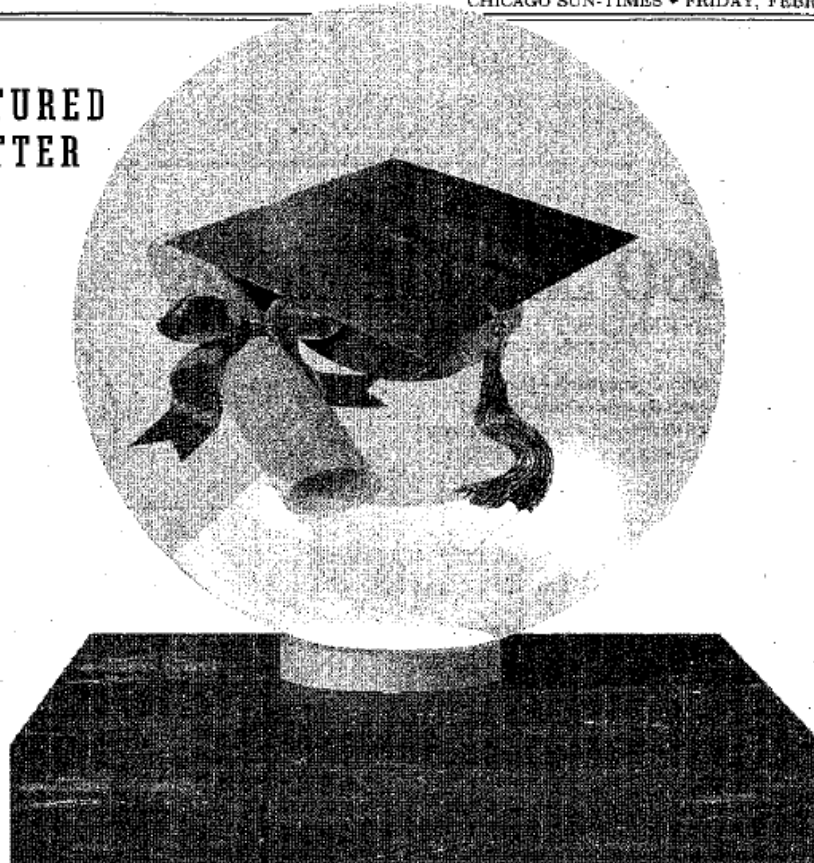


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Group helps kids see college in future

Esther Cepeda's commentary on Jan. 21, "Teach low-income students they can make college work," is heartily applauded. As Cepeda has realized, "For the struggling lower class, a college education is still an elusive door that promises to open opportunity to better jobs and standards of living..." Unfortunately, equally qualified students from poor families are far less likely to earn a bachelor's degree than students from high-income families.

In Chicago, where 85 percent of public school students are from low-income families, there is some good news. Chicago is taking action to visit elementary schools and talk to students about how to make college a reality. The city has a variety of programs such as alumni clubs and Working In The Schools that find adult professionals promoting learning and the vision of college to elementary students — planting the seed of awareness that it is reachable at

the earliest possible time.

On Feb. 28, the Illinois College Access Network will host its second-annual "I Know I Can" event. About 4,000 CPS third-graders will participate in a College Awareness Day that will bring more than 140 volunteers — education, business and civic leaders, undergradu-

Volunteers will talk with them about the need for educational excellence as early as third grade.

ate and graduate students, and other concerned adults — into third-grade classrooms to share the significance of making college an active goal.

Volunteers, wearing sweatshirts from their colleges, will read *I Know I Can*, a children's book on college awareness.

The volunteers will talk with the third-graders about their goals and the need for educational excellence even as early as third grade. They will also share their own college experiences. The students will receive a copy of *I Know I Can*, as well as a college souvenir. The Illinois College Access Network plans to grow and expand this program each year.

Young children, especially from lower-income families, also need to learn financial planning skills and recognize that college is affordable. The network is assisting in promotion of the 2006 "Chicago Money Smart Week" from May 1-6. The event will provide free programs for children and families, all aimed at increasing financial literacy and promoting the reality of college for those who work hard to prepare for it.

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