



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Dec. 10, 2014

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CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF A NOBLE IDEA TO BETTER CHICAGO

Growing to 16 schools, network has positively impacted nearly 15,000 students

CHICAGO – Starting with holding classes in a lobby and a theater stage, the [Noble Network of Charter Schools](#) has grown immensely since opening its first school in 1999. Celebrating its 15th anniversary, Noble has surpassed 10,000 students at its 16 high schools throughout Chicago. Now the largest network of charter schools in Chicago, Noble is also academically successful as the home to eight of the top 10 open enrollment public high schools in Chicago, according to [ACT scores](#) recently released by Chicago Public Schools. Overall, nearly 15,000 students have been or are currently being served by Noble.

Noble’s success can be charted by the accomplishments of its students, who are three times more likely to earn a four-year college degree than their peers. In addition, Noble’s four year-high school graduation rate is 87.3 percent – higher than both the state and national graduation rates.

“When we started Noble, we had one goal in mind – to set up our students for success in life,” said Noble Superintendent and CEO Michael Milkie, who founded the network with his wife and fellow teacher, Tonya. “Noble has become a national leader in school culture and attracting excellent teachers.”

In 1999, Noble Street College Prep opened with 126 students who experienced longer school days, a rigorous curriculum, and a focus on personal and social development. In 2003, 85 percent of the first graduating class pursued a postsecondary education. Nearly 5,000 students have graduated from Noble since then, and this year’s senior class of 1,600 students will be the largest yet. Ninety percent of Noble’s graduates pursue two or four-year college degrees, which is directly contributing to the rising college enrollment rate in Chicago Public Schools.

“Support for Noble students doesn’t end at high school graduation. At Noble, we’re committed to helping our students complete their college degree and find a productive career,” Milkie said.

Brenda Cora, Rowe-Clark Math and Science Academy principal, is proof of Noble’s commitment. A member of Noble’s first graduating class, Cora is also the first alum to serve as a principal at a Noble school.

“I may have left Noble briefly to go to college, but it never left me,” Cora said. “Noble is a close knit family. Even when I was in college and struggled culturally, I had someone from Noble who was reaching out to me. That ongoing support from Noble was important and really made a difference to me.”

That’s the difference Cora is committed to making in the lives of her students.

“My goal is to prove to students that their struggles outside the classroom don’t have to stop them from succeeding in school,” said Cora. “Fifteen years ago Noble taught me the valuable lesson of perseverance. We work every day to teach our students that same lesson.”

Cora isn’t the only Noble alum who has returned to work with the network. Angelica Alfaro, also from the inaugural class, is the youngest of five children and was the first in her family to graduate from college. After earning a degree from the University of Illinois, Champaign, Alfaro returned to Noble as an alumni coordinator and volleyball coach. Today, Alfaro is Noble’s advocacy manager, teaching community members and parents about the school’s mission and goals.

“I want families and students to understand how much of an impact Noble can have on their lives,” Alfaro said. “Noble played a critical role in setting me up to not only graduate from high school and college but also to become a more respectful individual focused on giving back to others. I’m a better person because of Noble.”

Resources for students expanded this fall thanks to a \$3 million commitment from the Pritzker Foundation and the Pritzker Traubert Family Foundation to fund a college education for all of Noble’s undocumented seniors. The Pritzker Access Scholarship will be a substitute for federal and state financial aid that are typically available to low-income students, but not to undocumented students. In collaboration with financial aid directly from colleges, the Pritzker Access Scholarship will help close the financial gap often preventing these hard-working students from entering and finishing college in pursuit of the American Dream.

“In the years to come, we’re excited to grow our Noble community in hopes of bettering education for all of Chicago’s students,” Milkie said.

About Noble

Noble (www.noblenetwork.org) is Chicago’s largest and highest performing network of public high schools. In 2014, Noble campuses are eight of the top 10 open enrollment public high schools in Chicago and more than 90 percent of graduates matriculated to college this year. Noble is a non-selective network serving more than 10,000 students throughout Chicago at 16 campuses. Noble campuses are located in some of Chicago’s highest need communities and serve a student population that is 89 percent low-income and 98 percent minority. As a public non-selective high school, there are no testing requirements for enrollment at any of Noble’s campuses. Noble has a waitlist of over 6,000 families and plans to continue expansion to meet this demand.

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