

Ali Academy Greatness. Within. Reach

Ali Academy will serve children from kindergarten through 12th grade in the Carondelet and wider St. Louis community. We aim to achieve greater social justice in education by providing a world class rigorous program to children in underserved communities. Ali is the Arabic word for higher. Our measure of success extends beyond scholars graduating from college or having successful careers. We want our scholars, staff, and parents to realize their purpose, greatness, and responsibility to humanity. We want them to strive to achieve at higher levels than they ever thought possible. Ali Academy is a testament to the legacy left by the Greats like Frida Kahlo, Muhammad Ali, Madame C.J. Walker, and the legacy of those who fought against the injustices of war, poverty, and the temptation to give in and compromise one's principles during tough times. Unrelenting figures in American and world history, we will imbue our scholars with that same persistence and spirit to build institutions that will make the world a better place. Drive not demographics or dint of birth should determine destiny.

Not only did revered historical figures push for greatness professionally, but they pushed to be great human beings, exemplifying the best of us. Greatness is what we cultivate. And their lives prove to us that no matter the circumstance or disadvantage, all of our scholars can achieve because greatness is within their reach.

We hope to open our doors in the fall of 2022 and start with kindergarten and 6th grades. We will add one grade each year thereafter at the elementary and middle school level with our scholars matriculating to ninth grade in the fall of 2025. Our ends mirror our means. A society or community must be part of the conversation to determine what "social" justice means to them. We continue to engage the Carondelet community to gauge what "relevant" and "socially just" education means. Students, families, and community leaders have provided significant input as we build and organize. In the coming months we will continue to build a coalition of community members to ensure the school stays relevant to the community.

Mission: *Ali Academy will empower scholars to achieve academic, professional, communal, and personal greatness by focusing on relevance, rigor, and righteousness.*

Vision: *The Ali Academy Community will build successful educational, economic, social, and political institutions that will fight for and achieve social justice for all. We seek to build a network and improve schools across the nation and world.*

Graduate Aims. Graduates of Ali Academy will demonstrate

- **Relevance by being... Driven** - The Greats identify at least two career options, acquire certification in one area of interest, develop a plan, and take steps to begin a successful career. They strive through challenge, adversity, and doubt, knowing that they will eventually succeed; **Active** - The Greats analyze current social justice issues, investigate how others have responded, identify potential solutions, and take action; **Communal** - The Greats recognize that relevance should stem from community needs and issues. They strive to be engaged community members who listen for understanding and take their cues from their connected communities.
- **Rigor by being... Critical** - The Greats read and digest information at the college level by analyzing, assessing, applying, and reconstructing information within specific contexts; **Literate** - The Greats excel in media and information literacy to ensure full awareness of any issue before taking action.
- **Righteousness by being... Self-aware** - The Greats define who they are, who they want to become, and identify actions they need to take to become those people; **Caring** - The Greats care for other people and all living things; **Equitable** - The Greats employ an equity framework to



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their solution oriented thinking to ensure that everyone has the means to thrive based on their individual and communal needs.

School Design & Innovation: We are a social justice school. Social justice in education requires dismantling negative self-attitudes rooted in racist, stereotypical, or just negative beliefs and lifting up the confidence and desire to tap into one's greatness. At Ali Academy, we inspire children to recognize their innate potential and strive to be the best versions of themselves in all that they do. This theme cuts across all elements of the school. The progress we have made in social justice has been due to the work of our Greats like Harriet Tubman, Frida Kahlo, Madam C. J. Walker, and Martin Luther King Jr. Our continued progress towards social justice will be due to the work of future Greats - our future scholars. Scholars must realize their own greatness in order to realize their hopes and dreams and those of their communities. To unlock that potential scholars must engage in work that is a reflection of their greatness. Their work must matter to the world just like they matter to the world. Their work must be...

