

Emerson Early Literacy Challenge



Press Kit

Emerson Early Literacy Challenge: Background & Overview

- **What is the Emerson Early Literacy Challenge?**

- In partnership with Emerson, The Opportunity Trust is launching the Emerson Early Literacy Challenge (ELC), a transformative initiative designed to accelerate literacy outcomes and establish proof points for the successful implementation of literacy plans.
- The Emerson ELC brings together Local Education Agencies (LEAs) (i.e., traditional and charter public school districts) to engage in a two-year immersive learning experience that focuses on planning for and implementing proven strategies that improve students' ability to read on grade level by third grade.

- **Why is early literacy important for children?**

- Literacy is the cornerstone of educational success and lifelong achievement, while illiteracy contributes to major societal challenges such as higher crime, incarceration rates, and increased poverty. In St. Louis, as in many parts of the U.S., several student groups—particularly Black students, students with dyslexia, those with IEPs, and English Language Learners—are performing below their potential in reading.
- In the early years, between birth and third grade, children learn to read. Once they enter fourth grade, children are expected to use reading to learn. If they struggle with reading by the end of third grade, they risk falling behind in subjects like science, social studies, and math, which increasingly rely on understanding word problems.
- Individuals with below-average levels of education are overrepresented among people in prison compared to the general population. According to the [National Adult Literacy Survey](#), 70% of all incarcerated adults cannot read at a fourth-grade level, “meaning they lack the reading skills to navigate many everyday tasks or hold down anything but lower (paying) jobs.”

- In response to these disparities, the Right to Read movement, spurred by the NAACP, is championing literacy equity nationwide. In 2022, Missouri passed Senate Bill 681 mandating evidence-based reading instruction and has prompted the Missouri Read, Lead, Exceed initiative, a \$60 million investment in literacy, including teacher training on the Science of Reading. Locally, the St. Louis City and St. Louis County NAACP chapters launched a reading campaign, further emphasizing the community's commitment to improving reading proficiency.
- Unfortunately, in St. Louis and across the U.S., many students, particularly Black students, English Language Learners, and those with IEPs, are not achieving literacy proficiency by third grade. The Emerson ELC seeks to address this by providing Local Education Agencies (LEAs) (i.e. traditional and charter public school districts) with the resources, training, and support needed to close these gaps.
 - Additional Links:
 - [NAACP Launches Nationwide Partnership with The Right to Read Film in NYC](#)
 - [St. Louis City NAACP launches 'Right to Read' campaign](#)
 - [Missouri Read, Lead, Exceed](#)
 - [Science of Reading](#)
 - [Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters](#)
 - [The Relationship Between Incarceration and Low Literacy](#)

Goals and Objectives

- **Primary Goal:**
 - The primary goal of the Emerson ELC is to close the third-grade reading proficiency gap in St. Louis, ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to succeed academically.
- **Specific Objectives:**
 - Equip LEAs with the latest research and best practices in literacy instruction.
 - Bridge the gap between academic research on the Science of Reading and practical implementation in classrooms.
 - Create proof points in St. Louis that demonstrate what's possible when schools and communities commit to literacy equity.

Program Details

- **Who can apply?**
 - The Emerson ELC is open to 3–4 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) from St. Louis city and county. These LEAs will be selected based on their commitment to literacy equity, their readiness for change, and their ability to implement data-driven practices. See the application at emersonliteracychalleng.org
- **What does participation entail?**
 - Selected district teams will participate in a two-year immersive program that will bridge the gap between literacy research and practical implementation. Teams will consist of educators, school leaders, parents, and community partners who will work with experts in the field of literacy to develop and pilot tailored literacy plans for the 2024-2025 school year.
- **What support will LEAs receive?**
 - Selected LEAs will receive a \$20,000 planning grant and, upon successful piloting of their literacy plans, up to \$250,000 in implementation funding. Additionally, they will receive ongoing consulting support from top literacy experts.
- **Who is involved in the initiative?**
 - Emerson is the lead funder for the initiative in partnership with The Opportunity Trust which leads the program management. [Instruction Partners](#), a national nonprofit education consulting firm, is the lead consultant for the initiative programming.
 - A Steering Committee will evaluate and select applications to be funded. Volunteer members of the Emerson ELC Steering Committee members are:



