A Great School for Every Student:
The Mind Trust’s Charter School Incubator

The Mind Trust
Great schools. Innovative ideas. Every student.
The power of a great school

Great schools are transformative. They reshape the lives of students. They rebuild and revitalize communities.

Indianapolis is fortunate to have a number of excellent, autonomous public schools that prove that all students — regardless of their circumstances — can succeed. But to give all students in our city access to excellent educational opportunities, we need many more high-quality school options.

Of the 154,000 students in Indianapolis, more than 78,000 remain in need of a spot at a high-quality public school, according to a 2013 study by Illinois-based IFF.

With community support, The Mind Trust can help fill this gap. And we are working to do just that, so that our city – and the lives of its children – can be transformed.
The Mind Trust was founded in 2006 on the big idea that major change — whether in business, the social sector, or education — is driven by innovators. Think Henry Ford (cars) or Steve Jobs (Apple). Or in education, Geoffrey Canada (Harlem Children’s Zone) and Wendy Kopp (Teach For America).

Inspired by these individuals and others, our founders believed Indianapolis could transform its public education system and dramatically improve results for its students by attracting talented innovators and providing them with the right support and incentives to drive change.

Just as Silicon Valley created an ecosystem of perpetual innovation, we wanted to cultivate in Indianapolis a similar climate of talent, creativity, and boldness— but one focused on improving educational outcomes for students.

In seven years, The Mind Trust has:

- Attracted some of the nation’s best, established education organization to Indianapolis;
- Helped to launch seven groundbreaking organizations addressing education’s most pressing challenges;
- Enticed some of the nation’s best leadership teams to launch or expand high-quality schools in Indianapolis through our Charter School Incubator; and
- Released among the boldest plans in the nation for transforming the city’s largest school district.

Because of The Mind Trust’s efforts, Indianapolis is better positioned than at any point in its history — and than virtually every city in the country — to dramatically overhaul its education system so that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

To complete the transformation, we need to focus intently on creating more great schools where the talent and innovation we’ve built in Indianapolis can be unleashed.
The Mind Trust’s Charter School Incubator
Growing great schools in Indianapolis

Through the Charter School Incubator, The Mind Trust entices some of the nation’s best leadership teams to launch networks of high-quality, autonomous public schools in Indianapolis by awarding them up to $1 million. Winning teams are chosen through a highly competitive, months-long application and interview process.

**In addition to funding, we provide schools with ongoing support to ensure their success, including:**

- Collaborating with local professionals, the Allies for Educational Opportunity, to help the schools address key challenges;
- Bringing together winning teams to share best practices; and
- Working closely with Teach For America and TNTP (formerly The New Teacher Project) to ensure the schools have great leaders and teachers.

“If a meaningful turnaround in public education is going to happen here, it’s going to come from the fresh ideas and innovative thinking (The Mind Trust’s Charter School Incubator) grants are trying to leverage. Getting the desired results won’t be easy, but the odds improve when groups such as The Mind Trust make their bold moves.”

*Indianapolis Business Journal editorial, Oct. 15, 2011*

We have awarded **four $1 million prizes** and **one $250,000 prize** in the first two rounds of Charter School Incubator awards. Those awards will help to pave the way for the launch of **20 to 25 world-class charter schools** that collectively will serve more than **10,000 students per year by 2020**. But even with these investments, another 68,484 students will remain in need excellent public education options.

Together, generous supporters and The Mind Trust can make a significant impact on addressing this need.
Through our Charter School Incubator, The Mind Trust has invested $4.25 million, which will help to launch more than 20 schools serving more than 10,000 students by 2020.
Great schools make a great difference:

Stories from five schools

The Mind Trust’s Incubator awards will help to support the growth of four high-quality school networks and one single school in Indianapolis. The five schools in which we’ve invested make an incredible impact on parents and students. Read a few of their stories.
Rocketship Education

Karen Martinez

Empowered by her daughters’ experiences at Rocketship, she now advocates for education change

This charter network is making Indianapolis its third expansion city outside its home state of California. The innovative K-5 schools incorporate high-quality teaching, strong parent engagement and cutting-edge technology. Rocketship will launch eight schools that collectively will serve 4,000 students per year. Rocketship received $1 million through The Mind Trust’s Charter School Incubator.

