



## **Excellence in Partnerships, Innovation and Community**

EPIC Soar Academy proposes to launch a new K-5 school designed to prepare students for a 21st century world. Our school, to be located in the 24:1 Normandy footprint, would serve all students residing in the surrounding St. Louis County municipalities. Ninety-nine percent of the pupils in this area are students of color and 96% are enrolled in free and reduced lunch programs which speaks to concentrated areas of poverty. Our model seeks to support specific student academic social and emotional needs which have been identified during 40 extensive small group and one-on-one parent interviews. Those meetings focused on ways parents felt schools could provide better outcomes and overall support to their children. Parents expressed their expectations of academic engagement for their child in a safe, nurturing, joyful environment that prepares their children to do well in future college and/or careers. We aspire to be a school which honors the aspirations of these families.

**MISSION** EPIC Soar Academy prepares all K-5 students for a life of excellence through academic rigor, innovation, family engagement and community partnerships that support their holistic development.

**VISION** We aim to level the playing field for all students by empowering them with the academic, socioemotional and real world experiences to be successful in school and life.

**GRADUATE OUTCOMES** EPIC alumni will...

***Excel academically as lifelong learners.*** Students master literacy and numeracy skills to unlock success in all K-12 coursework to be prepared academically for future colleges and/or careers. They are resilient and motivated to achieve at high levels.

***Develop and apply future-ready skills.*** Students think critically and engage creatively, using technology in order to solve problems.

***Collaborate with others to make the world better.*** Students work collaboratively with others to contribute to their school and community.

**OUR MODEL:** To realize these outcomes and honor the aspirations of our community, our school will be built from the following principles:

**Excellence in Education through High-Quality Instruction Year Round:** We provide a robust year round academic model that is broken up into ten weeks on and two weeks off to ensure excellence in education for all students. This schedule is being adopted to provide teachers with job embedded professional learning and to maximize instructional time while avoiding the summer slide. We have sourced the most successful curriculum and instructional approaches. We use the [Expeditionary Learning Curriculum](#), a comprehensive, standards-based core literacy program that engages teachers and students in compelling, real world content and builds equitable and inclusive learning opportunities for students. We also utilize [Achievement Navigator Math Curriculum](#), a comprehensive, standards-based core math program that provides students with exposure to conceptual math problems using relevant math stories.

Our personalized learning process mirrors that of Rocketship Elementary School, a high performing school in Nashville, Tennessee that allows students to move at their own pace and ability level in a learning lab. We provide explicit intervention and tutoring support through our EPIC Success Tutoring program.

**Partnerships and In School Socioemotional Support:** We engage in external partnerships such as The Little Bit Foundation, Alive and Well, Beyond Housing and Home Works to support us in meeting student and family needs. To address trauma, we begin each day with a strong start so students can feel safe, valued and loved. We prioritize deep, meaningful, and authentic relationships, recognizing strong relationships to lessen the impact of stress on the brain. We train our teachers to support both the academic and non-academic needs of our students through integrated external supports.

**Innovation:** We implement deep learning in all of our instructional programming and we deliberately develop creativity, communication, and critical thinking through interdisciplinary projects and programs such as [Project Lead the Way](#) (PLTW) Curriculum. PLTW is an interdisciplinary curriculum that reimagines the learning experience for students using hands-on activities in computer science, engineering, and biomedical science that teaches social studies and science and focuses on core skills. During Friday immersion days students explore real world issues and our community led "specials" give students exposure to their interests, movement, and the arts.

**Community and Family Partnership:** At EPIC we see our community and families as an extension of our school. For example, we will have an onsite space for our parents and community partners. In addition, they will be encouraged to volunteer in the EPIC Success Tutoring program as we provide individualized support to students during the school day through personalized learning. We recognize excellent schools are not islands so we will work collaboratively within and without our community to leverage local assets in order to create the most impactful learning experiences possible for students.

### DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN EPIC SOAR STUDENT

Students follow a similar schedule on Mondays through Thursdays with a change to our programming on Fridays. On Fridays we offer high-quality enrichment support to be led by community partners and parent volunteers.

#### Sample Schedule

	Mike’s Experience
<b>8:00-8:45a.m. Strong Start Routines</b>	Morning procedures: Mike <sup>1</sup> settles into school with a fist bump to his teacher Mr. Bender, followed by morning meeting. On Mondays the entire school engages in Morning meeting to set the tone for the week. On Friday the school assembles again to celebrate achievements and a focus on living out the school’s core values. If needed, Mike can engage with a counselor one on one or in a group to secure his social emotional needs.
<b>8:45-9:30a.m. Phonics and Foundational Skills</b>	Mike goes to the carpet for a fun 12 minute whole class phonemic awareness activity from the <a href="#">Heggerty</a> program where he recognizes beginning, middle and ending sounds by clapping, dancing, and stomping out sounds. Mike then moves to a guided reading group at the kidney shaped table with his teacher for direct instruction. Today Mike gets to apply his understanding of the vowel sounds earlier by reading a decodable book.