Steering Committee Members

- Julius B Anthony St. Louis Black Authors of Children’s Literature
- Olivia Apsher MO Department of Education (DESE)
- Chester Asher Coalition with STL Kids
- Krystal Barnett St. Louis Bridge 2 Hope
- Akberet Boykin Farr Emerson
- Dr. Ian Buchanan NIA Education Group
- Maxine Clark Clark Fox Foundation
- Lisa Greening Turn the Page St. Louis
- Dr. Shea Kerkhoff University of Missouri St. Louis
- Dr. Gary Parker Washington University
- Kelly Pollock Berges Family Foundation
- Laura Vilines St. Louis Teacher Residency

Impact and Benefits

- **Why should LEAs participate?**
 - This is a unique opportunity to lead literacy reform in St. Louis, receive substantial funding and support, and become a model for successful literacy interventions that can be replicated across the region.
- **Community Impact:**
 - The Emerson ELC is not just about improving literacy scores; it’s about transforming communities by ensuring that all children have the foundational skills they need to succeed. This initiative will have a long-term impact on educational outcomes, economic mobility, and community well-being.



Application Process

- **How can LEAs apply?**
 - LEAs can apply through a detailed application process that opens on September 11, 2024, and closes on September 26, 2024. Applications will be evaluated and selected by the Emerson ELC Steering Committee.
- **What should LEAs expect during the application process?**
 - The application process is designed to be thorough but accessible. LEAs will be asked to provide information on their current literacy practices, their vision for improvement, and their readiness to implement significant changes.

Stakeholder Involvement

- **Role of Community Stakeholders:**
 - Community organizations, parents, and local leaders play a critical role in supporting the LEA teams. Their involvement ensures that the literacy plans are rooted in the needs and values of the community and that the plans have the broad-based support needed for long-term success.
- **Public Engagement:**
 - Regular updates, success stories, and interviews with key stakeholders will be made available to highlight the impact and progress of the initiative.

Looking Ahead

- **Long-Term Vision:**
 - The Emerson ELC is the beginning of a sustained effort to ensure literacy equity in St. Louis. The lessons learned and successes achieved through this initiative will inform future efforts and inspire other regions to adopt similar approaches.
- **Invitation to Participate:**
 - We invite all eligible LEAs to apply and encourage community members and organizations to support this important work. Together, we can ensure that every child in St. Louis can read proficiently by third grade.

Emerson Early Literacy Challenge



Press Release

For more information, contact:
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****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

The Opportunity Trust and Emerson Launch \$1 Million Early Literacy Challenge

A Groundbreaking Initiative to Close Literacy Gaps and Improve Educational Outcomes for Students in St. Louis

ST. LOUIS, MO – [September 23, 2024] – The Opportunity Trust, in partnership with St. Louis-headquartered Emerson, the global automation technology and software company, has launched the **Emerson Early Literacy Challenge**, a strategic initiative aimed at helping close the literacy gap and increasing the number of students in the St. Louis area who are able to read proficiently by the third grade. This program, **made possible by a \$1 million charitable donation by Emerson**, is a direct response to the urgent call to action by the St. Louis NAACP, which challenged the community to get involved in helping to address the literacy crisis in St. Louis City and County.

Literacy is a gateway to opportunity and economic success. Disparities in reading proficiency, especially between Black and white students, remain a critical societal issue, with research showing illiteracy contributes to increased rates of crime and poverty in communities across the country. Nationwide, the NAACP launched The Right to Read campaign, which has been instrumental in raising awareness about the literacy crisis and advocating for evidence-based reading instruction. In Missouri, this movement focused on aligning reading instruction to the “Science of Reading,” which led to the passage of Senate Bill 681, mandating the use of proven reading practices in Missouri schools.

