

# Champions Academy

A concept paper and proposal from The Portland Leadership Foundation  
Portland, OR

## **INTRODUCTION**

In our city, there are thousands of girls and boys who find hope in sports but destruction, dysfunction, and frustration in almost every other area of life.

We believe young athletes coming from underrepresented neighborhoods are some of the most at-risk students in the City of Portland, and we are collectively failing to support their holistic development.

Something must be done.

## **WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT OUR CHALLENGE**

With an aggregate of 50 years of working with youth in the city, here is what we know:

- Sports are a powerful venue for leadership development.
- Many inner city youth are priced-out of playing sports.<sup>1</sup>
- Many athletes create false sports dreams that stifle their ability to dream about healthy transitions after high school (Note: A study from the Center for the Study of Sport on Society found that two-thirds of African American males between the ages of 13-18 believe that they can earn a living playing professional sports.<sup>2</sup>)
- Too many students of color coming from underrepresented neighborhoods in Portland are not flourishing in high school or post high school.
- Oregon's graduation rate is currently one of the lowest in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

In the city of Portland, we do NOT NEED more schools or more non-profit sports teams or more non-profit mentoring programs. These entities already exist!

We recognize the hundreds of organizations that work hard to serve our most vulnerable young people, and these leaders are our friends and colleagues.

Respectfully, and in deference to the work currently being done, we are concerned that

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nbcnews.com/business/consumer/lower-income-students-getting-shut-out-sports-n164941>

<sup>2</sup> Stanley D. Eitzen, "Upward Mobility Through Sport? The Myths and Realities," *Sport in Contemporary Society: An Anthology*, 6th ed. (Madison: Worth Publishers, 2001), 256-63.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.oregonlive.com/education/index.ssf/2015/01/oregon\\_posts\\_worst\\_graduation.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/education/index.ssf/2015/01/oregon_posts_worst_graduation.html)

nothing exists to thread all of these entities together to serve athletes specifically and holistically.<sup>4</sup>

We aren't fully leveraging the power of sports because we don't have a way to knit together individual programs in a way that motivates athletes to participate while creating peer accountability in athlete friend groups (what we call "clusters"). The results are traumatic: athletes aren't prepared to make healthy transitions post high school and cycles of poverty continue.

Currently, a summer time athlete-specific program in Portland does not exist to collaborate with teachers, coaches, and mentors to provide a high-quality and holistic life-preparation experience to young men and women that results in helping young athletes make successful transitions out of high school.<sup>5</sup>

For Portland students from wealthy homes, summer vacation isn't a problem; citing the research of a Johns Hopkins sociologist in his book, "Outliers," Malcolm Gladwell shows that summer vacation is a profound handicap for students from poor homes, who actually outlearn their middle class counterparts during the school year but then fall behind them when school lets out. "For its poorest students, America doesn't have a school problem," Gladwell concludes. "It has a summer-vacation problem."<sup>6</sup>

So how do we close the gap between rich and poor students? How do we help inner city athletes live into other dreams outside of sports?

***Get rid of un-guided summer vacation for inner-city athletes by replacing it with something more desirable.***

<sup>4</sup> While organizations like Oregon Sports Authority (<http://fast-camp.org/about-fast-camp/>) recognize the power of sports for low-income students, current initiatives do not go far enough in terms of length and engaging students academically. There is another "summer bridge" program at Self Enhancement Inc; however, we believe the Champions Academy attracts a different demographic and is designed very differently as a result.

<sup>5</sup> According to post-secondary completion data from Portland State University analysis of National Student Clearinghouse data, among all local high school graduates, only 30.5% go on to complete post-secondary education and training. These rates are lower for some communities with a 12.1% completion rate for Latino students, 16.7% for American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 19.3% for African American students.

<sup>6</sup> To read the research from Johns Hopkins, click here: <http://www.nayre.org/Summer%20Learning%20Gap.pdf>

## **ANNOUNCING: THE CHAMPIONS ACADEMY**

**Our Vision:** *To create a holistic, culturally responsive learning community that produces Champions - students prepared to lead in the classroom, on the field, in the city and in life.*

**Our Mission:** *To challenge and equip diverse student athletes by providing academic, athletic, and character development in preparation for leadership in post high school study and work.*

**The Champions Academy** is a powerful annual six-week summer academy and training camp where the yearlong investments from teachers, coaches, and mentors come together to create new unified accountability structures, ensure primary and secondary students' grade level preparedness for the coming school year, and help graduating athletes make healthy post-high school transitions.

