

# Phalen Leadership Academy

**RAPID ADJUSTMENTS: LESSONS FROM A START-UP  
BLENDED-LEARNING CHARTER SCHOOL WINTER 2014**



## FACT FILE

### George and Veronica Phalen Leadership Academies

- Founder Earl Martin Phalen received \$1 million start-up award from The Mind Trust's Charter School Incubator to start five K–8 blended-learning schools in Indianapolis; planning for 5 schools to be launched by 2020 serving 4,500 students, and eventually to have 10 schools statewide serving 10,000 students, authorized by the Indiana Charter School Board
- PLA serves grades K–2; will add a grade each year until school has grades K–8 and about 860 students
- PLA uses extended 8-hour days and an extended 225-day school year, compared with 6.5 hours and 180 days in traditional public schools
- Curriculum includes art, music, Spanish, and cultural enrichment
- In 2013–14, PLA has 4 kindergarten teachers, 2 first-grade teachers, and 1 second-grade teacher; 156 students—72 in kindergarten, 51 in first grade, and 27 in second grade
- Of these students, 93 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch; 98 percent are African-American
- Of incoming students in 2013–14, 42 percent were reading on grade level; 3 percent were on grade level in math
- PLA's goals include:
  1. Third-grade reading proficiency
    - By 2016, more than 90 percent of third-grade students will pass the IREAD-3
    - By 2019, more than 95 percent of third-grade students will pass the IREAD-3
  2. Reading and math proficiency
    - By 2016, more than 80 percent of students will pass both English/language arts and mathematics on the ISTEP+
    - By 2019, more than 90 percent of students will pass both English/language arts and mathematics on the ISTEP+
- Results: Student scores will be available beginning summer 2015 at the [Indiana Department of Education's Compass Site](#).

## SUMMARY

How do you start innovative schools that help high-need children? For the founder of the George and Veronica Phalen Leadership Academies (PLA) in Indianapolis, it took a vision, a \$1 million start-up award, and many quickly learned lessons.

Securing and renovating a school location, overcoming some missteps in recruiting students, creating a stringent hiring process, winnowing the best student-learning software programs from a long list of options, preparing teachers to make the best use of those programs and their data, and making quick changes to the plans all happened in the first half of 2013. For school leaders considering a similar school, PLA's start-up story provides useful do's and don'ts.

Earl Martin Phalen started his first Indianapolis charter school with an established presence in the Midwest. Phalen began the Summer Advantage USA program in Indianapolis through The Mind Trust's Education Entrepreneur Fellowship. Summer Advantage, which works to erase summer learning losses and move students ahead, averages two months' worth of learning gains in five weeks among participating low-income students, and now reaches 5,000 children every summer in 15 school districts.

In 2012, Phalen's charter school became one of the first two winners of The Mind Trust's \$1 million Charter School Incubator start-up awards, based on his plans for the Phalen Leadership Academies, named after his parents, who adopted him at age 2. The Indiana Charter School Board awarded 10 charters to PLA, with approval to open one school in 2013–14 (see "The Indiana Charter School Board and PLA," page 2).

Phalen and the first school's founding principal, Jeremy Baugh, envisioned a blended-learning school in which students spend a short time in whole-group instruction, then rotate among small-group instruction, independent work, and individualized online learning intended to teach the basics and reinforce skills.

Their focus on great instruction goes beyond the core subjects, with plenty of school-day time for art, music, physical education, and Spanish instruction, plus daily cultural enrichment time on subjects of students' choosing, as part of extended eight-hour days.

This case study focuses on PLA in its early months, which involved rapid adjustments to the planned model. Staff members based these changes on the successes and challenges they saw,



Founder Earl Martin Phalen plans to open 10 Phalen Learning Academies to help high-need students.

working to establish the new school's culture and quickly learning to use their various online programs and data from those programs.

#### OPENING PLA—FAST

After receiving the charter, Phalen and his national team hurried to find available space—settling on a former Cadillac showroom and factory—and funding. With financing from the Charter School Growth Fund, renovations began in late spring 2013, and Jeremy Baugh, hired in January, focused on student recruitment,

with a plan to register 300 students in kindergarten through second grade.