“At Emerson, we recognize the foundation of a community’s future workforce and the stability of our community begins with early childhood education,” said **Akberet Boykin Farr, Vice President of HR, Corporate Functions at Emerson**. “The \$1 million investment we are making in the Early Literacy Challenge initiative in the St. Louis region is part of our commitment to help organizations working to ensure every child has the skills they need to succeed.”

The Emerson Early Literacy Challenge seeks to accelerate literacy outcomes by engaging three to four charter and traditional public school districts in St. Louis City and County to participate in an immersive learning experience, connecting them with the latest literacy research and best practices to implement proven Science of Reading approaches in the classroom.

Selected schools will participate in a two-year immersive program that will help their literacy/reading improvement teams bridge the gap between literacy research and practical implementation for grades K-3. Teams will consist of educators, school leaders, parents and community partners who will work with experts in the field of literacy to develop and pilot tailored literacy plans for the 2024-2025 school year. Each district team will receive a \$20,000 planning grant for participation and will be eligible for up to \$250,000 in additional funding to fully implement their literacy plans in the 2025-2026 school year.

“The Opportunity Trust is thrilled to partner with Emerson on this landmark initiative. The Emerson Early Literacy Challenge provides a critical opportunity to prove that with the right tools and collaboration, we can close the literacy gap and ensure all St. Louis students succeed,” said **Eric Scroggins, CEO of The Opportunity Trust**.

The Emerson Early Literacy Challenge application period is open now and closes on September 26, 2024. Administrators in local traditional and charter public school districts interested in applying can find more information and submit their application online at emersonliteracychallenge.org.

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About The Opportunity Trust:

The Opportunity Trust is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing educational equity and excellence. Through strategic investments, policy advocacy, and innovative programs, The Opportunity Trust works to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have access to a high-quality education that prepares them for success in life. To learn more, visit theopportunitytrust.org.

About Emerson:

Emerson (NYSE: EMR) is a global technology and software company providing innovative solutions for the world's essential industries. Through its leading automation portfolio, including its majority stake in AspenTech, Emerson helps hybrid, process and discrete manufacturers optimize operations, protect personnel, reduce emissions and achieve their sustainability goals. For more information, visit Emerson.com.

Emerson Early Literacy Challenge



Steering Committee Biographies

[Headshots](#)



Julius B. Anthony

President & Founder

St. Louis Black Authors of Children's Literature
and The Believe Projects

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Julius B. Anthony is President and Founder of St. Louis Black Authors of Children's Literature and The Believe Projects. Julius inspires kids to become readers and his signature initiative, The Believe Projects® has gained local and national attention. Julius says, "Representation in literature matters because children need to see themselves as essential elements of a story."

The Believe Projects gives children an opportunity to have access to books that reflect their everyday life, and they get to meet the people who author books for them. These are the transformational experiences that ignite the much-needed behaviors, interest and excitement that lead children to becoming successful readers." The Believe Projects literacy labs have grown to become three preschools, thirteen elementary schools, and one middle school serving 6,000 students throughout metropolitan St. Louis.

Through this work, Mr. Anthony has received several awards including the first recipient of the Children's Education Alliance of Missouri's IDEA Award (2019); Enduring Ideas 2020 Award sponsored by The Reinvention Lab at Teach for America; Nike, Inc. 2022 Black Community Commitment Award in Education Innovation; 2023 Celebrating Literacy Award from the International Literacy Association; 2023 Global Tassels Community Innovator Award; FOCUS St. Louis 2023 What's Right With the Region Award; National English Honor Society 2024 Literacy Initiative Award; and the Iota Phi Lambda Sorority Inc. 2024 Emerald Award.

Julius B. Anthony serves as a Board Member for St. Louis Regional Literacy Association, Metro Theater Company, and Books for Newborns. Julius is a 2022 Camelback Ventures Fellow.





