The Mind Trust names fourth class of Innovation School fellows to help create, transform city’s public schools

INDIANAPOLIS – The Mind Trust, the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) and Mayor Joe Hogsett, today announced the selection of the fourth cohort of Innovation School Fellows, talented educators who will design, launch and operate “Innovation Network Schools,” which transform struggling schools in IPS and create other new educational opportunities in Indianapolis.

Innovation schools are public schools that give building-level school leaders full academic and operational freedom to innovate in order to improve student achievement. School districts, such as IPS, may partner with nonprofits and charter school operators to convert their existing schools into Innovation schools or launch a brand-new Innovation school in the district. These new schools can also be magnet or charter schools.

The Mind Trust partnered with IPS and the Mayor’s Office of Education Innovation in 2014 to create the Innovation School Fellowship to supply a pipeline of talented educators to launch and run these new, high-quality schools. Now in its fourth year, the fellowship has attracted top educational talent from Indianapolis and across the country to launch an Innovation school in Indianapolis.

The fellowship provides educators with the resources, supports and sufficient planning time to expand their own capacity and launch a great school. In addition to salary and benefits, The Mind Trust provides fellows with a robust portfolio of supports as they spend up to two years developing their school. Fellows have access to an extensive local and national network of experts and experiences, executive coaching, community engagement training and the opportunity to travel to and learn from the nation’s best schools.

During the fellowship, fellows present a full plan for their school to the IPS Board for final approval to launch the school as part of the district’s Innovation network.

The new fellows are:

- **Keeanna Warren and Scott Bess (IN).** These leaders will launch the second location of Purdue Polytechnic High School, a new Indianapolis high school being developed by Purdue University. Both schools will provide a hands-on, STEM-focused education that teaches the skills and knowledge to be successful throughout careers and paves the way for admission to a post-secondary institution. The first school, which is being developed by Bess and 2016 Fellow Shatoya Jordan, will open this fall, while the second school is proposed to open in Fall 2019 with Warren as the founding principal.

- **Sajan George (NY) and Amy Swann (GA).** George is the founder of Matchbook Learning, a visionary nonprofit founded in 2011 to tackle the daunting, yet vital task of turning around the bottom five percent of schools across the country. They propose to launch a new school in Indianapolis, which would be the seventh prototype of a school turnaround model that has been tested and refined in Detroit and Newark, NJ. The proposed K-8 Innovation charter school would launch in Fall 2018, with Swann as school leader.
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- **Jacob Allen and Marie Dandie (IL).** These educators founded pilotED, an emerging charter school network that will offer Indianapolis students a rigorous liberal arts curriculum focused on identity and sociology to interrupt cycles of generational poverty. In 2013, they created after-school programs in two Chicago neighborhoods incorporating a curriculum embedded in sociology and identity to change the trajectory of struggling and low-income students. Based on a three-year record of success in Chicago, pilotED will launch a K-8 Innovation charter school in Indianapolis based on the same principles. The school could launch as early as Fall 2018, with Dandie serving as founding principal.

- **Emily Pelino (IN) and David Spencer (IL).** Pelino is executive director of KIPP Indy Public Schools. KIPP Indy is part of the national non-profit network of college-preparatory, public charter schools with a 20-year track record of preparing students in underserved communities for success in college and life. KIPP Indy launched in 2004 as a middle school, and opened an elementary school in 2014. It proposes partnering with IPS in order to deepen its impact on the near northeast side by opening its first high school, enabling KIPP Indy to educate its students from kindergarten to the time they matriculate to college. The school would open in Fall 2019 with Spencer as school leader.

This fourth cohort will join fellows from the last three years who have opened or are about to open new Innovation schools in IPS. The Mind Trust worked with IPS to launch three Innovation schools in 2016 with another four Innovation schools set to launch in Fall 2017.

“IPS is excited to stand on the cutting edge of school innovation and talent development,” said IPS Superintendent Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee. “To invest in these dynamic leaders who are thinking courageously and imaginatively deepens our commitment to provide quality school choice options to a diverse student population with wide-ranging interests and aptitudes.”

“The educators that are brought together by this fellowship program continue to enhance local opportunities for students and strengthen our pipeline of talent – demonstrating that Indianapolis’ culture of innovation is not limited to our tech ecosystem,” said Mayor Joe Hogsett. “I am excited to welcome the newest cohort of Innovation Fellows, and look forward to celebrating the impact of their work in the coming years.”