Karen Martinez was on the verge of hopelessness. She and her husband had moved five times in their home of Santa Clara County, Calif., in search of high-quality schools for their seven kids. They encountered more of the same: great teachers inhibited by a dysfunctional system; low expectations for their children; and a sense of discouragement that settled in when their kids fell behind academically.

The eldest five children in their blended family didn’t make it to college. But Karen was determined that her two youngest daughters, Daniela and Gabriela, would succeed academically, despite her lack of financial resources to send them to private schools.

So after hearing about Rocketship, a public charter school in San Jose, Karen and her hus-
“My daughter was like a shattered glass,” Karen said. “She is being molded into the beautiful sculpted glass she was once. Rocketship has helped to do that.”

band decided to give it a try. They were skeptical at first that this school would be any different, but within a few weeks, their perception changed.

When Daniela started at Rocketship, she was in third grade but reading at a first-grade level. Her confidence was low because of experiences in other schools, where at times she was forced to miss lunch and recess because her inability to read was misinterpreted as a lack of focus.

One day Karen was volunteering at Rocketship and walked into her daughter’s classroom. She saw Daniela’s teacher, Ms. Buri, sitting with Daniela and reiterating the encouragement, “You will read. You are smart, and you are able.”

When Karen heard that, she realized that teachers at the school truly cared about her children. She’d see that theme reinforced countless times—through a teacher who helped Daniela overcome her math challenges by tapping into her love for music; in the school principal’s special effort to make sure Daniela had companions and felt welcome at the school; and through teachers’ calls to the Martinez home at 10:30 p.m. to inform Karen that Daniela passed the state reading exam.

Daniela graduated elementary school from Rocketship with honors, and as a fifth-grader, she was reading at a sixth-grade level. Today, she is thriving at Alpha Blanca Alvarado Middle School, a charter that Karen petitioned to launch in San Jose so that her daughter could continue to thrive academically. Karen’s youngest daughter, Gabriela, is in third grade at Rocketship and is reading at a fifth-grade level.

And Karen has been empowered to use her voice as a parent to drive change. She led a group of parents in petitioning for Rocketship to add 20 schools in California and was recently elected to her local school board. Daniela’s evolution made her see what is possible through great schools.

“My daughter was like a shattered glass,” Karen said. “She is being molded into the beautiful sculpted glass she was once. Rocketship has helped to do that.”
Christel House Academy

Ann Ring

Christel House helped her to set her own goals and dream big for her kids

The Mind Trust’s $1 million Incubator award supports two types of Christel House schools: dropout recovery schools to help high-school dropouts prepare for college and successful careers, and K-12 schools focused on academic rigor and strong parent engagement. Christel House is launching four schools that together will serve 1,650 to 2,100 students annually.

When it came to attending high school, Ann Ring didn’t have much of a choice. At 16 she and her family moved to the small town of Reelsville in Western Indiana. Ann’s mom did not want her to attend the town’s tiny high school, but that was the only school option in Reelsville.

So at 16, Ann dropped out. At 18, she got married and moved to Indianapolis. And since then, she’s faced an uphill battle to find a stable, well-paying job.

She’s cleaned hotels, managed convenience stores, worked as a grocery store clerk and waited tables. Many of those jobs have been physically demanding. None of them have fulfilled her in the way she hoped.

Life without a diploma has made Ann realize the importance of education, and she’s determined that her children, Ashley, 14, and Aaron, 12, will have better opportunities. When Ashley
was finishing sixth grade, Ann began to explore new school options for both kids and came across Christel House Academy, a public charter not far from their home on Indianapolis’ Near Southside.

Ann was impressed by what she found through her research and meeting the school staff, so she filled out applications for their admittance. Aaron landed high on the waiting list and was admitted as a fifth grader. Ashley didn’t fare as well in the initial lottery but entered the following year as an eighth grader.

Ann has been wowed by the academic progress she’s seen her kids make at Christel House. Ashley, who always excelled academically, was challenged at a new level and did so well in eighth-grade math last year that she was invited to take the Algebra 1 end-of-course assessment a year early.

Aaron struggled a bit in sixth grade but with the school’s academic support boosted his grade-point average above a 3.0. And through Christel House, Ann found her way back to achieving her own educational goals.

