

## YES Prep Public Schools: A Top 100 School for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Year in a Row

### The Top of the Class

By Barbara Kantrowitz and Jay Mathews

#### No Frills, and a Future

YES Prep's name, small size and strong AP program suggest a prestigious private school. Instead it is a public school, a hard-to-find collection of old portable classrooms on a horse farm in southeast Houston. The school has no gym. The basketball court is out on the parking lot. "My favorite fund-raising line is, we are the only basketball team that gets practice rained out," says founder Chris Barbic.

Barbic, 37, was a partying frat boy at Vanderbilt, looking for a purpose in life, when he tried volunteering at a neighborhood center in a poor part of Nashville. He found that he loved working with low-income children, and loved teaching, particularly the thrill of creating his own school. At YES Prep, 78 percent of the students in the sixth-through 12th-grade school are from low-income families. Now the head of four YES Prep schools in Texas, Barbic started with just a sixth grade at a Houston elementary school with a terrible reputation. Parents saw how much more their children were learning, through projects and energetic teaching as well as a longer school day. They showed up several hundred strong for a series of key meetings that won official approval for Barbic to get his own campus, and grow.



Students cannot get a diploma at YES unless they take at least one college-level course in the high school and get into at least one four-year college. Like Teach for America, Barbic recruits recent grads to teach at YES schools. One of his new faculty members is Patricia Hernandez, a 2006 Stanford graduate, who five years ago was valedictorian of YES's first graduating class. Says Barbic: "She is a living, breathing example of what we are trying to do."

### Quick Facts

#### YES Prep Southeast Campus

**2007 Rank:** 38<sup>th</sup> (88 in 2006)

**Low-Income Student Count:** 78%

**Next Highest Ranked Houston School:** 90<sup>th</sup>