Olivia Apsher

Director of Early Literacy, DESE

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Olivia serves as the Director of Early Literacy for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Olivia is committed to ensuring that high quality, evidence-based reading instruction is provided to all Missouri students. Prior to this work, Olivia was an elementary educator in Central Missouri and Los Angeles, California. During her time with the Los Angeles Unified School District, Olivia had the opportunity to hold the positions of Literacy Prevention/Intervention Coordinator and Instructional Coach. As a Literacy Coordinator, she played an integral role in developing and implementing a comprehensive literacy action plan. She collaboratively led teachers in refining their core instruction and led them in implementing systematic and explicit small-group instruction, while also using data, high-quality instructional materials, and progress monitoring to drive her own work as an interventionist. Olivia holds a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from California State University Northridge.





Chester Asher

Coalition for STL Kids

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I seek to empower others. Education has been my tool for doing so. Whether through online tools, teaching, or training educators, I have a history of delivering on outcomes that make businesses more successful, and the world a better place.

After eight years in the classroom teaching every single grade from kindergarten to twelfth, two of those years as a grade team lead, three of those years as a department chair, and three of those as an ICT teacher; two years as a dean, a year as a Director of Curriculum and Instruction, two years as a principal, and three years as a charter school CEO, I know the full spectrum of K-12 educational achievement and what is needed for pedagogical excellence. I have observed and talked to school leaders in over a hundred schools including schools in South Africa, Jamaica, Ghana, Greece, England, France, Australia and New Zealand. I consulted in the United Arab Emirates, Sweden, New York City and Philadelphia. I have also helped to develop curricula at numerous colleges and universities. I have worked for some of the most successful public and charter schools in New York City and consulted with some of the most elite universities around the country.



Krystal Barnett

Founder and CEO, Bridge 2 Hope

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The schools in St. Louis do not serve children well, sometimes you have to just ask “how are the children”? . Children and their needs are not centered as decisions are made. The focus becomes about politics and adult feelings, teachers are expressing their feelings of extreme tiredness and how they feel unsupported and parents are often ignored, judged and shut out. In St. Louis, 74% of kids are reading below grade level in the largest district that services predominantly Black and Brown children. Less than 50% of kids in Missouri can read on grade level. Over the last 20+ years, there has been a mass exodus from our city, our schools, with the number of enrolled students having decreased from 100,000 to less than 20,000 students in 2022. Parents with wealth and access are choosing to go to other places with better schools, support, and opportunities. But what about the parents who are trapped in chronically failing schools operating under a flawed education system?

This is the unmet need that B2H serves. By equipping, connecting and engaging parents to advocate, demand, and take action on behalf of not just their children but all children, we believe this impact will change the system. Parents have to take their rightful place back in the education space. There is no greater time than now. We believe the people closest to the problem have the brilliance, expertise, and lived experience needed to disrupt the inequitable systems of education, moving out of the “you don’t know what you don’t know” space and activating their power to create change.

I had a unique educational experience. I too was removed from my neighborhood school through the desegregation program. I did learn in those schools, but I wasn’t valued in them. I do this work because I believe all children deserve a chance to write their own path to a great education. No more barriers!





Akberet Boykin Farr

Vice President of Diversity and Social Responsibility,
Emerson

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Akberet Boykin Farr has served as the vice president of diversity and social responsibility since December 1, 2020.

Boykin Farr, who has managed the company’s internal diversity and inclusion programs since 2017, will continue to oversee the D&I function. In her new role, she will also manage the Emerson Charitable Trust, coordinate the company’s corporate social responsibility reporting and serve as community liaison in St. Louis, the global headquarters of the Fortune 200 company. She will take over CSR duties from Dave Rabe, who is retiring in December after 36 years with Emerson, most recently serving as vice president of corporate social responsibility the past four years.

Boykin Farr joined Emerson in 1998 as an employee relations specialist and in 2004 was promoted to human resources director of its motor technologies business. After Emerson sold this business to Nidec Motor Corporation, Boykin Farr joined Nidec in 2010 to serve as its local vice president of human resources. In 2014, she returned to Emerson as a director of corporate human resources. In 2017, the company promoted her to vice president of diversity and inclusion. She has overseen the development and rollout of the company’s D&I programs, including unconscious bias training globally and the launch of employee resource groups to help promote a diverse and inclusive workplace.