Last fall she enrolled in Christel House’s new Dropout Recovery School (DORS), where she is working to obtain her Core 40 diploma. She earned 13 credits in her first year and is on track to finishing in the next few years.

When she began last year, she and Ashley were learning some of the same concepts, and Ashley at times would coach her in certain subjects. This year, Ann has made enough progress to be able to help Ashley with her homework.

After she earns her diploma, Ann hopes to advance her education even further – and she knows that finding a job will be much easier with high school and college education under her belt. Her dream is to find a job in which she can work with animals.

“I wanted to go back to show my kids than I can do it,” Ann said, “and to show them they can do it, too.”
Tindley Collegiate Academy

Abeo Peterson

With Tindley’s help, she pushes herself to a new level of success

Part of the Tindley Charter Network, this rigorous college-preparatory school matches academic intensity with strong support to help students succeed. The Mind Trust’s $250,000 investment is helping the school to double in size – from 200 to 400 students – and launch as a standalone school (it was formerly housed within Tindley’s high school).

Abeo Peterson always knew she had the potential to excel. But she didn’t realize how great her potential was until she began as a sixth grader at Tindley Collegiate Academy two years ago.

At Tindley, she was greeted by a culture of discipline. There was no talking in the hallways. Uniform requirements were strictly enforced. And what might seem like minor infractions at other schools – talking or wandering the halls during class periods – could merit a trip to the office.

Matching the discipline were rigorous academic standards. Abeo struggled with language arts, but her teachers gave her challenging work in the subject and pushed her to meet the high bar.

The environment was an adjustment at first, but Abeo quickly realized she liked it. With
every challenge or struggle she encountered, she found an equal measure of support from teachers and administrators who clearly cared about her success.

Teachers at Tindley stay after school until at least 5 p.m. to offer students homework help and answer questions. Abeo and her peers often take advantage of that time.

“Teachers push you to reach your absolute maximum goal – they want you to succeed,” Abeo said. “It pushes me that I can do better, I can be better.”

For example, she was given a research-heavy writing assignment and failed the rough draft. Determined to improve on the final paper, Abeo stayed after school to work with her teacher and get additional guidance. She got an A on the finished product.

On another occasion, Abeo was disappointed to get a B in a class after working hard to earn a good grade. She took the issue to the academic dean, who informed her that she had gotten that grade because the teacher knew she could do better. Next time, the dean urged, Abeo could push herself even more.

Abeo entered eighth grade at Tindley Collegiate’s new building in Fall 2013. She’s excited about being a leader as part of the oldest class at the middle school. And she’s already set her sights on attending college, with plans to earn her PhD in forensics. She sees Tindley as an integral path to the goal.

“It’s a better experience and a way to get to college,” Abeo said. “No other school is like Tindley. You have teachers who are so on point and so close to you.”
George & Veronica Phalen
Leadership Academies

Earl Martin Phalen

He beat the odds – and now is helping kids from similar backgrounds to do the same

This new network of K-8 schools will build upon the success of Earl Martin Phalen’s Summer Advantage USA enrichment program. The Mind Trust invested $1 million in this network, which will grow to five Indianapolis schools that collectively will serve 4,500 students annually.

Earl Martin Phalen grew up in foster care in Massachusetts at a time when 70 percent of black boys in the system would end up in prison by age 21. Phalen instead attended Yale University and Harvard Law School and has become one of the nation’s best education innovators.

He credits his success to the support of the loving parents who adopted and raised him, George and Veronica Phalen. As devout Roman Catholics, the Phalens were committed to having a large family and had seven children of their own before adopting Earl.

They also had a strong sense of social justice. In the height of the Civil Rights movement, Earl’s mother wanted to become a Freedom Rider in the South. Having seven children, however, made that unwise.
“Education has always been my calling,” Earl said. “I know that even though statistics are grim for children going to school in underperforming districts, the possibilities are great for them if they’re given the right support.”

So when the Phalens read a *Boston Globe* article about the bleak statistics for black boys in foster care, they decided to adopt Earl, both to grow their family and to change the life of a child who faced unfavorable odds because of his life circumstances.

They gave Earl the middle name Martin in honor of Martin Luther King. And they instilled in him their passion for serving others.