But Baugh and the PLA team found recruitment tough going without anything to sell but a vision—no building and no history. And they learned too late to be wary of initial sign-up numbers, not realizing just how few of the students who signed up would actually attend the school. Only about 30 percent of those who signed up enrolled, even after parents attended registration and information events. Though some other students filled vacant slots, the school ended up enrolling only about half of its planned student body in year one.

As PLA discovered, many parents simply said, “We changed our mind.” Some were on multiple charter school lists, while others chose to stay at their current schools.

But the biggest reason parents gave was transportation, which PLA does not provide. Although many parents found the extended day and year appealing for their children's education and for their own work schedules, having to bring a child at 7:45 a.m. and pick up at 4 p.m. every day proved too much.

Understanding those issues, along with now having a “brand” and an expansive, attractive school to show off, should make recruitment much easier for 2014–15, Baugh believes. In early planning for 2014, the school set a target enrollment of 315 to 450 students.

Staff members continue to debate how to expand the rising third-grade class while maintaining the newly created school culture and progress toward great learning outcomes.

“We know we have to get the data right out of the gate, and show effectiveness from the start,” Baugh says. He worries that

### THE INDIANA CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD AND PLA

The **Indiana Charter School Board (ICSB)**, which emphasizes a need for innovative school models in its call for charter school proposals, has granted PLA 10 charters, with the second charter contingent on positive results at this initial PLA school.

“It's been incredible” working with the board, Principal Jeremy Baugh says. “They're very helpful.”

Baugh especially appreciated the board's “launch checklist” and encouragement as he prepared to open PLA.

“It's a very positive relationship with the charter school board. They do what we need them to do in providing us with suggested resources and checks and balances.”

Founder Earl Martin Phalen agrees. “We love working with the ICSB. We feel like they were truly partners in the process, and that's been the best thing about our relationship. . . . They were thoughtful about what was coming around the next corner so we were prepared for it. We had a very collaborative relationship that helped from the start.”

The ICSB has appreciated the culture it sees forming at PLA, says Emily Richardson, ICSB's interim executive director and director of legal affairs and policy.

“PLA has created an engaging education environment focused on its students' needs and interests,” Richardson says. “From school staff to parents and students, the ICSB has seen much energy, optimism, and innovation there.”

the school will show the progress with its students that he expects in the first year, but bring in too many third-graders who will be starting out far behind and without an understanding of the school's culture, knocking it too far back. In a few years, as the school stabilizes, this will be less of an issue, he says.

In its first year, PLA expected to attract a mix of students from the surrounding high-need neighborhood and students whose parents commute to work downtown at such places as the Indiana University healthcare complex, passing PLA on the way. But for the neighborhood surrounding the school, PLA found, parents had competing charter schools available whose buildings and models were already familiar.

And all that parents knew of blended learning was the half-day online model around the corner at **Carpe Diem-Meridian**, a grades 6–12 school—which has since joined with PLA in a program to have its students mentor and tutor those at PLA.

That led PLA to target other high-need students at federally subsidized apartment complexes about two miles away, giving the school its high percentage—93 percent—of free and reduced-price lunch students. It will be interesting to see how that changes over the coming years, Baugh and Phalen say. Baugh sees benefits in a greater diversity of students, such as a 70-30 split, while Phalen emphasizes his desire to serve high-need students.

The final mix of students offered a few other surprises: The school originally hired two special education teachers, only to find it had just 11 special education students; it also worked to hire bilingual teachers, only to have no Spanish-speaking students.

After the difficulties of recruitment, creating a school culture seemed far easier. “We call it ‘the PLA way,’” Baugh says. Following the high-expectations charter school trend, the school refers to its students as “scholars” and has a daily focus on character education.

Parents have responded positively to the culture, Baugh says, telling him they find it to be a very open school.

“They feel in-the-know, and have access to the teachers—as a result, they feel very passionate about it.”

The organizational meeting for a parent-teacher group attracted 25 parents, surpassing expectations, he says. And in the early days, about a dozen parents had already come consistently to volunteer. The computer lab provides an easy volunteer opportunity, as parents can come in for short stints.

