Indianapolis – (June 30, 2020) – The Mind Trust, an Indianapolis-based education nonprofit, today announced the members of its seventh cohort of school leader fellows to design and lead high-quality public schools. Tariq Al-Nasir of Indianapolis, IN; Morrise Harbour of Washington D.C.; and Francisco Valdiosera of Indianapolis, IN, will spend one to two years developing sustainable school models that attract and retain high-quality, diverse talent, commit to equitably serve their school community, and have an academic vision of excellence for all students.

“Our School Fellowships provide exceptional leaders with the necessary time and resources to design schools that are focused on creating strong and equitable academic outcomes for all students,” said Brandon Brown, CEO of The Mind Trust. “We are especially proud that our seventh cohort of School Fellows consists entirely of Black and Latino male educators, who are traditionally underrepresented in academic leadership roles within our education system. These leaders’ demonstrated track record, passion and commitment to excellence and equity will be an incredible asset to our city and the students and families they will serve.”

Harbour and Valdiosera were selected for the Innovation School Fellowship, a partnership between The Mind Trust, Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS), and The Mayor’s Office of Education Innovation (Mayor’s Office) to attract best-in-class educators to develop and lead high-quality IPS Innovation Network Schools.

Innovation Network Schools are schools within IPS that give building-level school leaders full academic and operational autonomy to make decisions based on the needs of an individual school community to raise student achievement. Innovation School Fellows will present a full plan for their school to the IPS Board of School Commissioners for approval to become an Innovation Network School.

In the 2020-2021 school year, there will be 26 Innovation Network Schools within IPS, collectively serving more than 10,000 students. Fifteen Innovation Network Schools have been founded by former Fellows, including KIPP Legacy High, Matchbook Learning at Wendell Phillips School 63, and Purdue Polytechnic High School. According to a 2019 study from Stanford University, students in Innovation Network Schools are achieving 2-3 months of additional learning in reading and math.

“Indianapolis Public Schools is grateful to The Mind Trust for its commitment to provide these Fellowships that allow our exceptional educators the opportunity to step away and focus on new, innovative ways to continue to engage our students and perpetuate the high standards we hold for educating our children,” said Aleesia Johnson, IPS superintendent. “When these leaders complete this Fellowship, they’re ready to hit the ground running with proven strategies
and techniques that offer growing options to meet the needs of our students’ many learning styles and interests."

Al-Nasir was selected for the Charter School Fellowship to design and launch a STEM-focused middle school in partnership with Eastern Star Church’s The ROCK Initiative as part of a K-12 high-quality education continuum in the Arlington Woods neighborhood. Seven independent charter schools in Indianapolis have been founded by former Charter School Fellows, including Paramount Englewood, pilotED: Bethel Park, and Invent Learning Hub.

“Our city has set a national standard for high-quality charter school authorizing, which has been supported by The Mind Trust’s School Fellowships,” said Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett. “Indianapolis students benefit when school leaders have the time and resources to engage the community, develop a high-quality school model, and hire a team focused on developing equitable outcomes for all."

Tariq Al-Nasir, Charter School Fellow
Tariq Al-Nasir will develop a new public middle school as part of The Mind Trust’s partnership with Eastern Star Church The ROCK Initiative. The middle school will be grounded in unlocking students’ STEM and critical thinking superpowers. The school will be intentional in its approach toward STEM as a vehicle for all students, especially those who have struggled academically, to experience success. It will be located in the Arlington Woods neighborhood and will serve 7th and 8th grade students. The school will be part of a continuum of high-quality K-12 schools in the neighborhood, which includes Arlington Woods School 99 and Rooted School Indianapolis, both led by former Fellows of The Mind Trust.

Al-Nasir founded Stemnasium in 1998 and since then has served as the organization’s Executive Director. Stemnasium is a national organization that delivers learning labs, school-within-a-school models, and Saturday programming to engage students in hands-on, rigorous STEM experiences. After winning The Mind Trust’s School Design Competition in 2016, Al-Nasir moved to Indianapolis to deepen Stemnasium’s local impact. Al-Nasir has received a Master of Engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a Doctorate of Engineering from Stanford University alongside earning educational certificates related to STEM fields from New York University, Duke, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Carnegie Mellon University.

Morrise Harbour, Innovation School Fellow
Morrise Harbour will develop and lead a K-8 school built on student-centered, innovative instruction, instructional staff support and development, and operational excellence. During the first year of his Fellowship, Harbour will work to develop strong connections with the Indianapolis community to understand the needs and expectations of parents, students, and teachers.

Harbour has more than 20 years of experience in education and has consistently demonstrated his commitment to the art of teaching and leading for results-driven collaboration. Prior to the Fellowship, he served as Principal of Friendship Public Charter Schools’ Chamberlain Campus for ten years, leading the school to impressive student achievement gains. Harbour has attained a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology from Sacred Heart University, a Master’s degree in Education and School Building Leadership
Francisco Valdiosera, Innovation School Fellow

Francisco Valdiosera will develop a middle school anchored in an appreciation and examination of Latino culture, with an intentional focus on cultural competency for students from all backgrounds. The school will seek partnerships with Latino community organizations in Indianapolis and will be grounded in the concepts of ganas (perseverance), orgullo (pride), and comunidad (community) to drive student success and family engagement.

Valdiosera is a first-generation college graduate who has first-hand experience navigating opportunity gaps and structural inequities that keep students from achieving college and career success. He has held several roles within Indianapolis Public Schools, including assistant principal at George Washington High School and ESL department director, where he planned and managed ESL instructional programs for 30 IPS schools. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology from Stanford University, a Master’s degree in Education from Stanford University, and a Master’s degree in Educational Leadership from Butler University’s Experiential Program for Preparing School Principals.

The new cohort joins returning Innovation School Fellow Geoffrey Fenelus, who is the founding school leader of Promise Prep, a K-8 college preparatory school that enables students to become critical thinkers, have choices, capitalize on opportunities, and secure continuing economic advancement to positively impact their community. Promise Prep was recently approved as a mayor-sponsored charter school by the Indianapolis Charter School Board.

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About The Mind Trust

The Mind Trust is an Indianapolis-based education nonprofit that works to build a system of schools that gives every student in Indianapolis, no exceptions, access to a high-quality education. The Mind Trust does this by building a supportive environment for schools through policy and community engagement, empowering talented, diverse educators to launch new schools, and providing existing schools with the support they need to hire world-class talent and achieve excellence. Since 2006, The Mind Trust has supported the launch of 37 schools, 13 education nonprofit organizations, and has helped place more than 1,500 teachers and school leaders in Indianapolis classrooms. More information can be found at themindtrust.org.