- **Relevant** - "Why?" Is one of the most basic and foundational questions children ask. "Why are we doing this?" At Ali, we always have an answer and every scholar should be able to articulate it on a consistent basis. Finding relevance and purpose is what gives not only children, but also adults, the motivation to begin, persevere, and achieve ([Aspen Institute, 2019](#)). The "why" empowers children to be scholars - those who seek knowledge. Greatness is not an end unto itself, but rather a means to make the world a better place. Greatness represents our consistent "why." At Ali, relevance comes in the form of college, career, and campaigns (Social justice actions). Many adults spend the majority of their waking hours working. This work should matter to the world. Our scholars must have exposure and experience with numerous colleges, careers, and struggles to inspire them to work for a life that matters to themselves and to the world. Economic empowerment is a key element of social justice. Our scholars must be economically empowered and be in a position to economically empower others to uplift their communities. Through this lens school will have relevance to their lives, their struggles, and the struggles of others to live decent lives. By the time every child graduates high school, they will be certified in some area, e.g. coding, web design, EMT, auto mechanics. Scholars will also have a portfolio of campaigns they have engaged in. Whether trying to create more culturally representative media or trying to work with politicians to reduce gun violence, scholars will engage in age-appropriate social justice campaigns every year. Their work will be meaningful.
- **Rigorous** - To be one of the GREATS, scholars must be able to meet objective standards of achievement. We utilize standards based grading to clearly display and push what scholars know and what they can do. We have a focus on reading throughout all subject areas. Reading and writing is a skill that cuts across almost all disciplines, college curricula, and careers ([Lemov, 2010](#)). In order for our scholars to reach greatness they must be able to read and write, at least, on grade level so that they can criticize and analyze deeply in order to improve and build new, socially just institutions.
- **Righteous** - Sports and physical exertion force the human body to contend with itself physically and emotionally. Sports catch you at your worst - fatigued, stressed, upset - and forces you to perform your best, maintaining focus, exercising skill and increasing effort. Sports help to provide that self discipline and tenacity necessary to achieve on and off the field ([Fox et al., 2009](#) and [Harrison & Narayan 2009](#)) To this end every child will be involved in at least two sports per year. We constantly make the analogy between the fight in the ring, arena, or field, and the fight in life so we refer to our teachers as coaches. We explicitly teach character through our morning advisory (Huddles), community service and sports. ¶ To make the world a better place, one must seek to make themselves a better person. One cannot seek the betterment of the world and exempt themselves from the process. Scholars must have the grit and moral compass necessary to Strive



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for and achieve social justice for all including themselves ([Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain by Zaretta Hammond](#)). They must “Be the change they wish to see.” - Gandhi. To be great is to display positive characteristics in good times and in bad. “The ultimate measure of a man [and woman] is not where [s]he stands in times of comfort and convenience but where [s]he stands at times of conflict and controversy” - MLK. We seek for scholars, staff, and families to embody the GREATS and focus on one value every month.

- Giving & grateful, Respectful, Ever curious, Always optimistic, Tenacious and Spiritually self-disciplined