All told, Baugh says, his biggest challenge in opening the school came in implementing so many systems at once: online learning; a response-to-instruction framework; the creation of school procedures and culture; a website; and parent communications.



“I am so excited to change the face of urban education,” says Principal Jeremy Baugh.



Bright walls and well-lit open spaces mark all of PLA's computer labs, overseen here by physical education teacher Josh Pearson.

## BLENDING LEARNING AT PLA

In remodeling its two-story building, PLA put classrooms along one outer wall, from which students walk out into a large, interior, open space whose walls are lined with laptops on desks. Other desks and tables are grouped in the center for small-group instruction or more laptops, along with couches where teachers may sit with students who need extra help.

On a typical day, a student begins in a classroom, eating break-

fast and participating in character education, or getting pulled out for intervention sessions with teachers or paraprofessionals. The whole class then gathers for 30 minutes of reading instruction, followed by “rotations,” in which students move through 30-minute blocks of online learning, small-group instruction, and individual learning.

The schedule repeats after recess and lunch for math instruction, with 20-minute rotations. Students then have “specials”—art, music, physical education, or Spanish—before doing writing workshop, science, and social studies lessons. The day wraps up with a 45-minute “enrichment” class of each student’s choosing, led by teachers who create these classes according to their interests. In the first quarter, that included classes in photography, painting, African drumming, world cultures, and Zumba.

### Digital Instruction

During their online rotations, most students sit with headphones on, with a lab monitor sitting in the center or walking behind students, assisting them or helping them stay focused. Some students said they dislike the headphones and work without them, which creates a low but tolerable noise level.



First-grade teacher Leslie Fisher leads a math lesson during the guided group rotation.

## BLENDED LEARNING IN ACTION

What do students do throughout their rotations? Follow a typical first-grade student through her math rotation:

**SETTING THE SCENE:** Throughout the rotations, students are scattered around the classroom working independently in centers. In one corner, several students gather with a teacher for small-group instruction. Outside the room, in the computer lab, lab monitors oversee online learning for the rest of the class. Teaching assistants, meanwhile, pull out other students or small groups for assistance, or help students in centers.

- **FIRST ROTATION: Guided group.** In our student’s small group, the teacher gathers six students around a U-shaped desk, reviewing addition and subtraction facts using a large whiteboard, as students use small whiteboards to record their answers. The teacher focuses on her small group, but stays aware of—and redirects as needed—students in their independent centers who are losing their own focus.
- **SECOND ROTATION: Centers.** Our student next works with a partner on a math game with dice, practicing the skills learned in whole-group and small-group instruction. Her fellow students in centers sit quietly on the floor in a corner of the room playing the game or solving problems on a worksheet.
- **THIRD ROTATION: Computer lab.** When our student is released to the lab, she chooses a laptop, logs in to a program such as Dreambox for math, and selects a game from a menu of options. In today’s game, she must identify number patterns on a hundreds chart; she might also do addition and subtraction games. (Should she use iReady, she would get direct instruction on a skill, practice examples, and take a quiz to check for understanding.) The lab monitor moves around the lab, checking progress and ensuring students are engaged, awarding stickers when students pass an element, and helping students to focus—for example, by creating some extra privacy for themselves by creating “office walls” of standing folders around the computer. If the data dashboard alerts the monitor to a student struggling with a subject, the monitor pulls the student aside for help, alone or in a small group, to explain the skill in greater detail, using concrete examples and intervention strategies.

Some of the simplest issues are magnified when working with such young students, few of whom had experience with computer keyboards. Even getting all kindergarteners logged into their individualized schoolwork needed simplifying, as the original passwords were long for small children to memorize.

As in any classroom, keeping 5-year-olds focused presents challenges. In the early weeks of school, students were not progressing at the needed pace through their online work; the school added sticker charts as incentives, so that every time students complete an online component—prompting a “congratulations!” message on-screen—they add a sticker, ultimately leading to prizes such as participation in a party. The incentives were a hit, speeding up students’ work and improving their concentration.

