

## **Ignite Liberatory Academy**

Charles Stanley Jr, Lead Founder

Ignite Liberatory Academy (Ignite) proposes a k-8 public charter school set in North City St. Louis.

***Mission:** Ignite Liberatory Academy ignites a pathway to liberation via print, digital, and financial literacy for students in kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade.*

***Vision:** Ignite Liberatory Academy empowers students through literacy to live productive lives of choice and voice.*

Ignite Liberatory Academy's name reflects our goal to ignite a love of learning that provides liberation to all students. When we utilize the term liberation, we are referring to students' ability to make life choices and advocate for themselves without barriers rooted in skills and knowledge. We apply a broad definition of literacy that covers skills one needs to access life in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century world. We believe school is powerfully positioned to equip students with the literacy skills that will provide them with critical access and opportunities. At the root of our approach are our beliefs that:

1. **Literacy is a human right.** Digital, financial, and print literacies are pathways to liberation. The ability to analyze and comprehend texts, media, and finances positions literate individuals to make informed choices and to use their voices to advocate for needs. We create opportunities for students to engage with challenging texts, digital media, and concepts of personal finance and economics in a risk-friendly atmosphere, building knowledge that can transfer into their personal life choices.
2. **Learning is fostered through play.** The pedagogy of play supports this incorporation in schools because it creates familiar context for bridging academic and social skills while offering movement and high engagement, which gives access to more diverse learners. We intentionally embed play with curricula choices and course offerings.
3. **Cultural representation/identities is vital.** School is often the first place you are inundated with cultures, values, and beliefs different from your own. Ignite embraces those differences in the ways we staff, choose curriculum, design systems, and establish policies.
4. **Problem solving, critical thinking, and research are integral to developing students as active agents in their learning.** An inquiry-based approach to learning ensures that students get ample opportunities to develop skills that are in high demand for an evolving workforce, innovation, and self-preservation. Our approach leverages questions throughout all content to provide students with ample opportunities to develop their skills as problem solvers, critical thinkers, and researchers.
5. **Inclusive teaching is an equitable approach.** The skills individuals need to enter adulthood with independence do not change because of ability. We believe that it is our responsibility to help diverse learners identify points of access and develop effective learning strategies.

### **Target Population**

Black students make up an average of 96% of the neighborhoods where we will recruit our students (63147, 63115, 63120, and 63136). In 2018, according to DESE data, 77.2% of Black students scored basic or below basic on the Missouri Assessment Program English Language Arts assessment and the following year proficiency went down instead of up –1.3 percentage points. This was similarly true in mathematics, with 81.6% of students scoring below or below basic and dropping by -1.6 percentage points the following year. Performance data for White students show an opposite trend of improvement. This decline of academic performance over time is why Ignite Liberatory Academy seeks to open its

doors. The concentration of low-performing schools is in North City and most of those schools are. Our intentional quest to be located specifically in Baden is in reaction to these statistics and the lack of a school site in the neighborhood since 2009.

“Ignite” refers to kindling a new wave of energy to bring back access and prosperity to Black communities impacted by segregation and redlining practices of the past in north St. Louis. Our school will ignite the potential and possibilities in north St. Louis, which in turn will ignite a movement of Black people back into St. Louis City. We are looking to serve the Baden, Walnut Park West, Walnut Park East, North Pointe, Mark Twain, Wells Goodfellow, and Penrose communities. As communities in this region are constantly facing school closures and infrastructure limitations, Ignite Liberatory Academy will be the reminder of the promise of these communities.

### **School Design**

At Ignite, we understand that the climate in which students learn determines their ability to thrive. We create a culture in our school building that fosters and honors the potential of our students and positions them to become lovers of learning. The creation of a constructivist school is actualized via the following cultures:

1. **Culture of Literacy:** Classrooms at Ignite are intentionally designed to increase exposure to finance, digital media, and high-quality, diverse text. We emphasize the importance of research, reading, and the use of technology to create, revise, and analyze thinking.
2. **Culture of Inquiry-Based Learning:** Classrooms at Ignite Liberatory Academy prioritize problem-solving and critical thinking via inquiry-based learning opportunities that are embedded throughout all the content taught at our school. Students solve daily problems through collaboration, play, and exploration of diverse texts.
3. **Culture of Play:** At Ignite Liberatory Academy, we believe that play serves as a catalyst for learning for all children. We leverage play to make learning relevant and to create a culture where students feel comfort and joy as they take risks and learn new knowledge. Because play is a familiar context, it serves as a bridge for academic and social skills.
4. **Culture of Growth:** Students see their failures as opportunities to learn and grow. This can show up in grading for students and professional development for staff.

### **School’s Innovation**

**Liberatory Education** - Ignite Liberatory Academy recognizes that all people deserve to realize their full potential and have pathways that are not obstructed by the absence of literacy. We engage students in digital, financial, and print literacy to build their capacity to understand the world in which they live and its demands, as well as provide the tools to pivot flexibly as the world and its demands change. In this way, Ignite nurtures exploration, concept achievement, and application as an ongoing growth process that centers students as agents of their learning. Reimagining education in this way is not just conceptual but fundamental and the nexus of educational change.