The Champions Academy serves both as a “**pre-season**” intervention for student-athletes who have fallen behind and as a stimulating summer enrichment camp to keep grade level students on track and primed for their upcoming academic “season.”

Every Champ will be matched with a yearlong mentor, and the Champions Academy will provide yearlong accountability and encouragement structures for student athletes—ensuring that Champs experience authoritative community outside of the summer.

Through the Champions Academy:

- PLF will develop leaders in the context of community.
- PLF will create a community of desire.
- PLF will create shared experiences where relationships among student-athletes develop uniquely.
- PLF will develop student athletes to be champions for life and for the city.

## **Champions Academy Leadership:**

### **Anthony Jordan, President Portland Leadership Foundation**

If it wasn't for the power of sports teams and the coaches and teachers surrounding him, PLF President, Anthony Jordan, would not have broken through the cycle of poverty. Outside of his gang involvement, the only adult men who could speak into Anthony's life were coaches, mentors and teachers. Between Donnie Mcpherson (teacher and coach) and Kenny Washington (mentor), these two men challenged him to change.



Anthony began coaching young people in 1996 and left his job at Self Enhancement Inc. in 1997, to serve as a Director for Young Life. Anthony co-founded Portland Leadership Foundation in 2009, where he serves as President. Most important to Anthony is coaching and mentoring young athletes. He is known to say, "20 years from now, it won't be about wins or losses. I want to know, will these young men and women be wonderful fathers and mothers, great husbands and wives, and productive citizens in our city?"

### **Ben Sand, CEO Portland Leadership Foundation**

After growing up with a single parent and his back against the wall, Ben Sand knew he wanted to give his life away to young people in the city. Ben first moved to Portland to work as a Director for Young Life, where in 2005, he launched the Act Six Leadership and Scholarship Initiative.<sup>7</sup> In 2008, Ben co-founded Portland Leadership Foundation with the dream of empowering thousands of individuals and families to lead toward systemic change in Portland. Ben's role at PLF is ensuring excellence in all program areas and connecting with leaders across all sectors in the Portland metro area.



Ben wakes up every day to take big risks and big steps to serve.

<sup>7</sup> Act Six website: [www.actsix.org](http://www.actsix.org)

## **Donna Barber, Academic Director Portland Leadership Foundation**

Donna Barber has served as an educator, trainer and coach for urban youth and urban youth program leaders for more than 25 years. She has worked in Philadelphia and Atlanta, creating and leading schools and youth programs that develop urban children to be spirit-led, socially aware, community-minded leaders. Donna has worked in the context of the local church, Christian and public schools and local non-profits. She holds degrees in Communications and Urban Teacher Leadership and has provided trainings and coaching for national organizations and conferences. In Portland, OR she has served as Interim Director and consultant at George Fox University and presently as coach for the PLF Act Six Academy and Director of Operations for The Voices Project, a network of African American and other leaders of color engaged in lifting the voice of the marginalized and engaging and influencing the broader culture for systemic change.



## **A Glimpse at Portland Leadership Foundation**

Portland Leadership Foundation’s mission is to strengthen and develop leadership for the spiritual and social renewal of the city. With the vision of raising up the next generation of diverse leadership for the city, PLF has sent over 250 students to college through one of three scholarships—Act Six, City Builders, and Avenues to College. 85% of those students are either currently enrolled or have graduated. Along with the scholarship work, PLF operates Embrace Oregon<sup>8</sup>, the Young Fellowship, the Center for Communities, Portland Youth Football and Cheers<sup>9</sup>, the Hillside House and other emerging initiatives.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Embrace Oregon website: [www.embraceoregon.org](http://www.embraceoregon.org)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.oregonlive.com/gresham/index.ssf/2013/02/sudden\\_closing\\_of\\_portland-are.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/gresham/index.ssf/2013/02/sudden_closing_of_portland-are.html)

<sup>10</sup> Portland Leadership Foundation website: [www.portlandleadership.org](http://www.portlandleadership.org)

## **CHAMPIONS ACADEMY: PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

### **We Seek to Build an Authoritative Community—Where Champions Flourish:**

Building champions requires a community commitment to excellence. The Champions Academy will create an *authoritative community*, which is a community, committed to one another over time, that models and passes on what it means to be a good person and live a good life.