PLA also needed to adjust its use of the software. Originally, on advice from other blended-learning users, the school tried to use three programs. Teachers and leaders quickly discovered that coordinating the three and using each to its best advantage created problems in telling which program worked best for what, at least initially. So they focused on using just the iReady program for the first quarter, to better judge its results. In the second quarter, Baugh said, they may switch to DreamBox for math, and compare the results.

Additionally, instead of simply letting iReady or another program completely “decide” what students will study next, teachers direct the online program on Mondays and Tuesdays to assign specific skills being covered in the whole-class instruction; for the rest of the week, they revert to iReady-guided lessons. That lets students get grade-level work at the same time as remedial work, with the expectation that this will lead to more than the standard “year’s worth of growth,” which would not be enough for students to catch up when starting far behind. At PLA, only 42 percent of incoming kindergarten students were reading on grade level, and just 3 percent were on grade level in math.

With that change, Baugh says, teachers know exactly what stu-

## SOFTWARE AND CURRICULA PLA USES

- iReady
- DreamBox
- Raz-Kids (an online library)
- Ticket to Read
- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt textbook
- Singapore Math
- National Geographic science curriculum

dents are working on and how they are progressing based on digital data reports, and students still can work at their own pace after completing the teacher-directed assignments.

The school has also established “power standards,” determining every 10 weeks which standards will prove pivotal to student success. Teachers focus on those standards for five-minute daily lessons, alternating a math and reading standard each week. If students have not mastered a standard by the end of the week, they are pulled out the following week in the early-morning, 30-minute intervention time. “We see that the morning intervention time is working,” says Gabriel Surface, the school’s teaching and learning coach.

In the school’s early months of working to get students on grade level, Baugh said he was optimistic that “we’re going to be 100 percent on track at the end of the year. . . . I am so excited to change the face of urban education.”

### What Teachers Say About PLA

Although the school isn’t trumpeting any results yet, teachers say they see successes in the blended-learning model, with these students progressing much faster than at teachers’ previous schools.

“I remember looking at the data for the first time and being so



Sticker charts give students incentives to progress through online learning programs.



First-graders find comfortable spots for individual and partner math work during center time.

excited, because I saw the progress, and thinking ‘this is so exhausting, but it’s working,’” says first-grade teacher Kellie Craige.

“I wanted a place that was really going to have a structure set up that will benefit kids,” first-grade teacher Leslie Fisher says. “I like the blended-learning model *a lot*.”

One student, Fisher says, came in unable to recognize numbers or letters, and had problems dealing with anger and anxiety. To see that child soon able to calmly write five sentences without help was hugely rewarding, she says. “There’s a lot of effort put into it, but success is coming.”

Teachers also appreciate the collaboration among themselves and administrators.

“It’s great to be able to walk into each other’s room and be able to ask questions that are honest about my efforts,” Fisher says.

“As I see the growth in the students, I want to stay [in future years],” Craige says. “Everyone is so committed and supportive here. Everyone’s goals are aligned. Everyone’s willing to pitch in and help make it work here.”

Baugh’s support and training for his teachers gets high marks.

“Having a principal who ‘gets’ instruction and what teachers need has been great,” Surface says. And, he says, “I’ve been completely overwhelmed by how phenomenal our staff is.”

Kindergarten and first-grade teachers, for example, rave about the training they received for writers’ workshop time.

Previous training simply did not compare to what she got at PLA, kindergarten teacher Roleen Brown says—and it shows, she says, in how her current students were about six months

## PLA’S PARAPROFESSIONALS

Teachers agreed on the value of their teaching assistants. “I feel blessed to have my TA,” Leslie Fisher says.

Her assistant, as well as Kellie Craige’s, had experience with reading recovery work, so they can work closely alongside the teachers. Although not required to, the assistants attend the first-grade teachers’ weekly two-hour, after-school planning meeting.

“It’s almost like co-teaching,” Fisher says.

Having a second adult in the room is crucial, Craige says, to make blended learning and small-group time possible.

ahead of where students in past years were in the first quarter. “Even strong teachers have learned to be stronger.”

Fisher agrees. “Because of that [training], my kids love to write—‘you mean I get to get my notebook out now?!’”

