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“I believe that in communities with high youth violence, 24/7 urban boarding schools can provide a safe environment and give kids a chance to be successful. Our schools should be community centers with a wide variety of after school and social/emotional programming. I believe initiatives like Ryan Banks Academy can be game changers in addressing the issue of youth violence, which is a public health crisis.”

- Arne Duncan, Former U.S. Secretary of Education

Who is Ryan Banks?

The vision for Ryan Banks Academy was born from tragedy. Ryan Banks was a happy-go-lucky 12 year old boy who was enthusiastic, full of life, always curious, and loved to make others laugh. While he had a difficult upbringing and had every reason to be angry, he was one of the happiest seventh graders to ever walk the hallways of New Sullivan Elementary School, on Chicago's far-east side. But on May 19, 2012, Niazi "Ryan" Banks was shot and killed by gunfire.

Ryan was a very special child who had the entire world ahead of him. However, Ryan is just one of far too many Chicago students who are lost to gun violence each year. In addition to the children and teens who are lost to senseless acts of violence, thousands more fall through the cracks in other ways—those who do not receive the proper academic and social/emotional support they need at the school level, live in an unsafe neighborhood, and those who are dealing with trauma within their family environment. Ryan Banks Academy is here to serve those students.

Executive Summary

Ryan Banks Academy will be an independent college-preparatory, residential, tuition-free middle and high school that will prepare motivated students from Chicago neighborhoods to graduate from college, enter into meaningful careers, and be the catalyst to bring positive change into their communities. We will serve Chicago students who are in 7th-12th grade and will open our doors in time for the 2018-2019 school year. We are a registered 501(c)3 organization.

Our long term vision for the school is to provide our students with a state-of-the-art facility that is fully equipped with current technology and equipment to create an optimal learning environment. During our first year in operation (the 2018-2019 school year), we will launch a pilot program of twenty seventh grade students. The following school year, Ryan Banks Academy will add two new classes of seventh grade students. Each year, we will add an additional grade so that we will have the capacity to serve a total of 240 students between 7th-12th grades, and we will meet maximum capacity by Year 7.

Academic Curriculum

Ryan Banks Academy students will expand their horizons through a curriculum model focused on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) and experiential and expeditionary learning. Ryan Banks Academy will have a rigorous academic program that will focus on preparing all of our students for college or for a vocation that will enable them to attain the same level of financial freedom that a college education would provide. We recognize that as a residential school, we will benefit from a 24/7 accountability advantage, embedded in which we will have an expectation for dramatic academic gains and personal growth. Our goals for high school graduation rates, college graduation rates, student retention rates, successful internship placement rates, and proficiency rates are mission-driven and benchmarked with the schools with whom we share certain practices.

Residential Curriculum

Ryan Banks Academy plans to differentiate itself from competitor schools because we are the first boarding school to provide services to underserved children in Chicago. Boarding schools have historically been a privilege and luxury that are reserved for the wealthy, and we believe that a successful boarding school education should also be easily accessible for disadvantaged youth.

Ryan Banks Academy will accelerate and reinforce student learning outside of traditional school hours, ensuring that students graduate from high school with both the academic and life skills to excel in college and in their professional career. Through receiving a breadth of holistic services, students will also be equipped with the social and emotional skills that will allow them to pursue meaningful relationships and to positively contribute back to society. Students will be surrounded by supportive and positive adult role models and mentors that will help them to develop the habits necessary to succeed academically, socially, and professionally.

Mission Statement

Mission statement:

Ryan Banks Academy is the first inner-city boarding school in Chicago to combine a high-quality, future-facing curriculum with an integrated social-emotional education in order to provide the launching pad for students out of poverty and into the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and world-changers.

How we will do that:

We will provide students with an exceptional education combined with a 24/7 living environment that addresses the needs of the whole students. Our curriculum is based on the principles of experiential and expeditionary adventure learning with a focus on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math). We also heavily emphasize the importance of social emotional learning, and we pride ourselves on our ability to provide exceptional social emotional support services to our students that go above and beyond that of competitor schools.

