



**BELIEVE**  
MEMPHIS ACADEMY

2022-2023

# Impact Report



# Badger Circle



Badger Circle,

Closings and new beginnings.

In the Spring of 2023 we graduated our second ever class of 8th graders.

There's something really significant about being the second class (or, more aptly named - the First Follower).

The First Follower legitimizes the founding class' work. The First Followers make a movement real. The First Follower exponentially propels momentum.

This year, as we graduate our First Followers, the first class to complete our Charter's 4th THROUGH 8th grade model, I could not be more humbled by and grateful for the class of students and families with whom we've had the privilege of building Believe.

As we set our sights toward the 2023-24 school year, our SIXTH year as a school, EIGHT years beyond the inception of Believe Memphis Academy, Inc., we enter a new chapter of new beginnings.

The 2023-24 school year will welcome our FOUNDING Kindergarten and 1st grade students. We build a new dimension to our mission. To prepare students in **Kindergarten through 8th grade** with the academic rigor, robust supports, and leadership development necessary to excel in high school, thrive in college, and lead lives full of opportunity.

In many ways, it doesn't feel like a new journey. It feels like the same journey on which we've always been. It feels less like doing something new and more like becoming more of who we always were.

This new beginning is filled with such anticipation and hope. And, we can look back on the years we've journeyed to find the confidence that we don't step into the unknown; we step into the familiar.

And, for each of you - whether you've followed our work since the beginning or just are getting to know us - thank you for being with us. We believe, now more than ever, the work of building access to high-quality educational options for ALL children in our city is necessary, it's hard, and it's completely worth it.

Believe Memphis,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Danny Song'.

**Danny Song**  
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Cowan'.

**Matthew Cowan**  
Head of School



**Danny Song**  
Executive Director



**Matthew Cowan**  
Head of School



# Our Students

TOTAL STUDENTS

320

GRADES

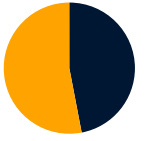
4-8

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 98% Black
- 2% Hispanic/Latinx



- 47% Female
- 53% Male



## Academic Achievement

From this year's State Data, of 203 public schools (traditional district and charter) in Memphis-Shelby County Schools:

THE ONLY LEVEL 5 CHARTER SCHOOL IN LITERACY AND NUMERACY FOR 3 CONSECUTIVE YEARS

## Level 5

2019 / 2022 / 2023

- 69 schools achieved a composite TVAAS Level 5 designation. **Believe was 1 of them.**
- 30 schools achieved a TVAAS Level 5 in BOTH Literacy and Numeracy. **Believe was 1 of them.**
- 9 schools achieved a TVAAS Level 5 in ALL subjects - Literacy, Numeracy, Science, and Social Studies. **Believe was 1 of them.**

“ At Believe Memphis Academy, we are building something uniquely different in our city that makes a long-lasting difference for our children. We are, measurably, 1 of 1.

We're only getting started.  
Thank you, Badgers! ”

– DANNY SONG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



# Extracurricular Activities

## GUSTO: BADGERS TAKE PRIDE & JOY IN HARD WORK!

Our extracurricular activities allow students to explore diverse interests and develop their creativity and self-expression. To achieve academically, students need to feel a sense of belonging and school pride while building relationships with fellow students, teachers and staff.

We believe in a well rounded education, which is why we offer music and art classes in addition to our core classes. Music and art develop our Badgers into adults who can see and appreciate the beauty of our world, as well as give them healthy and constructive outlets for expressing themselves.

Our comprehensive approach enhances student engagement and motivation, leading to better attendance rates, academic success, and positive relationships between students and teachers. This promotes social-emotional growth, empathy, and inclusivity, preparing students for the real world.