Teachers do note the issue of the long hours they are working—although they were expected in the start-up of the school.

“I didn’t think initially I would feel the extra hours [of an eight-hour school day], but I absolutely do,” Craige says.

Given its enrollment, PLA’s “specials” teachers now also serve as the lab monitors while students do their online rotations.

A DAY IN THE LIFE: A PHALEN TEACHER’S TYPICAL SCHEDULE	
6:30 a.m.	Arrive at school; prepare for the day*
7 to 7:45 a.m. (Wednesdays)	All-staff meeting
7:45 a.m.	Doors open to students;** students eat breakfast upon arrival and during the opening activities of the day
8 to 8:30 a.m.	Lead “Building Dreams” character education; students also pulled out for “power standard” remediation
8:30 to 9 a.m.	Lead whole-class reading lesson
9 to 10:30 a.m.	Three 30-minute rotations begin: In each, teacher leads some students in small-group instruction and oversees others in independent work, while a third group goes to computer lab
10:30 to 11 a.m.	Lead whole-class math lesson
11 to 11:45 a.m.	Recess and lunch
11:50 a.m. to 12:50 p.m.	Three 20-minute math rotations begin, just like reading rotations
12:55 to 1:40 p.m.	Planning time (students in “specials”—art, music, Spanish, P.E.). On Tuesdays, each grade-level team must meet together with the principal
1:45 to 2:30 p.m.	Teach writing workshop
2:30 to 3 p.m.	Lead science lesson
3 to 3:15 p.m.	Guide students in compiling their data folders; many teachers provide snack
3:15 to 4 p.m.	Lead students in “enrichment” classes that teachers design according to their interests
4 p.m.	School day ends; one teaching team (teachers and assistants) meets at this time each Thursday for two hours to plan the following week

\*Teachers do not need to arrive this early, but several said they prefer this to feel fully prepared.

\*\*PLA may begin allowing students to come to school earlier to accommodate more parents’ schedules, to reduce tardiness.

Teachers say that as they adjust to that staffing structure, they need better communication to focus on meshing all the instruction, including the time that specials teachers use to pull students out for intervention based on the data they see.

Baugh and the school staff stay focused on teachers' concerns, Surface says. "We're constantly reassessing with teachers, and adapting our model on the fly."

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT PLA

Professional development specific to blended learning has been a thorny issue for many new blended schools. In the early weeks at PLA, weekly staff meetings focused on using all the online tools, and on teaching strategies.

Baugh, who has experience with some of the online programs, guides and trains the teachers on how to analyze the data, and how to tie it into the core reading and math work, adjusting each child's instruction.

In the second quarter, once the initial technology training ends, Baugh intends to add collaborative observations by teachers of their peers, as well as videos of teachers in action for review and analysis. So far, they have been focused on a teaching strategy each week, with Baugh and Surface observing whether the strategies are being used effectively.

Although Baugh and Surface are frequently in the classrooms, teachers said they wished for more feedback and development.

Teachers are also required to do two rounds of online professional learning, but that is on hold until the second semester, Baugh says.

"I don't want to burn out our teachers—they're working 7 to 5, and some feel overwhelmed. Part of that is because they're perfectionists, just like me," he says. "Right now, they need to survive and keep their heads above the water."

### PLA STAFFING: ONE-TEACHER-ONE-CLASSROOM, BUT INFORMAL TEAMS

PLA employs a total of eight classroom teachers and eight teaching assistants, a special education teacher, and music, art, physical education, and Spanish teachers, plus a teaching and learning coach, giving it one teacher per 15 students on average. At capacity, PLA intends to have about 860 students, with three kindergarten classes of 25 students, and 24 first- through eighth-grade classrooms with 30 students, with 27 teachers and one more special education teacher. Paraprofessionals will be paired with the 12 classroom teachers in kindergarten through third grade.

Although they now work informally as teams, with the best math teacher planning math instruction for all kindergarten teachers, for example, teachers do not have formal roles within their grade-level teams, nor do they know one another's students well. Teachers also note the need for better communication between



In a world culture enrichment class, students cheer their first successful chopsticks use.

lab monitors and teachers; with no formal teams, the teachers remain somewhat isolated within their classes.