A Day in the Life

Nala’s 3rd Grade Experience
How is her experience <i>relevant</i> (Career or campaign oriented), <i>rigorous</i> (At or above grade level standards), and or <i>righteous</i> (Focused on the monthly GREATS value. This month is Respect)
7:30 - 8:00 Breakfast - (<i>Righteous</i>) After breakfast, the principal highlights one scholar who has shown respect by considering other people’s feelings before acting. Nala has a turn and talk with a neighbor about how she will show respect by being considerate.
8:05 - 8:35 Huddle (Advisory) - (<i>Relevance</i>) Coach discusses how screen writers tell stories related to narrative writing unit - How do characters show consideration of others. (<i>Righteousness</i>) Coach discusses what it means to consider one’s feelings before they act. Nala sets her daily goals for how she will be considerate.
8:40 - 9:40 Math Block - (<i>Rigor</i>) Using Achievement First Math Navigator Curriculum - Nala has to articulate her thinking as she works through division word problems. (<i>Righteousness</i>) Problems are contextualized around how to be considerate and make sure that everyone gets an equal share.
9:40 - 10:25 Math Support Block - (<i>Rigor</i>) Nala circulates through different stations. One for more practice with division facts, one for real world applications and extended practice, and one with her coach to get more support around the work from the regular math block.
10:30 - 11:30 ELA Block - (<i>Relevance</i>) Utilizing our EL curriculum , Nala analyzes how authors utilize perspective while reading scenes from <i>Peter Pan</i> and watching scenes from 2 different iterations. Scholars, analyze, discuss, and write as screen writers from two different perspectives e.g. Captain Hook and Peterpan. Nala will then have to defend her perspective on whether Captain Hook deserved his fate (<i>Rigor</i>) Missouri ELA Standards: 3R 2.A.g
11:30 - 12:30 Guided Reading - (<i>Rigor</i>) Nala rotates with a group to work with her coach at their current reading level to improve specific skills. The other stations include independent reading, story writing, and reading annotations.
12:30 - 1:15 Lunch & Recess - (<i>Righteousness</i>) Coaches frame, at the beginning of recess, the type of considerate behaviors they are looking for and acknowledge at the end, those who displayed such behaviors.
1:20 - 1:50 Social Studies - (<i>Relevance</i>) Analysis of perspectives in <i>Peter Pan</i> and how resolution could have gone through Missouri governmental channels SS2 3.4 . Nala starts with an analysis of writer Maya Angelou (One of our Greats) quote, “What you’re supposed to do when you don’t like a thing is change it. If you can’t change it, change the way you think about it. Don’t complain.” SS3 1.10, 1.6 (<i>Rigor</i>) Missouri ELA Standard reinforced: 3R 2.A.g



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(Righteousness) This unit will culminate in a project designed by the ELA and social studies coaches which is a recorded short displaying the different perspectives and how issues could have been resolved through Missouri government.

1:55 - 2:25 Science - *(Rigor)* Nala will explore with her group how to build a replacement hand for Captain Hook using principles of force and motion from [StemScopes: Next Generation Standard: 3-5-ETS1-2](#)

2:30 - 3:15 Art - *(Rigor)* Nala will create a sculpture of Captain Hook's replacement hand. [Missouri Art Standard II.3.C](#)

3:15 - 4:15 Sports - *(Righteousness)* In her volleyball unit, Nala will explore what is good sportswo/manship - and discuss how this shows consideration and respect. Scholars will share at the end of class who showed sportswo/manship and how it affected feelings and/or the game.

Evidence of Impact

We use grade level appropriate, rigorous, and proven resources for our scholars. Our curricula choices span from grades K-12 in order to provide continuity and coherence in the curriculum for every year of a child's time at Ali Academy. We are utilizing the [Achievement First math curriculum](#) which has been utilized to significantly advance the math achievement of low-income students at a rate that has outpaced wealthier suburbs. We utilize the [Expeditionary Learning ELA curriculum](#) (K-8) and [Engage NY ELA](#) (9-12) curriculum that was developed in collaboration with Expeditionary Learning. Not only have these curricula proven to advance scholar learning but they purposefully incorporate social justice and culturally relevant material. We are utilizing [StemScopes](#) for our science program as it is aligned to Next Generation Learning Standards. We have studied and spoken with leaders at the [Kauffman School](#), [Valor, Achievement First](#) and [Amana Academy](#), representing some of the best in Missouri, Tennessee, New York, and Georgia respectively that have utilized and implemented these curricula along with character education programs that have led to some of the highest performances in their states. Social studies is an incredibly rich discipline in which to explore social justice issues. There currently does not exist a curriculum, tied to state standards that also adequately merges social studies with social justice. To address this, Ali Academy will be creating our own social studies, justice, curriculum aligned with our EL program with help from professors at Saint Louis University.

Outcomes

Ali Academy will achieve at the following levels.