"Innovation Schools are expanding educational opportunity in Indianapolis and providing students and families with more high-quality education options in Indianapolis," said David Harris, founder & CEO of The Mind Trust. "This important Innovation fellowship is continuing to attract the best and brightest education minds from Indianapolis and beyond to help in this effort to transform public education in our community."

(Fellow biographies and brief descriptions of each school are attached.)
Keeanna Warren and Scott Bess will launch the second location of Purdue Polytechnic High School, a new Indianapolis high school being developed by Purdue University in partnership with IPS.

Like the flagship Purdue Polytechnic High School in downtown Indianapolis, the second Indianapolis high school location will provide a STEM-focused education that teaches the skills and knowledge to be successful throughout careers and paves the way for admission to a post-secondary institution.

The high schools will serve as a bridge for center-city Indianapolis students to learn in a transformative environment with project-based, hands-on learning. Successful graduates who meet Purdue University admission criteria will have direct admittance to the Purdue Polytechnic Institute in West Lafayette. The first high school will open in Fall 2017, while the second proposed high school is scheduled to open in Fall 2019. At full capacity, it will serve approximately 600 students in grades 9-12.

Keeanna and Scott bring to the fellowship their experience working with Goodwill Education Initiatives (GEI), Goodwill’s arm that launches new educational opportunities throughout the Indianapolis region, and its Excel Center, a network of high schools for adults who had previously dropped out.

Keeanna, whom Purdue selected as founding principal for the second location of Purdue Polytechnic High School, has worked with the Excel Center in the Meadows neighborhood since 2013. She served in numerous positions, including night instructor, graduate counselor and lead instructor, until she was promoted to school director. Keeanna began her career teaching fifth grade at the Andrew J. Brown Academy charter school and Washington Township’s Nora Elementary School.

She earned her bachelor’s degree from Purdue University and a master’s degree in teaching from Marian University, where she was a part of the Turnaround School Leadership program. She is scheduled to complete her doctorate in school administration this spring at Indiana State University.

Scott is the head of schools of Purdue Polytechnic High Schools. Before joining Purdue, he was the president and COO of GEI. He previously was chief information officer for Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana and served in similar technology roles in the private sector.

He began his career as a teacher and coach in the Beech Grove school system. He also served four terms as a member of the Danville Community Schools board. Scott received a bachelor’s degree in math education from Purdue and a master’s degree in teaching from Marian University, where he was a part of the Turnaround School Leadership program.
Sajan George and Dr. Amy Swann are two of the minds at Matchbook Learning, a nonprofit founded by Sajan in 2011 to help turn around the bottom five percent of schools across the country. They propose to launch a new school in Indianapolis, which would be the seventh prototype of a school turnaround model that has been tested and refined in Detroit and Newark, NJ.

The proposed K-8 Innovation charter school in Indianapolis would launch in Fall 2018.

Matchbook Learning combines the best in both public school turnaround expertise and blended learning expertise. As a non-profit charter school operator that targets underperforming schools with a competency-based, technology enabled turnaround model, it brings together some of the country’s leading practitioners in engagements involving lead turnaround partners, blended school design and implementation and coaching of master teachers.

This tri-fold experience helps Matchbook target school turnarounds with a customized blended model that blends face-to-face and virtual instruction in brick-and-mortar schools via a one-on-one computing environment, while coaching teachers to personalize instruction for the benefit of each child in their classroom. Its unique and innovative blended turnaround school model is the first of its kind in the nation to be offered to schools with the highest poverty rates and needs.

**Sajan** is Matchbook’s founder and CEO. Before founding the nonprofit, he worked in the private sector as a turnaround and corporate restructuring expert. He was a managing director with the consulting firm of Alvarez & Marsal, where he led its Education Practice, a diverse group of talented turnaround professionals across the U.S. that assisted underperforming education institutions at the local, state and federal levels. While in this role, he worked with school districts across the country, including serving as the interim chief operating officer of the New Orleans Parish Schools during and after Hurricane Katrina and as interim chief financial officer of the St. Louis Public Schools.

In both the business world and at Matchbook, Sajan has worked alongside many of our nation’s governors, state superintendents, mayors and school superintendents to fundamentally restructure and improve some of the largest urban school districts in the country.

