

## The Community Lab School Prospectus

### **Mission**

Our mission is to prepare students for the future of work by combining a rigorous academic program with real-world, place-based experiences.

### **Target population**

St. Louis is one of the top ten most racially and economically segregated cities in America. This unsettling statistic is the catalyst to launch a new and diverse by design elementary school in the city of St. Louis. Although our school enrolls students living in any area of the city, we have been intentional in choosing a target location for our school by focusing on the following four criteria:

1. **Diversity:** What neighborhoods contain the diversity we want reflected in our student body?
2. **Learning opportunities:** What neighborhoods offer several place-based learning opportunities for our students?
3. **Accessibility:** What neighborhood will be accessible to low-income families via walking and/or public transportation?
4. **Need:** What area of St. Louis is lacking high-quality public elementary school options?

The Community Lab School will open on or near the campus of the Saint Louis University, a strategic partner, and primarily serve students and families living in and around the Central Corridor, primarily from households in zip codes 63103, 63104, 63110, 63108, 63113 and 63106. The selected area has a wide range of community resources that are within walking distance, which is ideal for our place-based learning framework. Just as important, the area includes a highly diverse population, many of whom face significant socio-economic needs and struggle to find quality public school options for their children. Research provided by [IFF](#) identifies this area as having some of the greatest unmet needs in Saint Louis (63106 and 63113).

### **School design**

**Place-Based Learning** uses the surrounding community and environment as a catalyst to teach students interdisciplinary concepts in social studies, science, mathematics, literacy, and the arts. This method helps overcome the disjuncture between students' lives in an urban environment and what is typically taught in a traditional classroom. Students are engaged in real-world problem solving using the city of St. Louis as their textbook. When students are taught outside the walls of the classroom, attendance rates improve, there is an intensified motivation to learn, students develop critical thinking skills, and there is an improved understanding of the community and world around them. In a thematic unit focused on water, for example, students might go to the Mississippi River to learn about bodies of water as well as how the river facilitated St. Louis became a booming city, and visit the Saint Louis Science Center to learn about the water cycle. By moving beyond traditional classroom practices and tapping into the unique resources found throughout our city, we can engage students in a truly transformational learning experience.

**Diverse by Design** We exist to reflect and embody the diversity of our city across race, socioeconomic status, and culture and intentionally recruit both staff and students from various backgrounds to create a unique learning experience for all involved. Our commitment extends beyond our recruitment through ongoing professional development and curriculum that supports equity. We believe that we can start addressing the historical disadvantages of segregated public schools through our model and leverage our diversity to prepare students to productively live and work across lines of difference.

**Normalized Interventions** Building on a base of rigorous core academic models, our model ensures all students are set up with a differentiated bar to move towards and eventually exceed. We focus on educating the whole child at The Community Lab School, giving students what they need both socially and academically through intentional and fluid groupings. Students are positioned in various settings so they are able to thrive, yet be challenged. Too often teachers "teach to the middle" when all different levels and abilities sit in the same classroom. Unfortunately this means some students are left behind to struggle, while others are bored. By committing to a personalized approach and flexible groupings, students at The Community Lab School are able to excel academically.

**Year-Round Schooling** At The Community Lab School, our year-round model is broken up into chunks of approximately five weeks of rigorous thematic units followed by two weeks off. Teachers have one week of professional development followed by one week of vacation during these two weeks. This scheduling is being adopted to avoid the “summer slide” and maximize instructional time. The winter and spring breaks will be directly aligned with the St. Louis Public Schools’ calendar, and while our summer break will not be as long, a portion will overlap with their calendar as well. Through community partnerships, we will offer programming for students during the two week intersession breaks to accommodate families’ work schedules as well as provide additional learning opportunities for kids.

**Excellent Educator Experience** We know that to have thriving students, we need thriving teachers. It is one of our priorities to recruit, develop, and retain excellent teachers for our students. We have designed a model that focuses on delivering high-quality professional development, as well as a schedule that mitigates teacher burnout. The teachers have an entire professional development week after each five-week school cycle designated to analyze data, debrief from the previous unit, receive feedback from their coach, and plan for the next cycle. Teachers receive weekly coaching and feedback from an experienced instructional coach to continually improve their practice. Teachers will also engage in weekly professional development throughout the year. This model allows teachers to feel supported and set up for success so they can be the best they possibly can for their students.

