

New 'Innovation' Fellows Named to Redesign Struggling Indianapolis Schools

By Denisa R. Superville on May 14, 2015 4:44 PM

The Mind Trust, the Indianapolis-based education nonprofit focused on improving the city's public schools, has chosen its second batch of Innovation School Fellows who will work to transform some of the district's struggling schools.

The [new fellows](#)—four individuals but three fellowships—include an IPS principal, a former humanitarian relief agency executive who ran schools in Kenya, and a partnership of two charter school administrators who are already working in the city.

The Mind Trust, Mayor Greg Ballard, and the Indianapolis school system [launched the Innovation School Fellowship](#) last year after the state legislature passed the Innovation Network Schools law.

The law, which applied only to the Indianapolis public school system, enabled the district to partner with outside groups and charter management organizations and allow those entities to occupy space in underutilized and vacant district buildings or fully manage and run some of the city's failing schools.

The leaders of those schools sign a contract with IPS and agree to performance benchmarks set by the district. They are freed from a number of district administrative rules, including being bound by the district's teachers' union contract. They can hire their own staff, design curriculum, and set the length of the school day. However, their students' test scores are combined with those of the district's other students for state accountability purposes.

In Tuesday's announcement, Mayor Ballard said the innovation network schools had the power to transform education in the city.

"Through this partnership, we are connecting the world's most innovative educators to our most vulnerable public schools, and we are strengthening entire neighborhoods within our city," Ballard said.

David Harris, the founder and chief executive officer of The Mind Trust, echoed that sentiment.

"Innovation Network Schools have the potential to remake public education across our community, and this cohort of fellows have the vision, creativity and expertise to create successful schools," Harris said.

This year's fellows are:

Sheila Dollaske, a Teach for America alum, former teacher and principal at Chicago Public Schools, and principal of the Key Learning Community at Indianapolis Public Schools. At IPS, Dollaske is credited with improving her school's academic performance by two letter grades in three years. Dollaske plans a neighborhood middle school that will also focus on older and under-credited students, with the goal of helping the older students earn high school diplomas and undergraduate credits.

Mahmoud Sayani, an engineer by training, who spent years leading a Canadian relief agency, Focus Humanitarian Assistance Canada. Sayani ran Kenya's School Improvement Program, according to The

Mind Trust, and also served for six years as the chief executive officer of Aga Khan Education Service in Kenya, where he was in charge of 11 private schools in four cities in the East African nation. Sayani proposes a STEM-focused middle and high school that will use the International Baccalaureate model.

Shanae Staples and Kevin Kubacki, of the Indianapolis-based Enlace Academy, where Kubacki is the founding leader and Staples is the founding academic dean. They propose a K-8 school that will use a "blended model" approach, with small-group instruction and an emphasis on technology.

The fellows receive full salary and benefits (around \$129,000) and spend a year honing their school plans during an "incubation" period at The Mind Trust.

The first Innovation Network School to be run by a Mind Trust fellow will open this fall at Francis Scott Key School 103. That school was [approved earlier](#) this year and the district approved the contract with the school's leadership, Earl Phalen and Marlon Llewellyn, in April. The two were among the fellowship's [inaugural winners in 2014](#).

In an interview earlier this year, Phalen spoke about his plans for the Francis Scott Key School, which he said will focus on providing rigorous instruction for students but also on deeply engaging parents, families and communities in their children's education.

The new school, Phalen Leadership Academy at 103, will use a blended-learning model. The school will also offer "specials"—enrichment programs of Spanish, physical education, music and art—which will be offered to all students on rotation.

Each classroom will have two teachers. The school day will run from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with the doors opening at 7:30 a.m. Overall, students will attend classes for 300 days a year, with the expectation that they will also be in class for a 25-day summer learning program, he said.

Phalen, whose George and Veronica Phalen Leadership Academies has been approved to open charter schools with an enrollment of up to 10,000 students, said he was excited about working on this new collaboration with the district.

"We love running charter schools, but we know that the original promise, the original vision of charters was to do innovative, cutting edge things in education that could also be fed back, could be learned from, could be visited by the traditional public schools because that's where most of our children are educated," he said.

"We obviously believe that we can deliver an exceptional education program for children," he said.

He added that his team was appreciative that the district had a "forward-thinking view," with a focus on creating great schools for students regardless of whether they were district-run or charter-run.

Phalen also spoke of replicating some of the successful community and family engagement strategies that are in place at the Phalen Leadership Academy, the charter school he now operates.

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At that school, a group for fathers convenes for monthly breakfast meetings and fathers are actively involved in the school. Grandparents are also encouraged to become part of the school community, he said.

"We really believe in communicating with and welcoming our parents to really be partners in the education of their children," he said.

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/District_Dossier/2015/05/new_innovation_fellows_named_t.html