Earl has been working since law school to provide children living in low-income communities with opportunities and give them a chance to defy tough odds like he did.

Through The Mind Trust’s Education Entrepreneur Fellowship, he started Summer Advantage USA, an intensive, five-week academic and enrichment program that helps kids gain an average of three months of learning during the summer, rather than fall behind as many kids from low-income backgrounds do during summer months.

Building from that successful model, he launched the George and Veronica Phalen Leadership Academies, which incorporates traditional instruction and online learning in a way that has never been seen in an Indianapolis school. The schools also focus on the critical elements that have made Summer Advantage thrive: engaging parents, hiring outstanding teachers, closely tracking student performance, and expecting every student to succeed.

Earl, who lives in Boston, said he was drawn to Indianapolis to start his school because the funding and intensive support The Mind Trust provided during his fellowship made him realize the rich network of resources in the city.

“Education has always been my calling,” Earl said. “I know that even though statistics are grim for children going to school in underperforming districts, the possibilities are great for them if they’re given the right support.”
KIPP Indianapolis

Eric Waites

Through KIPP, he learned to turn counterproductive traits into leadership assets

Part of one of the nation’s best charter networks, KIPP provides students with a rigorous college preparatory education that focuses on intense academic preparation and character education. KIPP received a $1 million investment from The Mind Trust and will add four schools that together will serve 2,250 students annually in kindergarten through 12th grade.

When Eric Waites entered KIPP Indianapolis as a sixth-grader, he exuded charm and energy—in ways that were often counterproductive.

He bounced off the walls in the hallways, dancing as he transitioned from one classroom to another. He also had a hard time transitioning from social settings, like the cafeteria, to serious ones, like math class, and sometimes that led to him being disruptive in the classroom.

But the team at KIPP saw real leadership potential in Eric, who was naturally influential among his peers. They key, they thought, was finding ways to channel his outgoing, social nature in ways that benefitted him and the school.

In some cases, they had to take a punitive approach. But KIPP’s main strategy was consistently giving Eric directions about how to focus his energy, setting high expectations for him, and
entrusting him with responsibilities so he could exhibit his natural leadership skills. They helped him become a mentor to younger peers on the basketball team. They taught him when was the appropriate time to speak up and when it was necessary to listen. And they took him to visit about six colleges so he could see the schools and develop a set of positive expectations about his future.

Nick Perry, who taught at the school throughout Eric’s tenure, said he saw a shift in Eric take place over about a year and a half. Eric began to embrace the same high expectations that KIPP’s staff held for him. If he was absent from school, he immediately checked in with all of his teachers about the work he missed so that he could make it up quickly. On the occasions he did step out of line, he admitted his mistake and apologized.

“He was more self-aware, and he had a sense of urgency,” Nick said. “School wasn’t just about the social piece for him anymore.”

Eric’s transformation mirrored a similar upward trajectory for KIPP, which under great new leaders and excellent teachers, has increased student proficiency on the ISTEP+ by 30 points in English and 39 points in math over the last three years.

And as Eric began to shift, so did his peers’ performance. Because of his social influence, his better focus and study habits inspired his friends to do the same.

Eric completed eighth grade at KIPP and is attending Scecina Memorial High School this year. The skills he learned at KIPP have put him on the path to successfully finishing high school and excelling in college.

“I started thinking about making sure (I asked), ‘What is the right thing to do?’” Eric said. “And I learned the importance of time and place.”
Now is the time.

Because of The Mind Trust’s efforts and your support, Indianapolis now has a rare combination of strengths: a network of high-impact education organizations; a robust pipeline of talented educators and innovators; a blueprint for a high-functioning school district; and a powerful tool, the Charter School Incubator, to make the blueprint a reality more quickly and with greater impact. With your support, we can leverage these assets to create a city filled with excellent schools in which highly qualified people and cutting-edge ideas help all students succeed.

Together, we can continue transforming Indianapolis’ education system. In doing so, we will continue positioning the city for a future with unprecedented potential for success and prosperity. We will continue pioneering a national model for transforming urban education. And we will continue giving thousands of children access to opportunity — and hope for a brighter future.

To learn more about how you can support The Mind Trust, please visit themindtrust.org/give.

The Mind Trust
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