



Group recruiting 'standing army' to support charters

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A new group of 40-something professionals in central Indiana is hoping to do for education reform what the amateur sports initiative did 35 years ago: spawn a generation of leaders to work on a long-term challenge.

That challenge is to start really high-quality schools that, they hope, can overcome the obstacles of poverty and broken families to help Indianapolis kids achieve at the highest educational levels.



Smith

That's why Kevin Martin, chief financial officer of Columbus, Ind.-based Johnson Ventures; his wife, Patty, a senior director for diabetes at Eli Lilly and Co.; and Rob Smith, president of the Lilly Foundation, have teamed up to launch Allies for Educational Opportunity.

The group has about 20 members so far, who are working with the Indianapolis-based education reform group The Mind Trust to help attract and support new charter schools in Indianapolis.

“Wouldn't it be great to get a younger generation of folks to get on board?” said Kevin Martin, 47. He added, “What we're hoping to do is engage some folks who could commit for the long haul.”

The Mind Trust awarded \$1 million grants last year to help two organizations—Christel House Academy and the Phalen Leadership Academies—launch a series of charter schools. It is scheduled to award another round of grants next month.

The Mind Trust's push to launch as many as 20 charter schools over five years has drawn criticism from some public-school leaders. Eugene White, superintendent of the Indianapolis

Public Schools, said The Mind Trust was trying to “flood” the district with charter schools.

In the future, Allies for Educational Opportunity hopes its mission broadens beyond charter schools, to work with schools in traditional school districts. But for now, it is focused only on the charters being funded as part of The Mind Trust’s charter school incubator.

“These are very complicated problems that require adaptive leadership. They’re multi-variable. They require a community-based approach,” said Smith, 45. Smith said Lilly had this kind of group in mind two years ago, when it committed \$2.5 million to The Mind Trust, including \$1 million to help launch its charter school incubator.

The effort really got rolling, however, a year ago. A few days after Indianapolis hosted the Super Bowl, former WellPoint Inc. CEO Angela Braly suggested to Kevin Martin that Indianapolis needed a group like the Super Bowl host committee in order to have a sustained effort to improve schools in the city.

The Martins started talking to The Mind Trust, and the project proceeded from there.

The Allies group is now trying to recruit 40-something professionals to be board members for new charter schools, and is trying to tap real estate professionals to help the schools find and finance their buildings. It also has members working to connect new charter schools with existing community organizations, businesses and universities that could help supplement their educational programs.

Longer term, the Allies group hopes to stage hospitality events for out-of-state charter-management organizations, in order to entice the best ones to set up shop here.

“It’s recruiting a constant kind of standing army,” said Patrick Herrel, vice president of education initiatives at The Mind Trust. He added, “The more we get the community involved and leaders involved in this, I think the better outcomes we’re going to see” from schools.



Martin

Some of the professionals involved so far include Sherrie Bossung, head of community engagement for the Lilly Foundation; John Crisp, a principal at the Cassidy Turley real estate brokerage; Mark Hosfeld, director of industrial leasing at Duke Realty Corp.; Molly Chavers, executive director of the IndyHUB group for young professionals, Rob MacPherson, vice president for development at Central Indiana Community Foundation, and Ron Stiver, senior vice president at the Indiana University Health hospital system.

Patty Martin, 52, said the group will continue to grow, based on the needs of the charter schools

and the specific projects the Allies group decides to focus on.

“What we want to do is get a handful of people that can quickly listen to these people that can come in and then get them connected with people that can provide the services,” she said. •