An authoritative community is defined by the following characteristics:

1. It is a social organization that includes children and youth
2. It treats children as ends in themselves
3. It is warm and nurturing
4. It establishes clear limits and expectations<sup>11</sup>
5. It is multi-generational
6. It has a long-term focus (Champs are Champs for life)
7. It reflects and transmits a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person
8. It is philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor

Authoritative communities don't just happen. They are created and sustained by dedicated individuals with a shared vision of building a good life for the next generation.

### **The Importance of Collaboration:**

At Portland Leadership Foundation, we are committed to the guiding principle of collaboration. Collaboration is a key piece of our organizational DNA, and as such, we don't do anything alone. Current "launching partners" for the Champions Academy include:

- Portland Youth Football and Cheer
- HOLLA Mentors
- FCA

<sup>11</sup> PLF believes in the "Pygmalion effect," which is the phenomenon whereby higher expectations lead to an increase in performance. We raise the bar believing that young people in our community will rise to it.

- Warner Pacific College

The Champions Academy exists to serve athletes, teachers, coaches, and mentors and we will work to build and sustain meaningful relationships with community schools, sports teams and mentoring programs in order to increase student success.

## **Target Audience:**

Starting in the Summer of 2016, our goal will be to leverage our current partnerships to launch the Champions Academy with a maximum initial enrollment of 300 students.

The Champions Academy will serve girls and boys, entering the 3rd to 9th grades initially and by year 5, by adding a grade each year, 3rd through rising college freshmen. We anticipate Champions belonging to the Academy each summer through high school graduation.

## **Sample Schedule:**

### **Monday—Thursday**

8:15-8:55am: Breakfast

9:00-9:55am: Academic Session #1

10:00-10:55am: Academic Session #2

11:00-11:55am: Academic Session #3

12:00-1:00pm: Lunch

1:00-1:25: Change for Sport Development

1:30-3:00pm: Sport Session

### **Friday**

8:15-8:55am: Breakfast

9:00-10:00am: Champions Speak (guest speaker)

10:00am-Noon: Character Development Session

## **Location:**

Champions Academy will be located on the campus of Warner Pacific College in Portland, OR.

## **Our Philosophy of Education:**

**Deference:** At Champions Academy, our work begins with an acknowledgement of the inherent value of children. We believe that all children are divinely created with a gold mine of gifts and abilities and gifted teachers use their craft to bring these treasures to the surface. We recognize the awesome privilege we have as educators to contribute to our future by serving children and accept the great responsibility of that task.

**High Standards:** It is this high regard for children that compels Champions Academy to set and maintain high standards and expectations. We are committed to offering a curriculum that emphasizes higher order thinking and skill mastery and pushes every student to his or her personal best. We are likewise dedicated to providing the support necessary to help each one achieve that goal.

**Purposeful:** At Champions Academy, we believe that we are educating the future leaders of our community and the world; therefore, we make every effort to offer a curriculum with purpose. Each activity is selected to provide meaningful learning, provoke thought, sharpen skills, and to spark and challenge ideas with the goal of preparing men and women who will be able to assess, address and find solutions to the problems now facing our society.

**Holistic:** We recognize that man has been created body, mind and spirit and are therefore committed to creating a program that serves the whole child. The scholar is also an athlete. The athlete is also a soul, so at Champions Academy, learning includes movement and laughter. Teaching includes coaching and counsel. We are wholly dedicated to the healthy development of young people who are strong in mind, body and character.

**Culturally Relevant:** As educators, we know that new information is understood and “learned” by attaching it with or processing it through existing knowledge and experiences. We understand that each student’s unique environment is rich with content. Champion teachers work, therefore, to make connections between the new information and experiences presented in the classroom and the familiar, historic and significant people, places and things of the students’ daily life. Here, the student’s community and culture is not an afterthought but rather acknowledged and respected as an essential consideration in the learning process.



**Student Specific:** Finally, we believe that all children both possess knowledge and are capable of learning. However, children learn differently. Therefore, as Champion educators, we aim to teach how children learn, using a variety of approaches and techniques. Champions' teachers acknowledge learning styles or preferences while continuing to challenge students to acquire information through a variety of means. We are committed to discovering how each child *is* smart and assisting him or her to use the confidence of his or her strength to address areas of weakness.