- Music and Coding
- Class Trips
- Internships/Extra programs
- Student Council (*grade level student council officers, vice-president, and president*)
- Garden Club



“ Last year we started our full music program, offering a choral music program where students learn singing techniques, music literacy, and participate in live performances. Students also participate in small group and individual lessons in voice, piano, and guitar. This year we have added percussion and are continuing to refine our singing skills. Students have an upcoming December performance which we are looking forward to! It is our hope to continue to grow the program. ”

– JOE JOHNSON, MUSIC TEACHER





# Promoting Access to HBCUs and Black History

Our commitment to diversity, inclusion, and understanding is reflected in our belief that all students should have access to the rich legacy, culture, and academic excellence of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Black History. To center the experiences, achievements, struggles, and contributions of Black History in the broader American history, our Badgers had the opportunity to visit prestigious institutions such as Jackson State University, Alabama A&M, and Fisk University, as well as explore Black history sites. We are grateful to our supporters for providing the financial resources to make these experiences possible, as they play a critical role in encouraging cultural appreciation, inspiring future leaders, and cultivating a more equitable society.



# Athletics

HEALTHY BODIES AND HEALTHY MINDS

Promoting physical fitness and overall health is essential for our Badgers. Our athletic programs foster teamwork, discipline, leadership skills, and other valuable life lessons while creating a sense of school spirit.

## Basketball

Boys 6-8

Girls 6-8

## Track

Boys 6-8

Girls 6-8

## Memphis Inner-City Rugby

“ Last year was our first year playing in the SCIAA basketball league. In this league, we played other schools to compete to win the state championship. In our first year, both boys and girls were able to make the playoffs, making Believe history. This year, we are looking to make the playoffs again, but advance to the district championship and beyond. ”

– NICK WILSON, ATHLETIC DIRECTOR





# Our Badger Squad

## BADGERS:

Belief, Ambition, Determination, Gusto, Empathy, Respect, and Steadfastness

**Belief:** Badgers believe in ourselves, our community, and the future we will create.

**Ambition:** Badgers work hard to achieve our dreams.

**Determination:** Badgers never give up.

**Gusto:** Badgers take pride and joy in hard work.

**Empathy:** Badgers consider the feelings and experiences of others.

**Respect:** Badgers treat all people as they would like to be treated.

**Steadfastness:** Badgers finish what we start.



## What teaching means to us:

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**We see the children we teach.** We teach unique, brilliant, funny, quirky, and complex middle school students. We strive to know them in their fullness. We are confident in their ability to do great things inside and outside the classroom walls.

**We create a safe environment for children to learn and thrive.** For too long and in too many places, students of color – specifically Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students – have had to navigate classroom spaces that lack physical, emotional, and academic safety.

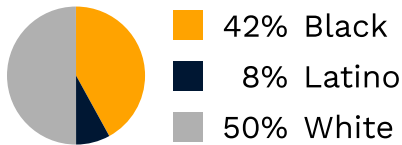
**We provide intentional opportunities for students to see their own success and foster intrinsic motivation toward growth.** Small wins are everything in the classroom. We believe that establishing growth mindsets in our students is essential to their long-term success.

**We know our students' success is dependent on the team with whom we work and collaborate.** As teachers at Believe, we do not work in a silo. We push, question, celebrate, and learn from the colleagues around us. We know that what we can do together is so much greater than what we could do alone.

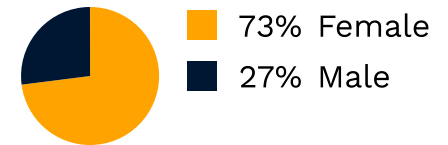
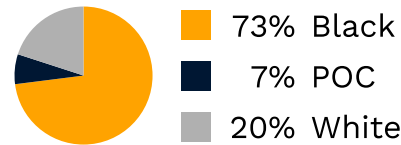
# Diversity in our Leadership

We believe that our students can only be what they can see, which is why our leadership is reflective of our student body demographics. We take great pride in having a diverse board and staff and we believe that this is one of our major strengths as an organization.

## BOARD DEMOGRAPHICS



## STAFF DEMOGRAPHICS



## At Believe, teachers matter.

### Benefits of working with Believe:

#### MATERNITY/PATERNITY LEAVE

We believe that teachers have the right to start their families without incurring a loss of income. We offer paid maternity and paternity leave to any staff member welcoming a new child to their family.