**Amy** currently is chief academic officer for Matchbook, where she leads the company’s academic model, curriculum, assessment design and instructional capacity building. Prior to joining Matchbook, she was principal of Bate Middle School in Kentucky, where under her leadership the school was named a P21 Exemplar by the Partnership for 21st Century Schools. She previously served as an assistant principal and teacher in several schools in Kentucky. She attended the University of Kentucky, where she earned two bachelor’s degrees, a master’s degree in social studies and a doctorate in educational leadership & instruction.

In addition to her national work, Amy has published papers and spoken during international symposiums on education leadership in Finland, China and Sweden.
Jacob Allen and Marie Dandie are co-founders of pilotED, an emerging school network that will offer Indianapolis public school students a rigorous liberal arts curriculum focused on identity and sociology to interrupt cycles of generational poverty.

In 2013, Jacob and Marie created an after-school program in two Chicago neighborhoods incorporating a curriculum embedded in sociology and identity to change the trajectory of struggling and low-income students. They assembled a team of teachers, developed a new curriculum and began executing a non-profit education program in their first years of teaching.

Based on a three-year track record of success in Chicago, pilotED will launch a K-8 Innovation charter school in Indianapolis based on the same principles – restorative justice, sociology and identity and civic engagement. This school would launch in Fall 2018, with Marie serving as founding principal.

Academically, pilotED utilizes direct intervention, identity development and small grouping to improve student achievement. Part of this approach includes student groupings by external and internal assessments where students rotate according to growth and need throughout the school year. This approach allows pilotED students to be challenged and receive rigorous instruction based on achievement levels through fluid groupings that benefit all students.

Jacob is co-founder and CEO of pilotED. He entered teaching as a member of Teach For America (TFA) and taught middle school science at Alain Locke Charter School in Chicago. He earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Washington and is a graduate of the Northwestern University Kellogg School of Management’s executive program for nonprofit management. He also holds a certification in charter school policy, finance and administration from UCLA. He has been a fellow with the NewSchools Venture Fund, Echoing Green and Camelback Ventures.

Marie is also the co-founder of pilotED and was a 2013 TFA member, teaching elementary and middle school English at Catalyst Maria High School in Chicago. She earned her bachelor’s degree from Central Michigan University and is a graduate of the Northwestern University Kellogg School of Management’s executive program for nonprofit management and leading excellent schools. Marie also holds a certification in charter school policy, finance and administration from UCLA. Along with the fellowships she shares with her co-founder, Marie also has been a fellow with the Thomas P. Fordham Institute.
KIPP Indy Public Schools seeks to deepen its impact in the Indianapolis community by partnering with IPS to open KIPP’s first local high school, enabling the network to educate its students from kindergarten to the time they matriculate to college.

Emily Pelino, executive director of KIPP Indy, will lead the development of the new high school, and David Spencer will serve as founding school leader. The new high school would open in Fall 2018.

KIPP is a non-profit network of college-preparatory, public charter schools with a 20-year track record of preparing students in educationally underserved communities for success in college and life. All schools, including KIPP Indy, are locally operated and managed in their own communities.

KIPP Indy believes that all students, regardless of their zip codes or demographics, can learn and achieve at the highest level. Its goal is to help students build the skills needed to graduate from college and lead choice-filled lives. To achieve this, KIPP Indy provides every student with a well-rounded education that includes rigorous academics, character development and extra-curricular opportunities. KIPP Indy strives to support students and alumni to and through college, and it believes an aligned K-12 network will best serve students on their path through college and beyond.

KIPP Indy was founded in 2004 with one class of fifth graders and has grown to educate more than 600 students across two schools, KIPP Indy College Prep Middle School and KIPP Indy Unite Elementary School.

As executive director of KIPP Indy, Emily is responsible for supporting the performance and development of its current schools and leading the region’s growth to a K-12 network. Emily joined KIPP Indy in 2009 as the assistant school leader, and later school leader, of its middle school. Emily began her career in eastern North Carolina where she taught middle school math through Teach For America (TFA). Emily earned her bachelor’s degree from the University of Michigan and master’s degrees in social work and public health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Before joining the fellowship, David was assistant principal at Moving Everest Charter School in Chicago. David began his career teaching in the Houston Public Schools through TFA and later worked for YES Prep Public Schools. While working on TFA’s staff, he served as a corps member advisor, curriculum specialist and school director. After moving to Chicago, he worked as senior director of learning for By The Hand Club For Kids.

David earned his bachelor’s degree from Texas Christian University and holds master’s degrees in youth and young adult ministry from Andrews University in Michigan and educational leadership from Columbia University.