



# Crossroads Academy of Kansas City

Kansas City, MO | Dean Johnson, Executive Director

**Grades Served:** K-7 ■ **Enrollment:** 276 ■ **Year Opened:** 2012

**Instructional Strategies:** Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM); experiential education; service-learning; extended learning time.

**Student Demographics:** 47% African American, 33% White, 16% Latino, 3% Asian, 1% American Indian  
55% FRL eligible, 9% English Learner, 7% Special Education

## A Mission to Serve

Crossroads Academy of Kansas City (CAKC) strives to be the premier urban school serving Kansas City's youth and a destination for other educators seeking inspiration and best practices. Based on three pillars—high expectations, 21st Century learning, and community engagement—Crossroads Academy aims to graduate students who pursue their dreams relentlessly and have a positive impact on their family, their community, and the world. Crossroads Academy students utilize their downtown location by walking to cultural amenities like Barney Allis Plaza for recess, the Kansas City Central Library—which serves as the school library—and The Folly Theater for field trips and student performances.

Hiring and developing outstanding teachers is a top priority for Crossroads Academy's leadership team. CAKC's instructors have 10 years of teaching experience on average, including experience teaching in urban settings. The school operates on an extended school day and academic year, amounting to 37 percent more instructional time than the Missouri state standard.

## From Vision to Reality: How CSP Funds Enabled CAKC to Open

In 2011, Crossroads Academy had an initial fundraising goal of \$920,000. The school received a startup grant through the federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) starting in May 2012 for \$125,000 per year for three years to launch the school. Crossroads Academy operated on a shoe-string budget during the initial five months of its start-up period. A successful first round of fundraising and receipt of the CSP grant enabled the school to begin paying salaries to its founding team and to purchase critical materials like computers, library resources, and curricula.

To meet their overall fundraising goal, additional funds for the school's building renovation were raised from the local philanthropic community. By having CSP funding to cover initial staffing and curricular costs, the school was able to dedicate \$818,000 in funds raised through private donors toward building renovation, which was the most costly part of the startup process. Executive Director Dean Johnson noted that receiving the CSP startup grant was not only a substantial amount of funds, but it also showed that a federal entity essentially endorsed the school's funding application and vision, which in turn opened more doors in the local philanthropic community. It would have been impossible for the school to meet its fundraising goals and begin serving students in 2012 without the CSP startup funds. Johnson strongly encourages Congress to continue funding the CSP program so that more schools can access these startup funds, which are critical in states like Missouri where state funding does not kick in until there are students in the classroom.

## STATEWIDE IMPACT

- CAKC students have 37 percent more instruction time than the standard set by the State of Missouri.
- CAKC was one of four Kansas City elementary and middle schools—out of 49 total—that improved student scores in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science.



## IN THE COMMUNITY

- CAKC uses its urban location to build partnerships with the civic, artistic, financial, and historic institutions of downtown of Kansas City.
- CAKC students use the Kansas City Central Library as their school library on a weekly basis.

## Principal's Office

Crossroads Academy Co-Founders and Executive Team Leaders Dean Johnson and Tysie McDowell-Ray met while working together on the leadership team of another Kansas City public charter elementary school. During their time working at the elementary school, they achieved significant academic and financial improvements for the school, and also discovered that they had a common vision for a new public charter school. They teamed up in August 2011 to combine their 20 years of educational experience to launch Crossroads Academy. "It was exciting for me professionally to be able to help bring to life something that we hope and we think is having a positive impact in our community by affording parents a choice that they're really excited about," Johnson reflected on the experience of launching Crossroads Academy.

Principal Tysie McDowell-Ray noted that, "One of the things that makes our school special is our staff. Through the hiring process, we bring in staff who are highly trained and who can create hands-on and engaging lessons for the students." She explains that CAKC serves its students by "trying to be a broader school to meet the needs of all the students here."

## Heard in the Halls



"If we're going to build a better society, a better community in the 21st century, we need great schools that are empowering our kids to master those basic learning standards, but also empowering them and enabling them to become great thinkers, great problem solvers, and great innovators."

—Dean Johnson, Executive Director



"A challenge here in Kansas City is that we don't have a lot of high-quality school options. I have three kids of my own, so I know that struggle. We started this school for those parents who choose to stay in the city."

— Tysie McDowell-Ray, Principal



"I think we have an obligation within charter schools to set the expectation for public schools all around. It shouldn't be just high expectations for charter schools. What we have is the ability to be different from the beginning. So we should be the leaders to encourage change, and facilitate change, and demand change across the board for what is happening in classrooms everywhere."

— Kara Schumacher, Kindergarten teacher



"I'm getting better grades here than at my last school. There are more ways for you to express yourself, and you get many opportunities here."

— Itzel Mendez, 6th grade



*"Charter schools have allowed my son the opportunity and the freedom to truly be himself while learning."*

— Andrea Clayton-Jones, Kindergarten teacher and CAKC parent