- Academic Goals on MAP grades 3-12. For grades K-2, Achievement First Math and the University of Chicago's Strategic Teaching and Evaluation Progress [STEP](#) System for ELA. With current proficiency rates for St. Louis students being at 18% for math and 23% for ELA, we think the following goals are ambitious considering the amount of growth towards which we're working.
 - Year 1 - 50% and 40% of scholars at or above grade level in ELA and math
 - Year 2 - 55% and 45% of scholars who have been at Ali for at least one year perform at or above grade level in ELA and math
 - Year 3 - 60% and 50% of scholars who have been at Ali for at least two years perform at or above grade level in ELA and math
 - Year 4 - 65% and 55% of scholars who have been at Ali for at least two years perform at or above grade level in ELA and math
 - Year 5 - 70% and 60% of scholars who have been at Ali for at least two years perform at or above grade level in ELA and math
- Operational Goals - Attendance - 95% ADA; Food - Student survey indicates that 80% or more of



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scholars look forward to lunch; Compliance with all local, state and federal regulations; Transportation - 95% on time pick up and drop-off; Facilities - 80% of staff and parents report it is aesthetically pleasing; 90% of staff and parents report it is clean and orderly

- Financial Goals - Clean third party yearly audit every year; Internal financial policies and internal quarterly review; At least two months of operating revenue in reserve account and a positive cash flow.
- Governance Goals - Monthly review of academic and financial dashboards; 90% of Board members complete their term; Board provides a yearly evaluation of the CEO

Team

Chester Asher - School Leader: Asher has dedicated his life to social justice. He has been in education for the last seventeen years. He is an instructional expert and has a passion for teaching. As a Teach for America Alumnus he has taught every grade from kindergarten to twelfth. He has also taught mentorship seminars to undergraduate students at New York University and graduate students at Columbia University. He has observed and talked to school leaders in over a hundred schools including schools in South Africa, Jamaica, Ghana, Greece, England, France, Australia and New Zealand. He has consulted in the United Arab Emirates, Sweden, and in New York City and Philadelphia. He has also helped to develop curricula at Amherst College and Simmons University. He has been a Dean of School Culture, a Director of Curriculum and Instruction, a Principal, and a CEO of some of the highest performing charter schools in different states. He has his Master's degree in teaching from Fordham University, an undergraduate degree from Pennsylvania State University, a Master's in Public Administration from New York University and a Juris Doctorate from Yeshiva's Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law. He is the father of four and steps into every school, and every classroom with the idea that the school, class, instruction and adult interactions should live up to the expectations and standards he would require for his own children.

Founding Board Members:

Dr. Amber Johnson - Expertise: Community/Social Justice Advocate. As a scholar/artist/activist, Dr. Johnson's research and activism focus on narratives of identity, protest, and social justice in digital media, popular media, and everyday lived experiences. Dr. Amber Johnson is an award-winning Associate Professor of Communication and Social Justice at Saint Louis University. Dr. Johnson is the author of two books, African American Communication: Examining the Complexities of Lived Experience and Gender Futurity, Intersectional Autoethnography: Embodied Theorizing from the Margins. As co-founder of The Institute for Healing Justice and Equity, Dr. Johnson specializes in humanizing equity and exploring the relationship between healing justice and equity. Humanizing equity is the process of making organizational equity work radically inclusive in action. This requires bringing those most impacted by systemic injustice into the fold and including them throughout the entire process. Additionally, if organizations are not assessing the impact their policies have on actual lived experience of those most marginalized, how will they know their efforts are working?

Stanford Richardson - Expertise: Facilities/Operations. Stanford is a City of St.Louis native. He has a background in industrial engineering with a degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia. He also has an MBA in Finance from Webster University. He has spent his entire career in a variety of construction management roles from being an Owner's Representative to being a General Contractor. He has worked in most major sectors of construction including K-12 education, transportation, and health care. He also has experience as a substitute teacher in SLPS high schools and as a football coach.

Board positions for which we are currently recruiting: Finance Officer; Lawyer; Development - Two experts in the fundraising; Marketer - to help with enrollment & recruitment; Resource Connector - to connect us with philanthropists and strategic partners; Parent; and an Educator.