Boykin Farr attended Saint Louis University where she completed her undergraduate and graduate studies, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in management and industrial relations, an MBA in human resource management, and a doctorate in organizational theory and public policy studies. She currently serves on the local boards of directors for the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis and City Academy.





Dr. Ian Buchanan

Founding President and CEO, Nia Education Group
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A native of E. St. Louis, Illinois, Dr. Ian Buchanan is committed to servant leadership and interrupting inequity. He currently serves as CEO of Nia Education Group, a coaching and consulting firm dedicated to helping great leaders become their greatest leadership selves. In addition, Ian is the author of the

best-selling book, *KING: A Four-Part Leadership Framework for Black Men*. Most recently, Dr. Buchanan has assumed the role of Education Chair for the St. Louis City NAACP chapter, leading a region-wide literacy campaign, the Right to Read.

Prior to founding Nia Education Group, Dr. Ian served as Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction (Chief Academic Officer) in the School District of University City (Missouri). Before his five-year tenure in University City, Buchanan served as founding Director of Strategic Partnerships for the Achievement School District (Memphis, TN). Also during his tenure in Memphis, Dr. Buchanan served as founding Managing Director of the Parent Leadership and Advocacy Institute (PLAI), a non-profit organization committed to empowering parents to influence change. He also played an influential role in the development of the nationally acclaimed Memphis Lift, a self-described “powerful parent organization.”

Over a span of more than two decades, Ian has served in a number of teaching roles at the K-12, adult basic education, undergraduate, and graduate levels. He also spent more than a decade in school leadership roles at the elementary and middle school levels.

Ian has received numerous awards and recognitions, including the Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals Consummate Professional of the Year Award, the St. Louis American Salute to Excellence in Education Award, and the Teach for America Principal of the Year Award.





Maxine Clark

Founder, Build-A-Bear Workshop

CEO, Clark-Fox Family Foundation

Inspirator, the Delmar DivINe™

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Maxine Clark is the Founder of Build-A-Bear Workshop®, a teddy-bear themed retail-entertainment experience. In 2004, Build-A-Bear became a public company traded on the NYSE. Today, there are nearly 500 Build-A-Bear Workshop stores worldwide and over 250 million stuffed animals have been sold world-wide. In 2022, Build-A-Bear celebrated its 25 th anniversary.

Maxine stepped down from her CEB (Chief Executive Bear) position in 2013 to start her next act-- to help unleash the potential of women and minority entrepreneurs and to use her entrepreneurial skills to create platforms and places that give access to more St. Louis families. Her latest venture is the Delmar DivINe™—the transformation of a neighborhood eyesore, the historic St. Luke’s Hospital in the St. Louis West End, into a multi-use real estate development opened in late 2021.

Maxine is an Emeritus member of the Build-A-Bear Workshop Board of Directors and a recent past member of Footlocker, Inc. Board of Directors. Maxine is also an Emeritus member of the Washington University Board of Trustees and an Emeritus member and former Chair of Goldfarb School of Nursing. She now serves on the boards of Arch Grants, Operation Food Search, PBS national and Nine PBS boards. In 2017 Maxine was named to the Missouri Public Affairs Hall of Fame and in 2015 was named Women of the Year by the Greater Missouri Leadership Foundation.

Maxine is a graduate of the University of Georgia and holds an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Washington University in St. Louis and St. Louis University and an Honorary Doctor in Human Letters from the University of Missouri St. Louis and The A.T. Still School of Dental Medicine and an Honorary Associates degree from St. Louis





Lisa Greening

Executive Director, Turn the Page STL

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Currently, the Executive Director of Turn the Page STL, St. Louis' chapter of the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, dedicated to increasing the number of children that are reading at or above grade level reading by the end of third grade. Turn the Page STL is a city-county wide literacy initiative that convenes and aligns high-quality literacy programs, resources and initiatives in order to ensure children from low-income communities, birth through third grade, have access to quality early childhood programs, literacy programming during out-of-school time, prepared and supported classroom teachers, engaged families, and high-impact tutoring . Experienced Executive Director with a demonstrated history of working in the non-profit organization management industry. Skilled in Nonprofit Organizations, Public Speaking, Fundraising, Program Development, and Community Outreach. Strong business development professional with a Master of Arts in Education from The Johns Hopkins University.