<sup>1</sup> The name Mike is used as a reference to former student Michael “Mike” Brown, a graduate of Normandy High School who was shot and killed in Ferguson, MO.

<b>9:30-10:15a.m. Core ELA</b>	Core block: Mike is exposed to a read aloud of an on grade level complex text from the <a href="#">EL Education Curriculum</a> . Mike uses his reciprocal teaching cards as the teacher creates a mental picture of what it means to use context clues to make meaning of text. After a successful read aloud Mike then gets to read the text and write a shared response to the read aloud with his friend Jacob.
<b>10:15-11:00a.m. Personalized Learning ELA and Writing</b>	Mike has personalized learning and tutoring in ELA and Writing on alternating days as part of the school's intervention program in the learning technology lab. He receives small group intervention by The EPIC Success Tutoring Team comprised of interventionists, parents, teachers and community members. We also utilize research based programs such as LLI-Fountas and Pinnell, Foundations for explicit phonics.
<b>11:00-11:45am Lunch &amp; Preferred Activity Time</b>	Mike has lunch and is excited to play chess at recess followed by basketball. Mike's teachers engage in lunch/flex time.
<b>11:45-1pm Core Math</b>	Mike engages in deep mathematical thinking using <a href="#">Mathematical Learning Routines</a> in a Math Workshop model. He then engages in the <a href="#">AF Navigator curriculum</a> <sup>2</sup> which exposes him to on grade level complex math problems addressing the appropriate aspects of math rigor called for by the lesson.
<b>1:00 - 2:00 pm Personalized Learning Math and Science (M-Th)</b>	Mike has personalized learning and tutoring in Math and Science on alternating days as part of the school's intervention program in the learning technology lab. He receives small group intervention by The EPIC Success Tutoring Team comprised of interventionists, parents, teachers and community members. Interventions are provided for students using strategies for math coherence of instruction based on Mike's needs as informed by data
<b>1:00 – 2pm Fridays - 1:00-3:00pm Extended enrichment by community volunteers</b>	Mike has the ability to explore the elective of his choice which includes (dance, stem, engineering, art, music, gym, chess, cooking) Depending on the day, enrichment is led by a community partner and/or his specials teacher. Mike's teacher is engaged in common planning time and a deep dive of student data for misconceptions. Mike chooses chess as it is Friday and he is progressing well in the activity.
<b>2:00-3:00pm Science and Social Studies M-Th</b>	Science/ Social Studies: Mike is engaged in a thematic and interdisciplinary stem unit that embraces his innovation, collaboration and critical thinking skills from <a href="#">Project Lead The Way</a> , which embeds The Missouri Learning Standards and Next Generation Science Standards. Today he writes in his Engineering Notebook and designs his final conclusions from this project that he has worked on for the last two weeks.
<b>3:00-3:30pm Daily Closure</b>	Mike engages in a daily reflection of his ability to stay true to EPIC's core values and assess his own understanding and growth. He sits face to face with another student to share how he resolved conflict earlier in

<sup>2</sup> AF Navigator is a Math curriculum developed by Achievement First, a system of schools with impressive results with minority students.

	the lunchroom. Today Mike feels excited to ends his day with a shout out from his teacher and he sets a goal to finish his engineering project.
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## GOALS AND OUTCOMES

### Academics:

1. In grades K-2, EPIC SOAR Academy students will grow in reading at least one or more years as measured by established early literacy assessments [Fountas & Pinnell](#).
2. In grades 3-5, 80% or more of students who began EPIC in Kindergarten will score proficient and/or advanced on the Missouri Assessment Program test. 70% of students at the school two or more years will score proficient and/or advanced on the MAP assessment.
3. 80% of students will meet their expected growth target on [NWEA](#) assessments annually. Students who enter EPIC after 1st grade and are not already on grade level will average 1.5 years of growth with all students growing at least one year.

### Social-Emotional Learning

Using Conscious Discipline at the end of 5th grade 80% of students will learn to manage conflicts on a daily basis with 100% frequency, independent of teacher support as measured by teacher observations, checklists, anecdotal records, behavior checklists, and self-evaluations. Students at K-2 will be taught steps for managing conflict using the Strong Starts C.A.R.E routine as students at grades 3-5 complete self-evaluations and rubrics. 80% percent of parents/caregivers will participate in at least four events through a Parent University model during the first year of operation. Participation will increase by 5 percentage points per year thereafter up to 90% by year three.

