to be used that will enhance parental or community involvement in the educational opportunities of the students.

The Parent Equipping Program (PEP) is one of UME Prep's most unique elements. As it is currently envisioned, the program will include seminars, suggested readings, and workshops, and may include other activities as the program develops. As space is available, some components of the PEP may be offered to the community at large and especially to the parents of prospective students.

There are three major emphases addressed by the PEP:

- General principles for developing a home environment that promotes learning and achievement,
- Practices that promote learning in specific disciplines, courses, or academic levels (i.e., grades), and
- Policies, practices, and procedures that promote achievement through improved parent-school coordination and cooperation.

The general principles component will address issues such as perspectives, values, and practices that build a learning-friendly environment. Nisbett, for example, points out that cultural values and practices can have a significant impact on both IQ and actual achievement and even notes that some cultures are more likely to produce "overachievers" than others.⁸ This, of course, is fully in keeping with the now commonplace understanding that higher expectations generally produce higher achievement. Nisbett and others⁹ argue that these same values and practices that characterize high-achieving cultures can be adopted effectively by any parents interested in seeing their children not only gain an impressive academic record but also—and more importantly—learn deeply significant knowledge and skills. The general principles component is the foundation and major emphasis of the PEP.

⁸ Richard E. Nisbett, *Intelligence and How to Get It: Why Schools and Cultures Count* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2009); see especially chapters eight and nine.

⁹ For example, in addition to Nisbett one may wish to consult William Bennett, Chester, E. Finn, Jr. and John T. E. Cribb, Jr., *The Educated Child* (New York: The Free Press, 1999); Jane M. Healy, *Endangered Minds: Why Children Don't Think—and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990); Soo Kim Abboud and Jane Kim, *Top of the Class: How Asian Parents Raise High Achievers—and How You Can Too* (New York: Berkley Books, 2006).

UME Preparatory Academy's Parent Equipping Program, According to Our Charter

Helping parents understand and apply practices in the home that help students achieve more in specific courses and disciplines is the second major emphasis of the PEP. Our primary purpose in this area is to help parents distinguish between assistance that helps students learn from that which hinders them, and to encourage parents to use those which are most fruitful. Some of the principles taught through this component of the PEP can be generalized to a major curriculum strand somewhat independently of grade level (e.g. general reading and writing skills at the secondary level) while others will be more applicable to specific courses or projects (e.g., appropriate help given at home for a science fair project).

The third component is very practical in nature and will include instruction on matters such as how to communicate effectively with school personnel, how to understand grading standards and rubrics, and so forth. Special emphasis will be placed on parents taking a proactive (rather than reactive) approach to matters such as tracking grades, supervising the completion of assigned work, providing timely and appropriate feedback to teachers, and arranging for conferences.

While not an explicit goal of the PEP, UME Prep also anticipates that training received through the program may also interest some parents in becoming teachers themselves. Should this happen, and they meet highly qualified requirements, these individuals will enter the profession with a very good understanding of the importance of positive parental involvement and the unique skills for fostering such involvement.

o) Describe plans for program evaluation and explain the ways in which results will be used to improve instructional programs for all students.

Our Parent Equipping Program (PEP), as a major component of our school plan, will also be evaluated on a regular basis. The same student performance data we use to evaluate our curriculum and instructional programs can be used indirectly to assess the effectiveness of the PEP. Basically, the performance data of students whose parents are more actively involved in PEP activities can be compared to that of students whose parents are relatively uninvolved to provide some sort of measure of the program's effectiveness. In addition, we plan to experiment with other forms of assessment, such as surveys or interviews, to evaluate the program's usefulness and effectiveness.

Special Needs Students (Section 6)

Unique Strength of UME Preparatory Academy

UME Preparatory Academy's innovative class scheduling and Parent Equipping Program will aid student achievement among special needs students due to the additional time with an equipped parent. Experience, data, and stakeholder feedback have shown, where this model has been employed for nearly 20 years in the private school realm, that parents welcome this approach because they are more empowered to work with their own children at home with the support (and collaboration) of the school. The certified special education coordinator will not only work with the students while at school,

UME Preparatory Academy's Parent Equipping Program, According to Our Charter

but will develop a working relationship with the willing parent (learning coach) to ensure a quality learning environment both at home and in the classroom.