Shea Kerkhoff, PhD

Associate Professor, UMSL

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Shea Kerkhoff is an Associate Professor of literacy and secondary education at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. She holds a Ph.D. from North Carolina State University in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus in literacy and language education. Dr. Kerkhoff utilizes mixed methods to investigate critical, digital, and global literacies. Her research centers on integrating inquiry-based global learning with adolescent literacy instruction. For her dissertation study, she was named an International Literacy Association Outstanding Dissertation Finalist and earned the first place award at the North Carolina State University Graduate Student Research Symposium. Her work has been published in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, and *Reading Research Quarterly*. She taught high school English for seven years, including North Carolina and District of Columbia Public Schools and previously served as Assistant Editor of *English Education*, a National Council of Teachers of English journal.

She also serves as Going Global, Inc.'s Education Director and previously served as the World's Education Director. In this capacity, the International Literacy Association awarded her the Constance McCullough grant to conduct inquiry-based digital literacy professional development and research with teachers in Kitale, Kenya. She is affiliated faculty with the Missouri Language and Literacies Center and in 2018 was named a Longview Foundation Global Teacher Educator fellow. Dr. Kerkhoff is passionate about literacy education at home and abroad.





Gary Parker, PhD

Associate Dean For External Affairs, Director Of The Clark-Fox Policy Institute

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Gary Parker has spent more than two decades engaged in policy practice. First as a government employee and then as a university-based policy analyst and researcher, he has partnered with policymakers on the local, state and federal levels to develop, implement and evaluate policies aimed at improving the health and mental health of children and families. As the former deputy director of the NYU McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research, he led several community-based participatory research projects and collaborated with community and government partners to connect evidence-based solutions to policy decision-making.

As director of the Clark-Fox Policy Institute, Gary leads a programmatic agenda driven by a commitment to advancing social and economic justice for children and the adults who care for them. Through the institute, he leverages a vast network of transdisciplinary scholarship and community knowledge to inform critical policy issues.

As the Associate Dean for External Affairs at the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis, he oversees the school's communications and professional development offerings.

Gary brings a passion for social justice and racial equity to all of his work and continually seeks to put theory, his academic training, and his commitment to stakeholder collaboration into practice to affect positive social change. He serves on the board of Forward Through Ferguson, an organization charged with advancing racial equity in the St. Louis region. Gary completed his doctoral studies at Hebrew University in Jerusalem earning a PhD in social work.



Kelly Pollock

CEO, Berges Family Foundation

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Kelly joined the Berges Family Foundation (BFF) as the inaugural CEO in September 2022, bringing extensive experience in non-profit leadership, relationship and partnership building, fiscal management, and most importantly, her passion for St. Louis and its non-profit community.

Prior to joining BFF, Kelly spent over 24 years as an integral leader at COCA – Center of Creative Arts, where she served as Executive Director from 2010–2022. Under her leadership, COCA, a national leader in arts education, expanded its impact through innovative programs, grew its financial base, forged key partnerships, and demonstrated a deep commitment to using the arts to address inequities and bridge divides. Additionally, she led COCA’s successful Create Our Future Campaign, securing \$49 million to build the organization’s endowment and expand its historic building, including its beautiful, state-of-the-art theatre – the Catherine B. Berges Theatre – made possible by a gift from the Berges Family Foundation.