### Financial:

By working with a national organization to provide operational, financial and accounting services. EPIC will develop a plan to become financially viable through public funds by our fifth year of operation. Leading indicators of financial sustainability will be: 30 days of cash on hand, positive cash flow, our debt-to-income ratio, and a positive fund balance.

### Operations:

EPIC Soar Academy will have a 95% average daily attendance rate, and 90% re-enrollment each year. We plan to ensure 100% parent satisfaction with educational programming and student support. We will partner with [Panorama Education](#) to measure satisfaction using surveys.

**Governance:** EPIC Soar Academy will be governed by an independent board pursuant to state statute for charter public schools. It will serve to ensure a successful operation of the school while upholding the values, beliefs, and priorities of the school community. The Board will have a fiduciary responsibility to help EPIC remain financially healthy and will not have a conflict of interest. Each board member must be present at a minimum of 80% of board meetings, and each board member will meet our annual giving requirement.

**Evidence for how the school design can produce these outcomes:** To ensure we are able to achieve our goals in providing students with a stellar educational experience we are learning from and leveraging the expertise and experience of the most successful schools in the country. We are building on schools that have evidenced tremendous success with a similar demographic of those we serve. One such network of schools is Achievement First, based in New York City, Connecticut and Rhode Island where a majority of the students are Black, Latino, and from low income families who will be the first in their families to graduate from college. Achievement First is currently outpacing the city and state in proficiency growth for students. We are using the curriculum they developed internally. We are also using the [Expeditionary Learning Curriculum](#) in ELA which is rated as the best culturally-responsive, and standards-aligned

curricula with impressive results across schools and districts. To ensure a focus on students' academic foundational elements of literacy and math for mastery we utilize [The Achievement Network Teaching and Learning](#) theory of action. The Achievement Network schools see six months of additional learning over two years according to research conducted by the Harvard University Center for Education Policy. In addition, Conscious Discipline was found to be one of the only three SEL programs that focuses 75% or more of its content on Emotion/Behavior regulation and one of only 13 programs that focuses 50% or more of its content on Interpersonal Skills. Project Lead the Way (PLTW) contributes to a strong, positive impact on math and science.

## **FOUNDING TEAM**

### **Sonya L. Murray, PhD., Executive Director and Founder**

Dr. Sonya L. Murray is an Entrepreneur-in-Residence at The Opportunity Trust and former Director of School Support with the Achievement Network (ANet) in Cleveland, Ohio where she provided direct coaching and support to school and system level leaders to strengthen instruction and increase student achievement. Six of the top 10 highest growth schools in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District were ANet schools coached by Dr. Murray. She has extensive experience as a former principal and director in St. Louis, Missouri. Sonya earned a Doctor of Philosophy in Teaching & Learning from the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She also has advanced degrees in Education Administration and Superintendent Endorsement from the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Dr. Murray is dedicated to the premise that every child deserves an excellent education regardless of their zip code or background.

### **Sheldon McAfee, EdD., Co-Founder Head of School**

Dr. Sheldon Cole McAfee presently serves as an elementary school principal within St. Louis County. Born and raised on the Southside of Chicago, Sheldon attended schools that contributed to his understanding around equity which is having access to opportunity. He has many years of experience as a successful Principal and Assistant Principal in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. Dr. McAfee has advanced degrees in Public and Educational Administration. Sheldon graduated from Maryville University- St. Louis in 2018 with his Doctorate in Educational Leadership. Sheldon likes to say, "Education is the silver bullet that can cure all of society's ailments." He firmly believes a better-educated populace creates a better community.

### **Helene J. Sherman, Ed.D., Founding Board Member**

Dr. Sherman is a Professor and Administrator Emerita in the College of Education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis where she earned a doctorate in mathematics education. After teaching elementary school, middle school and college mathematics. Helene taught mathematics and STEM education courses while Department Chair and the Associate Dean for Educator Preparation in the College. She is a coauthor of *Teaching Learners Who Struggle with Mathematics, (2019) 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*, Waveland Press Publisher and *Learning, Mathematics Successfully, (2019)* published by Information Age Publishing,. Dr. Sherman developed, directed and coordinated several unique programs, including study abroad programs in China and France, teacher preparation programs in cooperation with an area community college and a Missouri Beginning Teacher Assistance Program.

### **RoseMary Hanley, Founding Board Member**

Children have been at the center of most of Rosemary (Rose) Hanley's life. A former educator, with a degree in Elementary Education from Loyola University, and a mother of three, Rose found her niche in listening, understanding and addressing the unique needs of children. In 2001, Rose pushed to make a difference in the lives of children a little bit at a time. And thus, The Little Bit Foundation was born. Through this tenacity, resourcefulness and sincere love for "her kids," Rose has helped build and now leads an organization of well over 200 weekly volunteers serving 13,500 students living in poverty in the St. Louis area. Currently partnering with 42 schools in St. Louis city and North County.