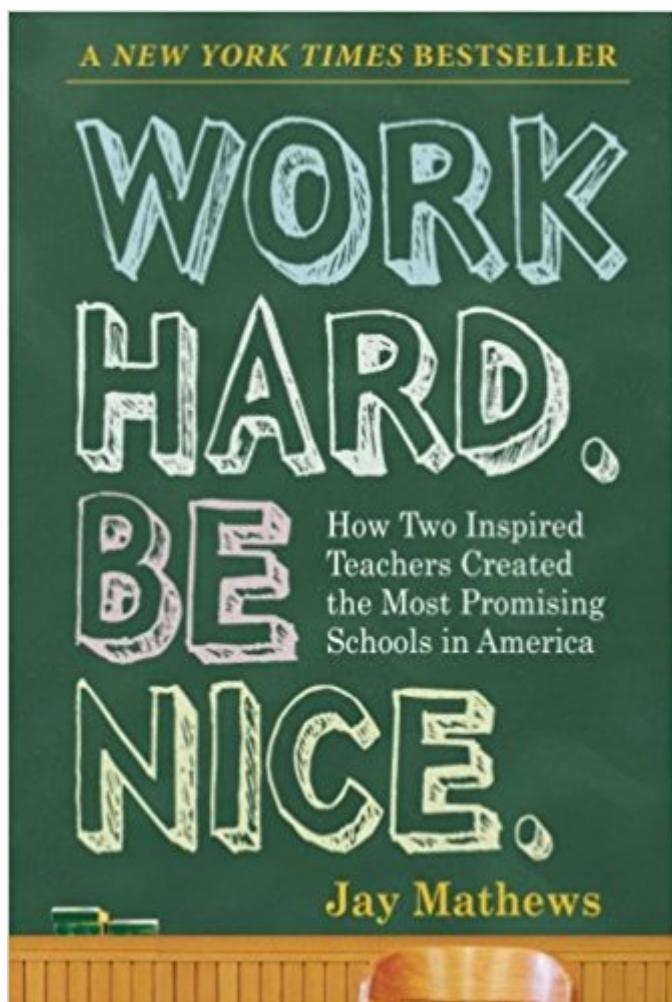


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# Work Hard. Be Nice.: How Two Inspired Teachers Created The Most Promising Schools In America



## Synopsis

When Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin signed up for Teach for America right after college and found themselves utter failures in the classroom, they vowed to remake themselves into superior educators. They did that-and more. In their early twenties, by sheer force of talent and determination never to take no for an answer, they created a wildly successful fifth-grade experience that would grow into the Knowledge Is Power Program (Kipp), which today includes sixty-six schools in nineteen states and the District of Columbia. Kipp schools incorporate what Feinberg and Levin learned from America's best, most charismatic teachers: lessons need to be lively; school days need to be longer (the Kipp day is nine and a half hours); the completion of homework has to be sacrosanct (Kipp teachers are available by telephone day and night). Chants, songs, and slogans such as "Work hard, be nice" energize the program. Illuminating the ups and downs of the Kipp founders and their students, Mathews gives us something quite rare: a hopeful book about education.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Many people in the United States believe that low-income children can no more be expected to do well in school than ballerinas can be counted on to excel in football, begins Washington Post education reporter Mathews (Escalante: The Best Teacher in America). He delves into the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) and follows the enterprise's founders, Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, from their days as young educators in the Teach for America program to heading one

of the country's most controversial education programs running today. Luckily for many low-income children, Feinberg and Levin believed that with proper mentors, student incentives and unrestrained enthusiasm on the part of the teachers, some of the country's poorest children could surpass the expectations of most inner-city public schools. Mathews emphasizes Feinberg and Levin's personal stakes in the KIPP program, as they often found themselves becoming personally involved with the families of their students (in one case Feinberg took the TV away from a student's apartment because the student's mother insisted that she could not stop her child from watching it). Mathews innate ability to be at once observer and commentator makes this an insightful and enlightening book. (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"Mathews does a smart, respectable job here. Frankly elucidating the major struggles and roadblocks inherent in attempting to reform how underprivileged children are taught, he nonetheless leaves readers convinced of the truth in Levin's idealistic statement on his Teach for America application: 'an educator could change lives.' A grand example of humanitarianism in the classroom: Naysayers who believe there's no hope for America's inner-city schools haven't met Feinberg and Levin."--Kirkus (USA Today) A vivid account of two young men who transform themselves from 'terrible' first-year teachers into visionaries. "USA Today" "The improbable story of how KIPP was founded in 1994 by David Levin and Michael Feinberg, two young Teach for America alumni in Houston, is thrilling and worthy reading." "Slate" "A lively account of the way two young guys with more passion than knowledge overcame bureaucratic and financial barriers, garnered knowledge from experienced teachers, and made those ideas and techniques core KIPP ideas. Mathews makes his book as entertaining as any novel by weaving personal and professional stories and by surrounding his two stars with interesting characters." "World magazine"