**A day in the life for a second grader**

Schedule	What this looks like
7:00 Optional Before-Care	Students are encouraged to read, work on arts and crafts, or rest. <i>Cost is on sliding scale depending on family income.</i> <i>Teachers have the option to work this shift for additional compensation.</i>
7:45- 8:15 Breakfast	Students go to their classroom for breakfast. Students have a routine to get their food, eat and clean up before beginning their morning work. <i>Parents have the option to come into the classroom at this time to drop off their child and say hi to the teacher.</i>
8:15-8:45 Morning Meeting	The purpose of this space is to set the tone for the day, teach powerful self-regulation and mindfulness strategies and build connections amongst students. Students sit in a circle, starting with a morning cheer or song. The teacher might start with a dance break or a short yoga video to wake tired bodies up. If kids are very energetic, teachers will start with a mindfulness activity or a slow movement exercise to get students focused for the day. One student is chosen to be “Turtle Buddy” for the day; s/he gets to wear a cape as the leader (line leader, passes out papers, etc.) and models making good choices. Everyone will have the opportunity to be Turtle Buddy several times. Teachers will lead a lesson (about 5 minutes) on something to focus on for the day. For example, the teacher might teach “balloon breaths” as a strategy to calm down when you are upset. Students have the option to give peers a shout-out for something they saw their friends doing well during the morning or yesterday. After morning meeting, students break up into learning groups based on ability and need and transition to their next classroom.
8:45-10:15 Literacy Rotations	Our literacy program is designed to ignite a deep love of reading and writing, while building a strong foundation of skills to support that passion. Students start their academic block in structured literacy groups, listening and discussing read aloud books and working through the Reading Mastery curriculum. Students are intentionally grouped with students on their reading level so they can thrive in their learning environment. Groups are determined by data, which is reevaluated after every five week session. Books are chosen in alignment with the place-based thematic unit when possible.

	<p>After the literacy rotations, students have a twenty minute recess break to stretch their body and have snack. We know that movement is imperative for little bodies and we make sure we break up the day with several movement breaks.</p> <p>After recess, students work with their homeroom class on writing, using Lucy Calkins Writer’s Workshop as the guide. Students conference individually with their teacher once per week, while aides and other administrators push in during this time to provide additional feedback on their writing.</p>
10:15-11:45 Math Rotations	<p>The math program is designed to build a strong foundation in numeracy so students can develop a relational understanding of content and apply it to real-world problem solving. Similar to literacy rotations, students work with peers who are on the same academic level. The math block starts with math facts sprints and a “do now”. The mini-lesson will be pulled from Eureka Math, the most widely used curriculum in America. After the mini-lesson, students will be given time for independent practice.</p> <p>Students will have a dance or mindfulness break (depending on what they need) before continuing to work on a real-world math problem. Students will work in teams to solve a complex problem, building off skills they have learned and practiced in class. Teachers will try to incorporate the thematic place-based unit theme in these math problems as well.</p>
11:45-12:45 Lunch and Specials	<p>We strive to ensure our students are well-rounded individuals. The purpose of this block is to engage students in the arts and physical education. Students will go to specials, which rotates between music, art and physical education. After specials, they will join their class in the cafeteria for lunch.</p>
12:45-3:00 Place-Based Learning Block	<p>Our place-based learning blocks are organized for students to tackle relevant questions and challenges in their community while gaining key content knowledge and enduring deeper-learning skills. These interdisciplinary blocks remove the silos of subjects we see in traditional schools and expose students to Missouri Learning Standards through a cross-disciplinary approach. The second grade class starts the afternoon with a read aloud, <i>What If There Were No Bees?: A Book about the Grassland Ecosystem</i> by Suzanne Slade. The thematic unit they are focused on is Interdependent Relationships in Ecosystems. They spend 5 weeks researching the following essential questions: What happens to organisms when their environment changes? How are plants, animals, and environments of the past similar or different from current plants, animals, and environments? Then the 2nd graders board public transportation to work with the chef at Eleven Eleven Mississippi. The second graders have the opportunity to dig in the dirt and work in the urban garden located right outside of Lafayette Square. Some students feel brave enough to gear up in the bee suit to inspect the beehives. Students learn from Chef Brad about the disappearing bee colonies and are encouraged to think critically about how this affects the rest of the environment in St. Louis. Students brainstorm potential solutions and identify one to build a project around in the coming weeks.</p> <p><i>A thematic unit lasts 5 weeks. Each unit ties in social studies, science, math, and ELA state standards. We incorporate the arts, music, technology and physical activity as much as possible in these units. Students leave campus at least once a week.</i></p>
3:00-3:30 Community Meeting (or travel time)	<p>We end the day on a positive note, wrapping up the day with glows and grows. We are always focused on a growth mindset, so we are constantly pushing ourselves and others to be the best versions of ourselves. Students give shout-outs to their peers before they head home for the day.</p>
3:30-5:30 Optional After School	<p>Students are encouraged to read, play games, and go outside during this time. They are also given a snack when they arrive.</p>

