

CHARTER LEADERS OF COLOR **MATTER.**

Jonathan Johnson

Founder & Executive Director
The Rooted School



I was a Black kid growing up in Southern California in a family that lived paycheck to paycheck, causing us to move around a lot because we couldn't always afford basic living expenses. Those lessons of scarcity gave me the moxie of strength to become the first in my family to graduate college.

While my parents wanted me to start working immediately - "Go make lots of money now while you can!"- I knew I had to be in a place where I could be a part of a community and have real impact. I moved to New Orleans as a Teach For America corps member and ended up teaching at KIPP. As a teacher, each day with my students started with Tupac's poem "Rose" which describes the powerful ability of a rose to grow where no one ever thought possible—through a crack in the concrete. I shared it with my students hoping that it would inspire them the way it inspired me.

It was in my classroom that I met two students who would forever change my life. These students were my mirrors – black middle school teenagers from families living paycheck-to-paycheck. Both students wanted to fast track their family's financial freedom so, they started selling drugs. It was that decision that sent one student to an early death and one to jail for murder.

It pained me to see two promising students make life-changing decisions in good-hearted attempts to manifest economic stability for their families. I founded Rooted out of a fear that unless communities like New Orleans take bolder action on behalf of kids of color, they just won't have enough time to catch up.

ROOTED IN ROSES

At Rooted we use the framework called "rose, bud, thorn" to reflect on our work. Rose is something that is going really well for you right now. A bud is an opportunity that you're really excited about. And, a thorn is something that is just a pain in your side.

One of my roses at Rooted, is that our school model is working -- providing high school students with the opportunities to develop their skills in the most in-demand job sectors in New Orleans. Our sophomores have made 4.4 years of reading growth, which is more growth than the average high school student is making per year in half the time. At least 70% of our students have four or more industry-recognized credentials in the technology field that would enable them to earn \$20.00 an hour after graduation, compared to the current state minimum wage of \$7.25.

ROOTED INTO THE FUTURE

Because of this early success, communities across this country are inviting the Rooted School to expand. We see Rooted as a bold step in supporting communities to use schools as vehicles for truly solving the disparities that continue to perpetuate Tale(s) of Two Cities. This is Rooted's bud. We now have the opportunity to incubate leaders to go out into other parts of the country to rethink how schools, particularly charter schools, expand their own impact and really begin thinking about how charter schools led by people of color can deliver on academic achievement and social impact at the same time. That makes me really excited about the future.

A current thorn is the amount of resistance and doubt I get on whether we are doing the right work and if I am the right person to lead it. This thorn is motivation because I know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I, like other charter leaders of color, are exactly the people who need to be leading this kind of work. We are the experts, the innovators, the connection to moving our children toward their own North Stars. And we're getting this done through never-before-seen school models, like Rooted, every single day.

The Rooted School

Location	New Orleans, LA
Year Opened	2014
Student enrollment	165
Grades served	9-11
Website	www.rootedschool.org

Student Demographics

Asian	.9%
Black/African-American	85.5%
White/Caucasian	6.7%
Hispanic/Latino	6.7%
Two or More Races	N/A

Homeless Youth	0%
At Risk Students	100%
Students with Disabilities	22%
ESL Students	6%



CHARTER
LEADERS
OF COLOR
MATTER.