Kelly has been recognized as a 2016 U.S.A. Eisenhower Fellow; a YWCA Leader of Distinction; a Saint Louis Visionary Award winner; a Tedx Speaker on Creative Leadership; and a Most Influential Business Woman by the St. Louis Business Journal. Pollock currently serves as a Board member for Urban Sprouts Child Development Center and as the Chapter President for the St. Louis Eisenhower Fellows. She earned a B.A. in History from Washington University and a Master of Public Policy Administration degree from the University of Missouri–St. Louis.





Laura Vilines

Founder and Executive Director, Teach St. Louis

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In 2018, Laura founded Teach St. Louis, the first program of its kind in the St. Louis region. Prior to this work, Laura served as the Chief Academic Officer at STEM Preparatory Academy, a charter school network located in Nashville, Tennessee. In her time as CAO, STEM Prep was consistently named a Reward School,

performing in the top 10 percent of schools in the state. Laura holds a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy and a Master's degree in Education Policy from Vanderbilt University. Laura is a graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, and she began her career as a 2006 Teach For America Corps Member, teaching high school English.

Laura currently enjoys living in the city with her husband, two sons, and their bad dog - Julep. In her time away from work, Laura enjoys yoga, hiking, and spending time outdoors.





Eric Scroggins

Founder & CEO, The Opportunity Trust

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Eric began his career in education teaching middle school science in the Bronx in New York City as part of Teach For America. He had a number of roles on Teach For America's staff including helping to open the St. Louis region and to lead the San Francisco Bay Area region through a major expansion. In these roles, Eric helped to codify the organization's regional growth and fundraising strategy and then served as Teach For America's Chief of Strategy and External

Affairs nationally. In this role, he oversaw the unprecedented growth of the organization: opening 16 new sites, growing regional fundraising from \$82 million to \$228 million, and securing over \$50 million in federal funding that fueled a 67% increase in the size of the national teacher corps. After 15 years working to scale Teach For America's impact nationally and being a part of bold and successful reforms of public education systems in cities across the country, Eric returned to St. Louis to launch The Opportunity Trust to help catalyze and steward necessary change in St. Louis. He serves on the Board of Directors for Forest Park Forever and Innovate Public Schools based in San Jose, CA, and is an Aspen Institute Fellow. Eric was the first in his family to graduate from college, graduating summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Washington University in St. Louis.





Jesse Dixon

Partner, The Opportunity Trust

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Throughout Jesse’s career, he has worked on advancing educational equity at the early childhood, K-12, workforce development, higher education, non-profit, state, and federal levels. Jesse was formerly the special assistant to the superintendent of the St. Louis Public Schools where he managed federal grant programs, charter sponsorship, and launched the strategic planning process that led to the District’s re-accreditation. He also spent four years in East St. Louis where he oversaw educational

programming for 2,500 students year-round – including a 1,500-student Head Start program where he initiated a two-generational education strategy leading to hundreds of Head Start parents being prepared and employed in family-sustaining wage careers. As an education policy consultant to states, districts, and schools, Jesse directed the launch and management of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Office of District and School Turnaround, a national model for how states can successfully intervene in chronically underperforming school districts. Jesse earned his master’s in Education Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.



Rachel Powers

Partner, The Opportunity Trust

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Rachel Powers is a proud St. Louis native and has spent her career elevating the voices of communities to recognize and actualize their power to make change. In her previous role, she served as Communications Manager for Noble Schools in Chicago, Illinois. There, she managed external and internal communications, public and media relations, social media, and brand management for the organization’s 17 high schools and one middle school.

Rachel also served as Dean of Students at Muchin College Prep, where she guided high school students to their goals through academic and social-emotional counseling; and led strategic partnership development to enhance learning outside of the classroom. Previous to working in Chicago, Rachel was a Consultant at Vector Communications in St. Louis, where she galvanized communities to address public policy issues in Missouri and Illinois. In this role, she managed marketing, public relations, community, and stakeholder engagement in the areas of health and human services, transit, transportation, and education. Rachel holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Missouri–Columbia, and a master’s degree in Social Work with a concentration in social and economic development and management, from Washington University in St. Louis.