Care	<i>Cost is on sliding scale depending on family income. Teachers also have an option to work this program for additional compensation.</i>
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### **Outcomes**

**Academic:** Academic growth in reading (K-5) will be based on Fountas and Pinnell, NWEA and MAP tests (3rd-5th). Math academic outcomes (K-5) will be measured by topic assessments, daily check-ins for understanding, and teacher created formative assessments. Math growth (3rd-5th) will also be measured by NWEA and MAP data. Our students will graduate on or above grade level. Students who enter our school 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. 90% of students who began Kindergarten at The Community Lab School will score proficient or advanced on the MAP test in 3rd grade.

**Operational:** The Community Lab School will open in 2020 with Kindergarten and first grade and grow one grade per year through 5th grade. Each grade will consist of three classes of 24 students. Each class will retain 90% of those students and attrition will be backfilled through 3rd grade. At least 60% of students will qualify for free-and-reduced lunch. We will maintain an average daily attendance of 93%.

**Financial:** We are working with EdOps as our operational and financial partner. The Community Lab School will be financially sustainable on public funds within the first five years of operation.

**Governance:** The Community Lab School will have one board comprised of six members. It will serve to ensure a successful operation of the school while upholding the values, beliefs and priorities of the school community.

**Evidence for how the school design can produce these outcomes:** The combination of place-based learning experiences and normalized interventions will provide relevance for students as well as support individual student needs. The diversity of the board and stakeholders we have engaged include a wide array of experiences that will cater to successful operational, financial and governance outcomes. We are confident we will retain 90% of our students and staff because we are working with the community to build The Community Lab School.

**School's innovation:** This school will create learning experiences grounded in deep diversity and rooted in community context where learning is both more motivating and ultimately more relevant to preparing students to thrive today and tomorrow.

### **Founding Team**

**Colby Heckendorn** has been the school leader of Patrick Henry, a neighborhood elementary school in the St. Louis Public School District for the past five years. At the time of Colby's promotion to school leader, Patrick Henry scored in the bottom 5% of all schools in the state. While at Henry, Colby led a diverse team of nearly 50 teachers and support staff. By taking a "whole-child" approach, Colby and his team exceeded the goals set by DESE in all three core subject areas by more than 20 points. Attendance increased by nearly ten percent and enrollment grew by 18 percent. In addition, suspensions were essentially eliminated as a consequence. Colby's teacher retention rate is one of the highest in the St. Louis Public School District at 93%. Colby has a B.A. in Education from University of Missouri and Master's in Educational Leadership and Administration from University of Missouri, St. Louis.