### RETAINING GREAT TEACHERS

As the PLA network grows, founder Earl Martin Phalen says, the schools will decide on career pathways to offer. (Plans call for the next school in the network to open in 2016—but network leaders hope to begin in August 2015 instead.)

In the meantime, Phalen says, the school was aggressive in the pay it offered compared with the Indianapolis market, to recruit and retain teachers. Teachers have an average of five years of experience in traditional and charter schools, and went through extensive rounds of interviewing and demonstrating their skills before being hired.

PLA offers salaries of approximately \$43,000 to \$52,000 to teachers. This compares to a range of \$41,620 to \$47,438 for an Indianapolis Public School teacher with five years of experience.

The school is also focused on developing its teaching assistants, getting them teaching experience and much feedback, Phalen says, and offered higher pay to them as well compared with the rest of Indianapolis. "We looked at who was the most aggressive district within Indianapolis's 11 districts, and set a lot of our benchmarks against theirs."

Phalen also has high expectations for Baugh, who oversaw the hiring and developing of a team that Phalen calls truly collaborative and effective.

"We also firmly believe in the notion that employee happiness is strongly linked to the quality of their manager," Phalen says. "We're very pleased with (Baugh) as a manager and a leader, and in setting the culture and work environment. The team has been very good at making changes in personnel very quickly when it became apparent that it wasn't the right fit."

Additionally, Phalen hopes to partner with more organizations who can support the school's enrichment classes.

"We think with our model, we'll find partners to come and support our different programs," he says. "We know our day is long, and long for teachers, so we know we'll have to find a way to give teachers a break or down time or additional planning time or just time not to be on-the-go."

PLA has placed an emphasis on partnerships, which include its mentoring program with Carpe Diem, one with Purdue University and Eli Lilly and Company for National Geographic science kits, and another with a former star of the Indianapolis Colts football team, Marlin Jackson, for character education.

As formal reviews begin in the spring, Phalen says, the network should have a plan, based largely on experiences of other successful schools, to develop and support teachers, with a transparent career path.

PLA does expect to hire more lab monitors as the school grows; Phalen says he also expects to get more parents and volunteers involved.

"We'll also increase parental involvement in our labs. They'll help with management stuff like log-ins and other technical stuff. We'll see if that really works—having volunteers to give enough time and help out enough," he says.

### WORKING TOWARD FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Financial experts whom Phalen consulted suggested that, for his model to be sustainable, the school should pay teachers between \$36,000 and \$40,000 (assuming somewhat smaller class sizes than PLA plans at capacity). But Phalen, concerned about getting inexperienced teachers at that salary, decided to start the



Music teacher Brittany McDonald helps her students drum in a round.

pay scale at \$40,000. All the teachers hired for the first year are earning significantly more than this.

"At the end of year 5, assuming we're on target, we project to be sustainable on public dollars," Phalen says.

To cover the start-up costs, the school needed \$2.5 million in "growth capital." Because enrollment came up short, the school will either need to raise more money, or get on track quickly in enrollment—which Phalen expects.

Having somewhat bigger classes after first grade will also help, he says, requiring fewer teachers.

Costs for facilities and technology are also a factor, but PLA intends, after the costs of start-up, to stay at 15 to 20 percent of its budget for facilities and 15 percent for curriculum and technology, with most of the rest going toward salaries and benefits.

### LOOKING AHEAD

Challenges and questions remain for the months, and years, ahead, including:

- Will enrollment get on track by 2014–15? If the school falls short, it may need to raise an additional \$1 million in "growth capital." Phalen acknowledges how not providing transportation adds to this difficulty, but expresses confidence that, with an expanded outreach team and the school's growing "buzz," PLA will meet and exceed its enrollment goals.

"We knew that when we had 10 schools with 10,000 students, did we really want to bus all those kids? The answer was no. The solution is to really be in touch with parents and families. . . . We believe that once people see what our results are, along with word of mouth, that it will drive up our waiting list and that parents will solve the transportation issue."



Kindergarten teacher Roleen Brown leads a "turbo-kick" enrichment class.