## **Champions Academy Academic Strategy:**

To thrive means to grow or develop well; to prosper or flourish. Portland's low graduation rates among underserved ethnic groups, economically disadvantaged communities, and English language learners suggests that thousands of children in our city are failing to thrive academically. This underdevelopment or stunted growth has resulted in one of the lowest graduation rates in the country. One of the top causes of high school dropout is poor academic performance. The Champions Academy will target three areas in order to improve student academic performance and high school graduation rates.

1. Learning Attitudes and Perception
2. Basic skills: Reading, Writing, Math, Science
3. Student self-concept and confidence

### **Learning Attitudes**

One of the biggest obstacles to learning is a negative attitude toward the learning process. The Champions Academy will create a learning environment designed to engage and pique the curiosity of student athletes through:

- Utilizing interactive learning games and activities which address a variety of learning styles
- Dividing students in each grade level into smaller teams, separated by gender. (Separate gender instruction has been found to decrease drop-out rates and generally improve academic achievement among urban students.)
- Emphasizing collaboration and group, rather than individual, competition
- Connecting subject matter, via project topics, classroom example, and terminology, to major sports and sport figures and other areas of student interest.
- Reinforcing active learning and positive behavior through praise and reward rather than punishment
- Hiring and training teachers to be knowledgeable of students' history, culture and values; using this knowledge to create and maintain a warm, welcoming and affirming learning environment

- Recruiting volunteer Interns to function as teaching assistants and camp counselors, working specifically to build relationship with each individual and among the group

### **Developing Skills**

Students who have not become proficient in grade level or basic reading and math skills in elementary school struggle and often fail in middle and high school because they don't have the foundational pieces in place to support higher level mathematics or to understand the increasingly difficult literature, history or social sciences necessary for graduation or post-secondary education. For this reason, Champion Academy will focus on mastery of the basic skills of reading, writing and math. In science, we will also devote a portion of our time to providing students with instruction and practice in scientific exploration, inquiry and experimentation.

To master basic, grade-level skills, teaching at the Champions Academic will include:

- Screening students (using a software assessment tool) to determine their grade level reading and math skills to establish a baseline and to assess progress
  - Note: we will especially concentrate on third to fourth grade level skills, which are designated as critical focus areas in the state Common Core Standards (Common Core tests are taken 3-8th and 11<sup>th</sup> grade)
- Utilizing music, movement and group competition to ensure students will have brief, daily practice of basic facts and vocabulary
- Grouping students by ability, but with flexibility, to most actively engage in learning activities and games
- Placing emphasis on the development or strengthening of higher order thinking
- Employing daily brain-teasers, mysteries and puzzles to promote problem-solving
- Reading daily from a variety of literature including books, periodicals, poetry and blogs
- Writing daily in a variety of forms including: journaling, reporting, hip hop poetry and editorial
- Learning and employing the scientific method with elementary students focused on exploration and investigation, middle-school students focused on inquiry and experimentation, and high school students focused on research and drawing conclusions

### **Student Self-Concept and Confidence**

Self-concept refers to a student's perceptions of competence or adequacy in academic and nonacademic (e.g., social, behavioral, and athletic) domains. The best way to improve a student's academic self-concept is to assist him or her in decreasing deficits and strengthening basic skills.

In addition, we will look to challenge students' negative core beliefs that their ability and related academic success is set and unchangeable and to reinforce the positive

understanding that academic success is not fixed or limited by ability but rather changeable based on effort, method and time.

- We will survey student learning attitudes before and after the summer session
- Students will be required to set personal goals and track their own progress
- Through journaling and teacher and peer affirmation, students will be encouraged to reflect on and acknowledge personal progress and achievement as well as positive contributions to the group and group success

### **Schedule and Staffing**

Each day will include a rotation through three 55 minute academic sessions. Students will be placed in classrooms according to both age and skill.

Student-to-teacher ratio will be 18:1 with each class assigned one intern as a teacher assistant/group leader. We will also hire lead teachers, who have demonstrated unique skill and passion to mentor other teachers.

Teacher-to-Lead Teacher ratio will be 5:1.

