



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Phalen Leadership Academies Celebrates Black History Month

Indianapolis, INDIANA – While the George and Veronica Phalen Leadership Academy (PLA) public charter school in Indianapolis regularly celebrates African-American history, PLA's elementary-age students (called "scholars") engaged in a particularly unique series of activities during February's "Black History Month" to honor the legacy and accomplishments of African-American men and women.

PLA's scholars, in grades K-3, began the month by researching important African-American inventors, including: George Washington Carver, the inventor of hundreds of food products such as peanut butter; Lewis Latimer, who contributed to the invention of the telephone and invented an improved light bulb; and George Crum, the inventor of potato chips. Children then practiced their artistic and speaking skills by decorating the door of each classroom with information on each inventor and by giving a presentation during a school tour. Additionally, upon entering the school, scholars, staff, and visitors alike passed by the school's "Hall of Fame," a display highlighting the achievements of African-American heroes such as Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Jackie Robinson, and more.

Scholars also engaged in discussion around African-American history during Family Movie Night; daily book reading and discussion; and a field trip to the Children's Museum of Indianapolis where scholars had the opportunity to learn about Ruby Bridges, who was among the first African-American students to attend an all-white elementary school in New Orleans, in a fun, interactive exhibit.

School leaders stated how these activities are aimed at introducing scholars to important historical leaders at an early age and in an in-depth way.

"It is so important for all children, particularly African-American children, to know about our history and about the great men and women who came before them," said PLA Founder and CEO Earl Martin Phalen. "I can't describe how impressive it was standing in a Kindergarten class and hearing our youngest scholars correcting one another on the accomplishments of heroes like Mae Jemison (first African-American female in space), Madam C.J. Walker (early 1900s entrepreneur, first self-made woman millionaire, and first African-American millionaire), Garrett A. Morgan (creator of the traffic light), and others."

Classes weaved all of this information together in a "Black History Quilt," which will be on display for Friday's Black History Month Festival. The event will bring together scholars, staff, and community agencies to celebrate Black History Month, as well as scholars' achievements, through arts and crafts, live music, a drum circle, story-telling, food, and more.

The month's activities also let scholars learn from important figures from the present day and their local communities. PLA's scholars regularly listen to inspirational guest speakers who discuss colleges, careers, and more, and this month children heard from Kameelah Shaheed-Diallo, Vice President of Strategy and Community Engagement at The Mind Trust, and Calvin Thomas, Vice President for the Health Division at Ivy Tech Community College.



About the George and Veronica Phalen Leadership Academies

PLA is a network of public charter schools that was awarded an unprecedented 10 charters in 2012 to ultimately serve over 10,000 students (called “scholars”) annually in grades K-8 across Indiana. The network’s key features includes a longer school day and school year; an evidence-based curriculum; two instructors per classroom; and a “blended learning” model which engages children in small-group and digital instruction to rapidly raise achievement. In its first year, PLA’s scholars improved from 31% on track to pass the state ISTEP+ test to 85% on track.

As a result of these strong gains, PLA was approved by the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) Board to open the first of Indiana’s “Innovation Network Schools.” The creation of this network, driven by a partnership between IPS, the City of Indianapolis, and the nonprofit The Mind Trust, replaces chronically under-performing or underused school schools with high-performing schools that have greater autonomy and accountability. PLA will lead the turn-around of the network’s first school beginning in the fall of 2016, helping to transform education in the classroom, in the district, and across the state.

For more information about PLA, visit www.phalenacademies.org or call Founder and CEO Earl Martin Phalen at 617-818-1959.

About The Mind Trust



The Mind Trust

The Mind Trust is the nonprofit that strives to give every Indianapolis student access to an excellent, high-quality public school. The Mind Trust: (1) recruits and empowers talented organizations and educators to work in and serve local public schools, (2) launches and supports new, innovative and high-quality public schools in Indianapolis, and (3) engages community stakeholders in conversations about innovation in public education. Now approaching its 10th year, The Mind Trust has impacted more than 113,000 Indianapolis public school students, recruited a network of 18 schools and organizations and has raised more than \$42 million to bring innovative ideas into Indianapolis classrooms.

For more information about The Mind Trust, visit www.themindtrust.org