



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Innovation Leads to Dramatic Turnaround at School #103

Indianapolis, INDIANA – At Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) School #103, transformative changes are underway.

Formerly known as Francis Scott Key Elementary and led by IPS, as of this year the school has been led by the Phalen Leadership Academies (PLA), an Indianapolis-based, nonprofit network of public schools. PLA was invited by IPS in 2015 to transform the school into the state's first-ever Innovation Network School. This initiative, spearheaded by district Superintendent Dr. Lewis Ferebee, allows for IPS to partner with high performing school operators to lead underperforming or underused district schools like #103.

“PLA has been blessed to have the opportunity to lead PLA@103,” said Earl Martin Phalen, Founder and CEO of the Phalen Leadership Academies. “Doing something new always takes courage, and we have been proud to partner with IPS and Dr. Ferebee in an unprecedented way serve our children and families. We’ve been inspired by Dr. Ferebee’s leadership and the fact that he is focused not on creating any particular type of school model, but only on ensuring every child in IPS has access to great schools. At PLA@103, we are now positioned to provide our children with a high quality education.”

Prior to PLA’s leadership in August of 2015, School #103 was previously one of the worst-performing schools in the IPS district. In the 2013-2014 school year, only 15% of children passed both the English Language Arts and Math portions of the ISTEP+ state standardized exam. The school was also noted for having the highest number of incidents of fights or other kinds of physical aggression of any school in the district. Among the schools with the highest number of incidents, School #103 stood out, as it was the only elementary school in a category of schools dominated by high schools.

In the less than four months since PLA has assumed the leadership role at PLA@103, the school has already made significant improvements. While the school previously struggled to provide rigorous instruction to its children, PLA has implemented an evidence-based instructional model and raised the level of instructional excellence. This includes hiring and intensively training highly qualified certified teachers and teacher’s assistants; using a research-proven curriculum; and using a combination of whole-group, small-group, one-to-one and computer-based instruction to help create a more personalized learning environment for each child.

At a school that has had such a long history of educational neglect, families had previously been understandably disengaged. School #103 has traditionally enrolled only 300 children, but thanks to the vast improvements in the school’s educational environment and culture, 387 scholars are now enrolled – a 29% increase. The school’s parents have been key partners in creating change and family engagement has dramatically improved. Over 80% of parents sign and return reports that are distributed each week and that highlight their child’s academic and behavioral progress. An incredible 265 families also attended an event in mid-December aimed at creating a strong school culture and building community among the school’s parents, families, and scholars.



Parents and partners alike expressed their amazement at the school's dramatic turnaround. A parent thanked one PLA teacher repeatedly for taking time out of her day to reach out to her. Another parent, who was initially one of the most vocal voices against the change in leadership, told PLA's staff: "I appreciate you so much to go above and beyond to ensure [my son] is making progress and learning... I know this school is new to us, but just wanted to let you know we thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

"If I hadn't driven to this school, you could not have convinced me that this was School #103," a leader from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Indiana stated. "These are the exact same children, but the school is completely different."

A leader from the Boys and Girls Clubs of Indianapolis had a similar reaction: "I could not believe this was the same school I'd visited multiple times over the last 10 years - nearly all of which were under very negative circumstances," she stated. "In addition to your incredible transformation, the atmosphere and student/teacher interactions throughout the building are among the best I have witnessed during my site visits this year."

"The most amazing thing about the transformation we have seen is that this is the same school, and these are the same children and families who are now making academic gains and creating a very positive school culture," said Agnes Aleobua, Principal at PLA@103. "However, none of these successes would have been possible without innovation."

If you would like to learn the true story about what is happening at the school, PLA invites you to come and visit. For media inquiries, please call Founder and CEO Earl Martin Phalen at 617-818-1959.

About the Phalen Leadership Academies

PLA is a nonprofit network of public charter schools that was approved in 2012 to ultimately serve over 10,000 students (called "scholars") annually across Indiana. In 2014-2015, 100% of PLA's third-grade scholars passed the state IREAD-3 examination, demonstrating proficiency on the standardized reading exam. For more information about PLA, visit www.phalenacademies.org.

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