The Champions Academy Academic Director will oversee all of the hiring and training of lead teachers, teachers, and interns.

## **Measuring Academic Success**

### **The data:**

Based on data published by the Oregon Department of Education in January 2013, Portland Public Schools has the lowest 2011-12 cohort graduation rate of the ten largest districts in Oregon. Portland graduated 52 percent of students from underserved ethnic groups, the lowest graduation rate for this group of students of the ten large districts. In addition, Portland graduated 56 percent of the economically disadvantaged students in the 2011-12 cohort, again the lowest percentage compared to the other large districts. Portland's graduation rates for students with disabilities and English language learners in the 2011-12 was 31 percent and 47 percent respectively, lower than most other large districts.

The Champions Academy will be developed with these student athletes in mind. While we are committed to serving students from all backgrounds, our primary commitment will be to serve student athletes of color, low-income student athletes, and student athletes who are English language learners.

Champions measure growth. Each summer, Champions will be evaluated at the beginning of the summer and at the end. Champions will be expected to grow and will be given a **Summer Academic Progress Report** to take to their teachers and coaches

in the Fall. We intend on measuring **Year-to-Year Transition Readiness** to indicate the effectiveness of the Champions Academy as an academic intervention.

We will measure **high school graduation rates** for all classes in our first and subsequent cohorts (3<sup>rd</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> grade) as one key indicator.

We also be developing a new statistic we are calling “**healthy high school transition.**” It is our objective to ensure that every child in the Champions Academy makes a healthy transition from high school to the work force, a trade school, or to college.

### **The story behind the data:**

More important than the data itself is the story behind the data. It is possible to graduate unhealthy students. It is possible to graduate students who are unable to make positive choices. It is possible to graduate students who will be unable to break the cycles of poverty in their lives.

When each student graduates from high school, the Champions Academy first day of each summer session will be a “Graduation Signing Day.” With families and media present, Portland Leadership Foundation will hold a signing day ceremony for each student who is making a healthy high school transition.

Beyond graduation rates, our motivation is to develop healthy mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, and the next generation of servant-citizen Portlanders.

Beyond graduation rates, we intend on developing a network of thousands of Champs—ready to lead for the future of the City of Portland.

### **Champions Academy Athletic Strategy:**

Central to the Champions Academy strategy is providing top flight athletic coaching and training for diverse student athletes. Sports are a powerful piece of urban culture. Students dream of stardom, earning athletic scholarships, and playing professionally. We see to harness the power of sports and athletic development to develop Champions to lead in all areas of life.

When a student athlete registers for the Champions Academy, he or she will choose two sports he or she wants to focus on toward their summer development. Each athlete will focus on his or her chosen sports for two three week periods.

## **Sample Athletic Schedule:**

### **Monday and Wednesday: 1:30-3:00pm**

3<sup>rd</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> Graders: Sport focus period with coaches highlighting: joy, technique, skill-development

7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> Graders:<sup>12</sup> Athletic trainers facilitate sessions focusing on fitness, speed, agility, and quickness

### **Tuesdays and Thursday: 1:30-3:00pm**

3<sup>rd</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> Graders: Athletic trainers facilitates sessions focusing on fitness, agility, hand-eye coordination

7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> Graders: Sport focus period with coaches highlighting: competition, skill-development, technique.

**Note:** Older athletes will also be trained in the science of sports mastery and psycho-kinetics.

## **Championship level mindset**

Sports provide the opportunity for young student athletes to develop resilience and grit. Resilience is more than physical; the Champions Academy will work to develop a Championship level mindset in every Champ. Older Champs will be trained in the science of sports mastery and psycho-kinetics.

## **Championship level coaches**

Believing in the Pygmalion effect, the Champions Academy will not lower the bar for young athletes. As such, we are committed to hiring coaches and trainers who have high character, are knowledgeable of their sport/skill, and have a commitment to teach at a consistently high level while being patient enough to recognize the maturity of each group of student athletes.

All coaches will be trained as 3D coaches—committed to their craft while capturing the heart of the student athlete.

## **Measuring athletic development**

All Champs will go through the Nike Sparq Combine at the beginning and end of the six week Champions Academy. Student athletes will be evaluated on their athletic progress and given improvement goals.

<sup>12</sup> The first year of the Champions Academy will welcome rising 3<sup>rd</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> graders.