



Choice: Phalen Leadership Academy

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In the land of Hoosiers, a newly-remodeled warehouse holds one of the nation's most promising schools.

The Phalen Leadership Academy in Indianapolis, Indiana, is home to 150 budding K-2 scholars. The new charter school is located in an area of town where fewer than half the students in local schools pass state exams. Yet the children at this new school are making incredible learning gains. In just the first ten weeks of school, 59 percent of students grew by one and a half years in reading. In math, the school increased the number of students "on track" from 3 percent to 51 percent.

This growth matches the expectations – and efforts – of the school's students, parents and educators. According to Earl Martin Phalen, CEO of Phalen Leadership Academies, all children are capable achieving great things, regardless of their zip code. He says at his school, "we believe every child should experience 1.5 years of academic growth every school year."

Phalen understands the transformative power of education and family involvement. Before graduating from Yale and then Harvard Law School, he was a child in foster care. At the age of two, he was adopted by George and Veronica Phalen. His parents instilled in him a passion for education, and he has spent the last 20 years focused on serving children in low-income communities.

Phalen arrived in Indianapolis five years ago to help the city provide high-quality summer learning programs to the city's children. With his program Summer Advantage USA, students did more than avoid losing academic skills and knowledge over summer vacation; they consistently advanced in reading and math.

Excited about these results, the Indiana DOE asked Phalen to take the Summer Advantage model and turn it into a charter school. Indiana's Charter School Board approved the Phalen Leadership Academies to open 10 schools and serve nearly 10,000 students. Their first school opened its doors on August 19, 2013.

Through great educators, parent partnerships, blended learning, individualized education, ongoing learning assessments, and longer school days, this young school is already making an impact in the lives of Indiana students. The school matches rigorous academics with enrichment programs such as art, debate, and music. Phalen says the young scholars love the educational model, and their joy is contagious.



Only 37 percent of African American males in Indianapolis will graduate from high school. At a nearby public school, only 39 percent of students pass state exams and a dismal 8 percent graduate from college. These families are hungry for quality school options.

Phalen shares the story of one dad who found out his son was accepted by Phalen Leadership Academy, “He was in tears because he knew he had forever changed the life of his child.”

Phalen Leadership Academy is one excellent school in a community, a state and nation ready for quality education options. Phalen runs a charter school, but he doesn’t promote one type of schooling over another. To him, it’s a matter of quality: “I’m for good schools, and that means choice. It needs to be about getting high-quality education options to students nationwide.”

To this end, Phalen and his team are making vital progress.