#### BELIEVE TEACHING FELLOWSHIP

The Teaching Fellowship Fund is an investment in new and aspiring teachers who want to seek their license. Believe covers the cost of this education and supports them on their journey. We currently have several full-time teachers and current members of our Leadership Team who are alumni of the BTF.

#### PAID SUPPLIES & UNLIMITED COPIES

Teachers should be provided the supplies and materials they need to do their job at no cost to them. At Believe, we cover all of these expenses and unlimited copies annually as a basic commitment to our staff and their work.

#### BELIEVE BLACK WOMEN FUND

As a part of our commitment to anti-racism and disruption of the status quo, this fund is set aside on an annual basis to recognize that privilege is real and that the intersectionality of systemic racism and sexism impact staff members of color and women more pervasively than other privileged individuals.

While privilege and lack-there-of are not earned, the impacts are real and felt. Therefore, for the last three (3) years, Believe has committed this fund as our commitment to our values.

#### 2 GUARANTEED MENTAL HEALTH DAYS A YEAR

Established by our school social worker, Lauren Reed, The Badger Mental Health Days (BMHD) offer a proactive approach to addressing staff burnout and mental health needs. At the beginning of each semester staff get to choose 1 day to take that does not come out of their PTO. A person may schedule their BMHD around the anniversary of the death of a loved one, seek therapy, engage in self-care, or take a trip.



# Staff Highlights



**LAUREN REED**

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER

As a dedicated social worker, my ultimate goal is to make a positive impact on students and families by removing any obstacles that may hinder their growth and progress. I am grateful to be a part of Believe's team, as their culture is built upon active listening and prioritizing the well-being of students. This empowers me to tailor my approach to each individual's needs and provide them with the support they deserve to excel. Believe Memphis Academy values and respects my profession and gives me the autonomy to shape my work in the most effective way possible. I am constantly encouraged to grow and evolve as a professional, which makes me feel valued and appreciated. I couldn't be happier to be a part of such an inclusive and supportive community.

Believe is where I belong. It's a place where I can work in an environment with Brown kids who look and grew up just like me. At Believe, I feel supported, and I'm able to be my authentic self. Every day presents opportunities to learn and grow, and I'm surrounded by like-minded individuals who share my passion for changing education and love the profession. Our vision and mission are not just empty words; they're actively happening each day that students are in the building. We go above and beyond to provide robust supports that help our students be ready for learning, such as transportation for 80% of students and providing school supplies and uniforms. Our academic rigor is equally strong, with interventions, standard-based instruction, and data-driven instruction. We're working diligently to eliminate the opportunity gap by being a choice-based school and allowing students from all over Memphis to attend.

*Prior to her role as Dean, she was a Teaching Fellow, 5th Grade Literacy Teacher, 5th Grade Math Teacher, now Dean of Culture.*



**DOMINIQUE CLARK**

ASSISTANT HEAD OF SCHOOL  
& MATHEMATICS GRADES 6-8

The day of the interview walking through the hallways I had never seen such a beautiful environment. I was very impressed. Despite all of the challenges, what never changes is the commitment to students and families. We care about our students as human beings. No one that I know in the education field, provides this level of support, investment, opportunities for the professionals in our team. The culture and taking the time to get to know the families and giving them what they need. One thing we do well is ensuring our students with disabilities have a direct relationship with our social workers. If they need anything outside of the classroom our team is ready to provide it, from uniforms to being able to get their laundry done. We think about the whole child. The people-centered nature of the work is why I keep coming back.

*Dominique Clark was 8th grade ELA teacher last year. Her 8th graders had the HIGHEST growth over the course of the year from beginning to end of year in the whole school. Prior to 8th grade, she was a Teaching Fellow, founding 6th grade social studies teacher, and founding 7th grade teacher.*



**KANDICE N. DUNCAN**

DEAN OF CULTURE

# Beyond Believe

At Believe, we want to foster the type of environment where our students and staff can grow and thrive, even as they advance beyond our walls. We take great pride in developing our staff so they have the confidence and skills to pursue the next step, whatever that may be, and the same applies to our students. Wherever life may take a Badger, we want them to be prepared and ready to excel.