Recommended to teachers wanting to know more about good teaching practices and understand the KIPP charter schools in depth. I found that this book corrected a lot of the misinformation I had about KIPP and charter schools in general. I especially liked that the book was not simply applauding founders, Dave Levin and Mike Feinberg, but rather showing their journey through the lens of who they were warts and all, and who they even olives to become in their creation of the KIPP network. They learned from mistakes and devoted time to reflection - doing more of what worked well and willing to change what did not work or prove to be motivating. One of my takeaways about

the KIPP schools is the willingness of the educators and administrators to keep examining what is working and not working and act quickly to change it for the purpose of supporting the children. It's evident that the success of kids is paramount in the minds and hearts of the leaders, educators, and mentors at KIPP. I highly recommend this book!

First., I want to say I am not in the field of education. I got the book just based on the title. It is a winner. What an interesting book, written in a most entertaining style, regarding the field of intermediate school charter schools. Back in the day, when I was in school, there were no charter schools, and I was not in the least informed about them, and the promise that they hold. When I was in school, we were expected to behave in a very regimented way in school, never dreaming of talking in class, or even slouching in our seats! I realize that today, kids can behave in a much more casual way, i.e. texting in class, and talking back to teachers with impunity. These two teachers brought their enthusiasm and keen business sense into their classrooms, setting up a highly structured environment where inner city kids thrived. Not satisfied with the dismal prognosis of the poorest children in public school, they developed a program which succeeded in raising the level of their students to equal that of the best schools in their area. They then proceeded to multiply this success all around the country, until their KIPP schools are found in all corners of the land. If this is interesting to you, read it. You will enjoy it.

KIPP (KNowledge is Power Program) schools have received a lot of press recently. Malcolm Gladwell's best-selling book "Outliers," devotes a whole chapter to praise of KIPP's methods. A few years ago, the book "No Excuses" offered KIPP schools as a prime example of how poor and minority students can excel as well as those in the status quo. As a teacher, I have been long curious about KIPP schools, their backstory, and how they educate. This is that story. In Work Hard, Be Nice, a journalist tells the story of two Teach for America teachers, Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, who were dissatisfied with the public schools in which they taught. They created a small program (not a school, but a program within a school) based on the methods of some of their mentors. Students had longer days, more homework, "thinking skills," class, etc. As the program experienced overwhelming success, a program became a school, which became two schools, which became a charter, which became a nationally recognized name in charter schools. As a teacher, I cannot recommend this book highly enough. Not only does it tell a very inspiring story, but it also offers some great advice to teachers, as seeing KIPP's methods gives us clues on how to harness some of these methods in our schools. We see Feinberg, Levin, and the host of teachers

who joined them, experiment with different methods of discipline, instruction and motivation and get to see what worked and did not. I recommend this book not only to teachers, but those concerned with the difference between how education is and how it can be. There is even a discussion towards the end of the book (after KIPP's story has been well told) about the merits and demerits of KIPP methods and whether such methods could work in any but a charter school. Thus, this book would appeal not only to teachers, but those concerned with education policy. It may even restore some faith in the possibility of education!

The performance reviews of KIPP schools seem to be mixed, but their founders have a flagrantly biased account in this book. These two guys admittedly stole their teaching techniques, but Jay Mathews does a nice job of white washing the whole affair. If you're looking for tips on promising educational reform, I recommend you skip this book and look to the source: Rafe Esquith. He wrote a few books of his own and has some YouTube videos. Rafe's motto is Be Nice. Work Hard. Sound familiar?

Two self motivated, if not obsessive, hard-working people can in fact make lasting changes to lives of children through education. This book travels sequentially through the hard days that it took to start KIPP. TFA teachers will recognize the agony of long harrowing days when it seems as if beating one's head against a wall would be less painful. Honest and yet inspirational book.

I always love to read about schools where kids do well. This is one such story. It's the story of the KIPP program that began in Houston in 1995, started by two committed Teach for America teachers. Here's a brutal fact: If poor children are going to learn at the same rate as affluent children, they need more school days. Ugh. That hits me where it hurts. This is a brutal fact teachers can't bear. One of the perks of being a teacher is summers off. Summers kill poor children's achievement. Eek. So, give me another way we can improve student achievement without taking away our summers? Yep, KIPP has another answer: longer school days. Another brutal fact that we teachers can't bear. Please, give me something else? Well, KIPP teachers help kids with their homework...in the evenings! Eek. This is getting worse and worse. KIPP offers good answers to improving student achievement among poor children, but the answers are not easy.

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