

For proof against the old saw “Those who can’t do, teach,” look no farther than Amanda Alpert Knight ’99. As the Chicago region’s executive director of Resources for Indispensable Schools and Educators, the former teacher never stops doing.

RISE is a national nonprofit organization that helps K-12 public schools in low-income communities attract experienced, talented teachers and retain them by improving working conditions. “You can have every piece of technology, every fancy book, a perfect curriculum, but if you have terrible teachers, kids are not going to succeed,” says Knight, who stepped into her role when RISE, founded in 2001, added Chicago last year to operations in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Knight traces her inspiration to become involved in education policy to Jonathan Kozol’s book *Savage Inequalities*, assigned by Joshua Miller, professor of government and law, in his introductory course on political theory. As a first-year student both disheartened and fired up by the book’s depictions of wildly disparate educational results in public schools, she began working with the Boys and Girls Club of Easton through the Landis Community Outreach Center. After graduation, she enrolled in Teach for America and taught for two years in an underprivileged neighborhood in Houston. She was named Special Ed Teacher of the Year.

With the encouragement of Michael H. Moskow ’59, then the president and CEO of the Chicago Fed, Knight earned a master’s degree in public policy at University of Chicago’s Harris School, where Moskow served on the visiting committee.

In 2003, armed with schooling, experience, and awards, she joined the Chicago Public Schools, where she served as director of planning and development in the Office of New Schools and as ethics adviser, among other roles. While with CPS, she earned school-principal certification at DePaul University, married her husband, Robert, and started a family. She was on maternity leave when a friend told her about RISE.

“The mission and vision piqued my interest. Again and again, working with both new and existing schools, I saw the need to improve how we retain our best teachers,” she says. On a typical day at RISE, she’s “like a mini-CEO,” building relationships in one-on-one meetings with principals, teacher leaders, and teaching applicants, as well as overseeing recruitment and managing budgets.

A self-professed Type-A personality, Knight is deeply engaged in education policy issues. She is cofounding the auxiliary board for Chicago International Charter School, which operates 12 neighborhood campuses serving more than 7,500 preschool-12th grade students, approximately 93 percent of whom are African American and Latino, mostly from homes with limited means. She observes, “The only way the education market is going to improve is with healthy competition. Charter schools provide that.”

In Chicago, Knight is back home, but her educational milieu of today is much different from that of her alma mater, suburban Lake Forest High. “I grew up in a place that had every opportunity in the world,” she says. “I have to do something to make opportunities for less fortunate kids.” □

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHUCK ZOVKO





Helping School Children Succeed

AMANDA ALPERT KNIGHT '99
RUNS THE CHICAGO OFFICE OF RISE.

BY DAN EDELEN