**Genevieve Backer**, a native to St. Louis, began her career in education as a 2013 TFA corps member in New Orleans, LA. She taught 5th grade at a traditional public school and ranked in the top 1% most effective teachers, determined by the Louisiana Department of Education Compass Final Evaluation. After three years at George Cox Elementary, Backer then was a founding lead teacher at KIPP East Community Primary, where her second grade students consistently outperformed other network schools on interim tests. She spent a year at Lafayette Preparatory Academy in St. Louis as a founding middle school Investigations teacher, where she created and led a project-based curriculum for 4th-6th grade. She now works as the Director of Operations at The Opportunity Trust. Backer has a B.A. in Social Entrepreneurship from Creighton University and a Master's in Education from Johns Hopkins University.

**Gay Lorberbaum** has lived a life of passionate learning and service for more than 45 years. After graduating with bachelor's and master's degrees in Architecture from Washington University in her native St. Louis, Gay worked for the London Borough of Lambeth and the renowned Finnish architect Reima Pietilä. During her 34 years at WUSTL, she led studios within the College of Architecture and initiated interdisciplinary courses linking architecture, engineering and environmental studies. In 2003, Lorberbaum created the New School – a group workshop that combines psychotherapy with creative process. In 2012, Gay and her husband started the non-profit, Building Futures, with an emphasis on educational hands-on problem-solving programs for St. Louis youth in grades 4th - 12th.

**Genevieve D'Arcy, Ph.D.** taught at the elementary level for eleven years at schools in FL, NY, and CA. Dr. D'Arcy has worked with preservice and practicing teachers across grade levels and subject areas for over 12 years as a mentor, instructor, curriculum designer, field supervisor, outreach developer and professional development facilitator. Her PhD is in Curriculum and Instruction from Penn State and while at the UCLA Lab School, part of the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies she was awarded the Haytin Award for Outstanding Research on Teaching and Learning. As an Educational Consultant as well as a Consultant for Nonprofits, Genevieve is currently working with AlignEd, Educators for Social Justice and the Racial Equity Curriculum Partnership in St. Louis.

**Marcus Robinson** is the Executive in Residence at The Opportunity Trust. He previously served as the CEO of the Memphis Education Fund, a \$240 million philanthropic collaborative that invests in education improvement initiatives for Memphis schools. Prior to the Memphis Education Fund, Marcus was the Chancellor and CEO of the high performing Tindley Accelerated Schools for 14 years. As the founder and instructional leader, Robinson led Tindley's flagship school to national prominence as its student performance exceeded the district and state averages on the state test as well as the national average on the SAT, working with a student population that was primarily high need and low income. As the state's first Early College High School, Tindley maintained consistently high graduation rates and 100 percent four-year college placement. Marcus was able to grow Tindley from one school with 160 students to six campuses and one district turnaround school with more than 2,000 students in one of the most challenging neighborhoods in the city.

**Aaron Massey** currently serves as Director of Talent Recruitment for St. Louis Teacher Residency, an organization committed to preparing aspiring teachers to be highly effective the moment they step in the classroom. Aaron launched his career teaching secondary mathematics at Prescott Middle School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He's traveled all around the country including New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Memphis, Chicago, and New York in varying capacities including Dean of Instruction, Dean of Students, Assistant Principal, Consultant, and Researcher to narrow down exactly what it takes to develop a school where kids can grow academically and personally. Aaron Massey then founded EAGLE College Prep: Gravois Park in St. Louis. Aaron received his MA in Education Policy from Brown University, and his BA in Urban and Community Development from Illinois Wesleyan University.

**Russ Kirk** is the former Vice President of Maritz, Inc. (headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri), the world's largest performance improvement company. Currently, Kirk serves as liaison between Maritz and Patrick Henry Downtown Academy connecting the two with financial and professional services. Prior to his retirement, he served on the Board of directors of UrbanFuture, a non-profit providing tutor and mentoring services to St. Louis public schools. After his retirement, Kirk served as a substitute teacher in the Bayless school district and as a full time building substitute at Patrick Henry. Kirk has volunteered over 100 days a year at Patrick Henry and helped mentor Mr. Colby Heckendorn. Kirk has a Bachelor of Journalism degree from the University of Missouri.