“

At Believe, I found an unwavering commitment to fully support their staff, families, and students, which is why I chose to teach here. One of the biggest challenges facing public schools across the nation is their inability to adapt to the evolving needs of their students. However, Believe stands out by making impactful and sustainable changes.

Believe's greatest strength lies in its people. The school fosters a collaborative and connected environment where individuals can show up as themselves. As a result, Believe has created a space that values teamwork and individual learning. Even on the toughest days, you are surrounded by a strong support system that enables continued growth. This collective approach to ongoing learning creates a school that students truly deserve.

I highly recommend Believe to my colleagues because the school is an excellent example of an organization prioritizing individual and professional growth. I chose to teach at Believe because of their unyielding commitment to fully supporting their staff, families, and students. One of the biggest problems plaguing public schools in our nation is the need for them to properly adjust to meet the needs of the students they serve. Believe, on the other hand, makes changes that are both impactful and sustainable. ”

**AMY DOWDEN** • FORMER TEACHER





# Badger Family Spotlight

**ROSILYN CURRIE** • PARENT & STAFF MEMBER

**SERENITI HODGE** • ALUMNI

**TAHANI** • FUTURE BAGER

Believe Memphis Academy is committed to creating a strong bond between families, students, and staff. We believe that fostering strong relationships, open communication, and shared values supports the growth journey of our students, families, and staff members. Rosilyn and her family exemplify the type of bond that we have with our families.

As a former student at Believe, I had a fantastic experience. The teachers were dedicated and went above and beyond to provide me with everything I needed. They set high standards for excellence and encouraged us to achieve our goals. Thanks to their support and encouragement, I felt challenged and motivated to succeed. Because of them, I now love learning and thrive in high school. Believe Memphis Academy is a welcoming community that feels like a family.

**SERENITI HODGE** • ALUMNI

As a parent, I felt valued and part of a support system that allowed me to be a better mom. I'm always impressed by the educational approach that prioritizes the holistic development of students, including their social and emotional health, as well as their families. That's what drove me to be part of the team! I wanted to be part of our organization doing great work for our entire community. My colleagues are exceptional, always going the extra mile to ensure the best possible education for their students.

**ROSILYN CURRIE** • PARENT & STAFF MEMBER

# Badgers Making an Impact in High Schools Across the Mid-South





# Our Badger Community

Our community partners play an **integral** role at Believe Memphis Academy because their support enhances the learning experience of our students. Their support and resources foster a sense of community that promotes career readiness, offers social-emotional support, and facilitates one-of-a-kind experiences. Their involvement strengthens the quality of education and the overall success of our students.



Alcy Ball Development Corporation • Alcy Ball Community Association • ALL Memphis • BES • Board on Track • CheckBox Pro • City Leadership • Code Crew • Diverse Learners' Cooperative • First Horizon Bank • Give Clean • Give Threads • Higginbotham Insurance • Junior Achievement • Memphis Athletic Ministries • Memphis Teacher Residency • Neighborhood Christian Center • Red Door Urban Ministries • Relay Graduate School of Education • Slingshot Memphis • Teach For America • Together Education • The Memphis Lift • Tennessee Charter School Center • Well Child

# Supporters & Donors

Thanks to the unwavering support of our donors, we can improve the overall quality of our school, ultimately fulfilling our mission of developing the whole child.



Cushman Wakefield | Commercial Advisors • First Horizon Bank • Hyde Family Foundation • Lionheart Foundation • Sell901 • Technology Happens • Tennessee Department of Education • Urban Child Institute





# Board of Directors



**Adam Crawford**

Board Treasurer

VP Finance

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**Alicia Norman**

Board Vice Chair

Director of NEXT Memphis

Porter Leath

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Board Member

Financial Advisor

UBS

**Thomas Marino**

Board Chair, Founding Board Member

VP of Mortgage Warehouse Lending

First Horizon



**BELIEVE**  
MEMPHIS ACADEMY

Thank You For ***Believing***  
What's Possible!

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NOVEMBER 2023

We look forward to another incredible school year at Believe, full of both exciting firsts and established traditions. To learn more about us, give, apply to teach, or enroll a student, visit our website [believememphisacademy.org](https://believememphisacademy.org).