- How will PLA deal with the issue of tardy students? Aware that parents can choose to pull their children from PLA at any time, Baugh has tried to walk a thin line between being tough on tardiness and maintaining good relationships with families who, he knows, may have many issues to deal with. Opening the school doors earlier in the day may help, he says; beyond that, he will have to get tough.

“Often times, the kids who need remediation are the ones coming in an hour late; sometimes I don’t have another segment of the day to make that up,” teacher Leslie Fisher says.

“I believe we can change communities through schools,” Phalen says. “I believe that schools can and do change children’s lives. I believe that children and school teachers and leaders can impact parental beliefs and actions. I believe it’s part of our educational obligation to teach parents how important it is to get their children to school on time. I’m also OK with the process, with making parents uncomfortable about not being on time. I’m OK with us doing that as a part of our work.”

- Will all students attend Summer Advantage? Although PLA advertises a 225-day school year, the 25 days of Summer Advantage are not required. Baugh expects most students to attend. Summer Advantage will also incorporate some of the PLA blended learning.
- Can Phalen’s team open new schools, with great teachers, every two years? The plan calls for opening a school in 2016 and every two years afterward; Phalen would like to speed that up as long as the network has a strong academic and financial showing. “Our kids need this,” he says. “We’re just not going to twiddle our thumbs while children’s futures die and lives are wasted.”

“Our kids need this. We’re just not going to twiddle our thumbs while children’s futures die and lives are wasted.” —Earl Martin Phalen

## LEARN MORE ABOUT PHALEN LEADERSHIP ACADEMIES

George and Veronica Phalen Leadership Academies

### News reports on Phalen:

[http://www.indystar.com/article/20130816/NEWS08/308160056/Matthew-Tully-An-idea-dream-new-school-Earl-Martin-Phalen-s-latest-mission?nclick\\_check=1](http://www.indystar.com/article/20130816/NEWS08/308160056/Matthew-Tully-An-idea-dream-new-school-Earl-Martin-Phalen-s-latest-mission?nclick_check=1)

<http://www.phalenacademies.org/wp-content/uploads/Indianapolis-Monthly-PLA-Article-2013.7.31.pdf>

<http://www.10tv.com/content/stories/apexchange/2012/06/04/in--exchange-blended-learning.html>

## Acknowledgements

The Indiana Charter School Board commissioned this case study with the generous support of an implementation grant from The Fund for Authorizing Excellence. This case study was written by Sharon Kebschull Barrett, with contributions from Joe Ableidinger, Rob Weldon, Bryan C. Hassel, and Emily Ayscue Hassel, all of Public Impact. Thank you to Beverley Tyndall for production of this report, and to April Leidig for its design. Public Impact also thanks Sarah McClamroch Sullivan and Emily Richardson of the Indiana Charter School Board for their assistance in working with PLA and for feedback on the case study draft. Thank you to all the staff of PLA for their assistance in helping to understand their model through site visits, interviews, and draft reviews.

© 2014 Indiana Charter School Board, Indianapolis, IN

© 2014 Public Impact, Chapel Hill, NC

The Indiana Charter School Board’s mission is to authorize and hold accountable a portfolio of high-performing charter schools in which

students achieve high levels of growth and graduate prepared for college and careers. Please visit [www.in.gov/icsb](http://www.in.gov/icsb) for more information.

Public Impact’s mission is to dramatically improve learning outcomes for all children in the U.S., with a special focus on students who are not served well. We are a team of professionals from many backgrounds, including former teachers. We are researchers, thought leaders, tool-builders, and on-the-ground consultants who work with leading education reformers. For more on Public Impact, please visit [www.publicimpact.com](http://www.publicimpact.com).

Public Impact encourages the free use, reproduction, and distribution of this paper for noncommercial use. **We require attribution for all use.** For more information and instructions on the commercial use of our materials, please contact us at [www.publicimpact.com](http://www.publicimpact.com).

**Please cite this report as:** Barrett, S. K. (2014). *Phalen Leadership Academy: Rapid adjustments: Lessons from a blended-learning start-up charter school*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana Charter School Board, and Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact. Retrieved from <http://www.in.gov/icsb/2448.htm>.