

Gentilly's New KIPP Believe School Opening Marks Watershed Occasion for Two Important Non-Profit Partners



April 3, 2019

New Orleans, LA –

The Bayou District Foundation (BDF) and KIPP New Orleans Schools trace a common history. Each organization's roots began in Gentilly in New Orleans in 2005 and encountered some very bleak days after Hurricane Katrina.

Today the two partners look proudly at what they have accomplished together with the opening of a new \$23.5 million, K-8 facility and gymnasium that is now KIPP Believe -- school home for nearly 700 youngsters.

For BDF, high quality, cradle-to-college education was always an organizing principle of its nascent mission in the years since Katrina to transform the former St. Bernard Housing Development into the new, mixed-income Columbia Parc residential neighborhood. The new KIPP Believe school building joins a Columbia Parc community along St. Bernard Avenue that is spread over 53 acres and 18 city blocks, and is home to 685 residential units/families, a St. Thomas Community Health Care Clinic, recreational amenities, community garden – and now *two* high quality schools.

Located just adjacent to KIPP Believe, BDF's Educare Early Learning Center opened five years ago to serve nearly 170 toddlers from birth to five years and their low-income families with a nationally acclaimed early education program.

And for KIPP New Orleans, the new school opening is a bona fide homecoming. In 2005, only three weeks before Katrina, KIPP opened its first school, KIPP Philips Academy in Gentilly, just a few blocks away from the new site. School leaders believe their odyssey that included 10 school moves across nine buildings throughout the city in the last decade is now over.

Officials with both organizations and supporters and partners from the city and region joined elected officials Wednesday, April 3, to formally open the school.

KIPP Believe's new campus is highlighted by an 88,000-sf school building and separate 7,500-sf gymnasium that was developed by BDF in partnership with KIPP New Orleans Schools.

Officials of both organizations said that without public funding available, KIPP Believe became the first privately funded charter school in New Orleans.

The new school building today serves a student population of 680 youngsters but has a capacity for nearly 100 more. The new building contains 42 classrooms, cafeteria, band and art rooms, science labs, nurse's suite and multiple teacher work areas.

KIPP New Orleans Schools officials said the new KIPP Believe location in Gentilly's Columbia Parc aligns with its vision of unlimited opportunity for every student in the city.

"To lead healthy, successful, choice-filled lives, students and families need access to safe and affordable housing, convenient health care, healthy food, recreation and education," said Rhonda Kalifey-Aluise, CEO of KIPP New Orleans. "BDF's holistic community around Columbia Parc provides those range of amenities..We are also pleased to have a partnership with Educare New Orleans, which serves children from birth through four years old. As part of the 'cradle-to-college' vision for Columbia Parc, children can attend Educare through pre-kindergarten, enroll at KIPP Believe in Kindergarten and then continue on to a KIPP high school on their path to college."

BDF Chairman Gerry Barousse has led the organization since its founding. For him, the opening of KIPP Believe provides more validation of the community model he envisioned in the "dark days" of late 2005.

"We always knew that high quality youth education would be the indispensable, sustaining piece for long term community transformation and permanence," he commented. "Educare's early success results in getting kids ready and on grade for kindergarten learning are most gratifying. And now, with KIPP Believe's opening right next door, we're very confident that our emphasis on high quality education is right on track."

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CONTACT:

- KIPP Believe – Kevin Barnes 504-275-4348, kevinbarnes@kippneworleans.org
- Bayou District Foundation – King Logan 504-296-5111 klogan@loganbrand.com