Paulo Freire’s liberatory education challenges the “banking” concept of education where classrooms have desks fashioned in rows that face the teacher, and the teacher serves as the ‘sage on the stage.’<sup>1</sup> We infuse liberatory practices into our school design by following four guiding principles:

1. Students and families are contributors to the learning experience.
2. Learning is about collaboration, not competition.
3. Schools make space for silence and voice.

---

<sup>1</sup><https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED598340.pdf>

4. Students have space to question, challenge, and reimagine.

**Liberation through Literacy** - Research has shown a statistically significant correlation between higher literacy levels and access to economic opportunity, healthcare, and democratic and global engagement.<sup>2</sup> We believe that knowledge, skill, and fluency in multiple areas of literacy create lives of opportunities. Ignite understands the importance of literacy and the need to create empowering environments and strategic supports for students to thrive across literacies. We intentionally specialize in three literacy areas as a school.

1. **Print** – Access to all areas of study has its origin in reading. Responding to the alarmingly low reading proficiency rates in St. Louis, particularly for students of color, we leverage the science of reading and other research about educating students of color and students with disabilities in reading. Reading is embedded into all content areas, specials, and elective course offerings.
2. **Finances** – Only 33% of adults worldwide are financially literate. We embed financial literacy into our school in response to this global lack of financial know-how. The goal is to equip students with the knowledge and skills of finance in their personal and professional lives. Finance is embedded within our math curriculum, it’s own standalone learning block, field lessons, and Games Day (students learn finance through games).
3. **Digital**- In a world driven by technology, becoming fluid users of digital technology positions students to be informed consumers, users, evaluators, and creators of media on digital platforms. Our students use technology for personalized learning, project-based learning experiences, and within our specials/elective offerings.

### Day in the Life

Schedule	Ignite Liberatory Academy Student Experience
7:25 – 8:55 Morning Meeting	Tony arrives and is greeted by a school leader who ensures each student feels welcomed and seen. When Tony transitions to his homeroom, he drops his homework fluency folder in the bin and then chooses the type of greeting he wants to receive from the teacher (fist pump, handshake, wave, etc). Tony gets breakfast and morning work which helps him grow skills from their counting unit “Bunk Beds and Apple Boxes”. After morning work, Tony’s class engages in meditation to set the tone for the day. Immediately after, students set their own goals and repeat daily affirmations. Tony’s classmate is chosen to lead Number corner which is an interactive review of calendar math. Lastly, Tony engages in a social emotional learning lesson on how to calm down when upset. Tony’s favorite part is that they bring out the puppet pretending to give the puppet advice.
8:55 – 9:55 Phonics/Independent Reading	Tony spends the next period growing his brain as a reader. Tony learns phonemes and practices letter sounds he will need while he reads. He also puts these skills to use by reading a book he selected. He has a variety of options that have characters that look like him and reflect his interests. Phonics builds phonemic awareness and reading fluency, equipping students with decoding skills.
9:55 – 10:40 Number Stories/Fast Math Facts	To build fluency, Tony works on a timed addition facts sheet that tests his ability to add numbers between 0 and 5. He knows that each time he does this he is practicing and growing, and warming his brain up for Number stories. Tony and his peers collaborate to solve one of 12 types of addition and subtraction problems. They experience playful learning by having to use tiles as counters to help them solve the problem. Tony discusses how he knows that 1+4 and 4+1 both equals 5. He is chosen to share his strategy with his

<sup>2</sup>[https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/infographics/pdf/REL\\_PA\\_The\\_Importance\\_of\\_Early\\_Literacy\\_for\\_Future\\_Success.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/infographics/pdf/REL_PA_The_Importance_of_Early_Literacy_for_Future_Success.pdf)

