

CHARTER LEADERS OF COLOR **MATTER.**

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I was raised by a hard-working single mother, who stressed the importance of education. Unfortunately, my school was rampant with bullying. With the death of my father, I received Social Security checks which my mother used to pay my tuition to attend a private college-preparatory high school. The timing of my father's passing changed the course of my life. However, no parent should have to die for their child to attain an excellent education. The idea that luck, or in my case, tragedy, should determine the future of a child is not a part of the American Dream. All students deserve the right to a free quality education regardless of their race, zip code, or socioeconomic status.

I obtained my Bachelor's degree and my Master's degree in Educational Leadership from Vanderbilt University. As the only sibling to graduate college, I felt a lot of pressure. After completing my Master's, I worked briefly as an Executive Team Leader at Target and then took a \$20,000 pay cut to join Teach for America. I wanted to help under-served students have access to opportunity. In May 2016, I founded Élan Academy. Our school is rooted in rigorous academics and leadership development, serving students from under-resourced communities.

THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE STUDENTS

Élan Academy is one of the Top 10 Schools in New Orleans. We completed our first state testing year last year (year 2 of our school), and we outperformed the state and city averages.

Parents say they feel the warmth when they walk into our school. We create a small, family feel, with two teachers per class and a maximum of 25 students per class. We have a wonderful parent-run organization called Momentum that organizes school events, many of which include students' families. When kids can see the connection across families—they know we're a team supporting them.

Our academic successes tie to our strong school community. We had a student who came to us in the second grade reading at kindergarten level. When he graduated second grade, he was reading at a fourth grade level! But this isn't a purely academic story. His house had burned down that year. His father wasn't in his life. I believe that Élan's nurturing culture provided a space where this young man could learn and excel despite the incredible challenges he faced outside our walls.

We further develop community and support student growth by implementing a "Leader in Me" curriculum program that includes teaching the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. We have posters listing the 7 Habits in the hallways, and we role-play opportunities to apply the habits. This creates a language of problem-solving among all of our students. When there is a conflict on the playground, a teacher can reference the 7 Habits and ask, "how can we have a win-win"?

SCHOOL CHOICE CHANGES LIVES

Many Black parents tell me that their child attended private school before joining Élan, and that the culture of the school made the child feel isolated. There was a lack of empathy and acceptance in the school culture. At their previous schools, these students were asked to wear their hair according to certain guidelines that were not culturally aligned. I wear my hair natural, and many little girls at Élan beam at me and say “you wear your hair just like mine!” At Élan, we create a community where all students are able to be their full selves.

School choice is so important. If a child is being bullied at school, or their well-being is at stake in other ways, parents should have alternative, high-quality options to choose from. Educational redlining and other practices that prevent school choice and promote inequality would be akin to telling a family of color that they weren’t allowed to shop at an organic grocery store because they didn’t live within a 10-block radius of the store. Charter schools allow for school choice, and this is so especially important for under-served communities and ethnic communities.

The majority of the time, people who are not Black are the ones having the conversations and making the decisions that affect black students. But on a daily basis, charter school leaders of color are making decisions that impact a majority of students who look like us, and this responsibility is our life’s calling. We see our work as generational. If I can help prepare a student for a life of opportunity, then that student can support aging parents and raise healthy children. Charter school leaders of color can impact a trajectory of people that society has left behind.

ÉLAN ACADEMY

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| Location | New Orleans, LA |
| Year Opened | 2016 |
| Student enrollment | 207 |
| Grades served | PreK-4 |
| Website | www.elanacademy.org |



Student Demographics

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|--------------------------------|-----|----------------------------|-----|
| Asian | 1% | Homeless Youth | 10% |
| Native American/Alaskan Native | 1% | At Risk Students (FARL) | 53% |
| Black/African-American | 85% | Students with Disabilities | 16% |
| White/Caucasian | 7% | ESL Students | 2% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 3% | | |
| Two or More Races | 3% | | |



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