	peers, and they respond with questions and their own observations from their work time. Number stories build problem-solving and foundational computational skills. Students work using manipulatives, engage in discourse, and create and test conjectures.
10:40 – 11:25 Science	Inquiry-based Science is one of Tony’s favorite times of the day. The class period begins with the science teacher posing a big question, “Why Do Some Things Float and Some Sink? Tony experiments with different toys to determine what attributes make them float or sink consistently. He forms a hypothesis that he discusses with his group.
11:25-11:55 Lunch	Tony enjoys a nutritious lunch with his peers. During this time he catches up with friends and talks about all of the fun they will have during recess time.
11:55 – 12:25 Recess	Tony’s class comes together to discuss and vote for the game they will play during recess. They decide to play a whole class game of Red Light, Green Light. A classmate gets upset and Tony reminds them of a strategy they learned during morning meeting to help them calm down. During the first half of the year, the whole Kindergarten class participates in structured recess to build community and norms around play. Students choose from a selection of activities to play in smaller groups.
12:25 – 1:25 Math Block	Math Block begins with warm-up exercises that invite students to think about a mathematical pattern. The teacher reads a story about a pajama party. In this story, the babysitter watches eight children play moving up and down bunk beds. She pretends that she is losing and gaining children as they move from one bed to the next. Tony and his classmates use manipulatives to reenact the scenes and solve how many students are left. Our math block is in the form of a math workshop. In math workshop, students engage in problem-solving via a contextually based skill. Students work in groups and leverage discourse to uncover math properties and patterns which build their conceptual knowledge.
1:25 – 2:25 Literacy Block	Tony’s literacy lesson today involves describing toys to classmates using habits of discussion and observations. This supports the standard that kindergarteners can describe familiar people, places, things, and events. The ELA portion of the literacy block builds the foundation of skills needed for strong reading, writing, and communication. Each unit grounds in a guiding question and set of power skills. The time is structured for a mini-lesson, independent personalized practice and feedback, and then deeper work time on a broader project. Tony and his classmates also use this block to get personalized instruction via Lexia, an online adaptive reading instruction platform.
2:25 – 3:10 Specials	During this semester, Tony is in coding class. He uses coding to create a new game for his classmates to use to help them with counting objects. When he gets older, he will be able to select which specials class as his elective.
3:10 – 4:10 Lab	On Mondays and Thursdays, Tony attends the Inquiry Lab. During this time, Tony has inquiry-based social studies. His class is answering the question: How can we unite to build a class community? They explore who they are and create ways to contribute. Tony shares with his group an idea for class jobs. His friend suggests that they can each take turns getting the jobs. Tuesdays and Fridays are for Reading Lab. During this time, Tony explores four types of labs (Create, Explore, Imagine, and Engineer) that embed texts with hands-on activities.
4:10 Dismissal	After his dad picks him up, Tony goes home and completes his homework fluency for the night before enjoying time with his family.

### Outcomes

- **MAP Achievement:** By the end of year 5, 60% of students in grades 3-5 who have been enrolled at the Ignite Liberatory Academy for three consecutive years will meet or exceed state standards for proficiency in ELA and mathematics, as measured by the Missouri Assessment Program

(MAP). Ignite Liberatory Academy's proficiency for students in identified subgroups (FRL, IEP, ELL, ethnicity) will score within 10 percentage points of the overall school average.

- **Academic Growth:** By the end of each school year, at least 70% of all students and 60% of students in identified subgroups (FRL, IEP, ELL, ethnicity) will demonstrate growth in reading, math, and language usage as measured by meeting or exceeding their NWEA MAP (Measures of Academic Proficiency) growth projections for each testing event.
- **Reading Proficiency & Growth:** At least 60% of students at Ignite Liberatory Academy, including students in identified subgroups enrolled for the full school year, will read at or above grade level, or make more than one year of academic growth by the end of the school year, as measured by the NWEA Reading Fluency assessment.
- **Operations:** Ignite Liberatory Academy has a sound organizational structure that ensures that we are meeting our goals and providing a high-quality, equitable education for our students.
- **Financial Responsibility:** Ignite Liberatory Academy demonstrates fiduciary and financial responsibility as measured by annual external audits within three months of the close of each fiscal year with no material findings and unqualified opinions.

### **Evidence of Impact**

To ensure that all Ignite Liberatory Academy students demonstrate growth and achievement, we have ELA and math curriculum selections that reflect the highest standards according to Ed Reports and our research of outcomes for students when implemented in schools with similar demographics.

In mathematics, we are utilizing the math curricular choices from Success Academies in New York. They use Context for Learning Mathematics as their main math curriculum, and it's supplemented with fluency math practice and cognitively guided math. This blended program of exploratory math has yielded performance in the top 1% for schools in the state of New York. This includes over 24 elementary schools, with some schools producing 100% proficiency ratings of entire grade levels of students. We are utilizing EL Language Arts Curriculum for literacy blocks. Students who have used the EL Education for two years have shown a learning growth of an extra five months. We are coupling this curriculum with the Think Literacy curriculum from Success Academies. Success Academies have literacy proficiencies in the top 1.5% of the state of New York.

### **Founding Board Members**

**Charles R. Stanley Jr., Lead Founder**, is a native of Greenville, North Carolina. He attended Vanderbilt University, where he studied Elementary Education and Child Studies. He is an Entrepreneur-in-Residence with The Opportunity Trust and former Director of Schools with RePublic Charter Schools in Mississippi. There he managed three schools improving their academic achievement, student enrollment, and staff retention. Charles received his master's degree from Trevecca Nazarene University in Elementary Teaching and has dedicated the last 12 years to educating students in urban school districts.

**Stephanie D. Harris, Founding Team Member**, is a native of Little Rock, Arkansas. Stephanie attended Vanderbilt University, where she studied Business Administration, Managerial Studies, Communications, and Corporate Strategy. She received her master's degree from Webster University in Human Resource Management. Stephanie's career began in the corporate world in the retail space. For the last three years, she has worked on the Talent team for KIPP St. Louis and currently serves as the Director of Talent for their school network. We welcome her experience with human resources, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and community engagement to our team.