Leadership

Ryan Banks Academy was founded by Valerie Groth, who holds advanced degrees in psychology, social work, and educational leadership. For many years she worked as a school social worker in Chicago Public Schools working closely with students, families, and communities. She is intimately aware of the challenges facing Chicago children and their families, and with a Masters degree in Educational Leadership, Valerie is qualified to serve as a school administrator in the state of Illinois.

Valerie has brought on over 30 Board members and volunteers who live both locally in Chicago as well as around the globe who believe in the Ryan Banks Academy mission and philosophy. Our Board of Directors and Advisory Board consist of nonprofit management consultants, social enterprise CEOs, individuals with urban teaching experience, individuals who have successfully founded their own educational institution, individuals who have experience with fundraising and finances, real estate professionals, and many with startup experience. Such breadth of experience will allow us to continue to forge relationships with the stakeholders and constituencies necessary to ensure Ryan Banks Academy's sound governance, operational effectiveness, and fiscal health.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What's not working (regarding the traditional school model)?

School teachers in urban districts face special challenges in promoting their students' long-term academic success. It is no surprise that so-called "failing" schools are disproportionately situated in urban centers with high rates of poverty and crime. The issue is not that teachers in these schools are merely less invested or interested in their students' lives, or that they are less well trained (although it is difficult for poorer districts to attract high-quality candidates to them with smaller paychecks than their suburban and high-performing counterparts). Rather, these teachers are faced with issues which the traditional academic model is not able to accommodate, and for which they are not equipped or trained to handle. In Chicago's west- and south-sides, a predominantly minority-group population faces more schools closing, less funding in schools, more generational or long-term poverty, and greater racial segregation than many other areas of the city. Students are raised—and all too often die—without ever having the opportunity to "make it out" of these desperate situations. The proposed end result of the research presented here is Chicago's first boarding school system specifically targeted at alleviating the wide-ranging negative effects of poverty and racial segregation in these areas.

The scene is by now a familiar one to people working and participating in higher education. The over-scheduled, under-paid teacher struggles to make do with inadequate or outdated texts, students with often-extreme cognitive or emotional challenges being "mainstreamed" without access to the special educational resources they may need, and which he is not qualified or prepared to provide. The teacher faces pressure from accreditors, administrators, and parents—all of whom are telling them different versions of what they ought to be doing in the classroom. In urban centers across America, crowded classrooms—sometimes with thirty or more students, make-shift seating, sharing books and desks—are becoming more common. In Chicago specifically, critics of the most recent round of school closings by Chicago Public Schools cited crowding as the inevitable result of numerous school closings, alongside a host of other problems. Proponents of the planned closings argued that by re-allocating resources and funding from under-utilized, under-funded, under-performing schools, a greater number of students could be situated in schools where standards of academic achievement traditionally had been higher. This argument, however, fails to account for the many factors influencing students' academic success, those occurring both within the classroom setting, and in the students' home and social lives.

Why a boarding school?

Numbers of programs have sprouted around our urban centers purporting to address problems in the public school system with novel approaches to education—work-study integrated into high school programs, project-based learning systems where students direct their own learning to an extreme extent, arts- and language-specific programs, second-language immersion academies. While many such schools have had admirable success, and profess admirable educational missions, it may be possible to identify some basic failings in each to address the root problems facing students from low socio-economic status (SES) families. These problems begin before a student ever sets foot in a school, and they grow exponentially as a student progresses through successive grades.

Based on a recent study we have conducted among a population of parents of potential students, most respondents indicated that they would consider a quality boarding school for their children were it available. Given the 62% *dissatisfaction* rate with the alternatives to traditional Chicago Public School available in their neighborhoods, the opportunity becomes apparent for a school model that presents a robust and competitive curriculum, incorporating educational interventions aimed at closing the literacy and achievement gaps noted among low-SES student populations. Programs that effectively bring parent and community involvement into the classroom pay dividends as the student progresses as the research shows.

I thought boarding schools are for the children of wealthy families. How do we know the model works for disadvantaged youth?

There are a handful of residential schools across the country that are specifically designed to serve low-income students. The SEED Foundation boasts that 92% of their graduates are enrolled in college, and they earn a bachelor's degree at 4.5 times the rate of students from families who are in the lower quartile of income earners. Sixty two percent of SEED graduates graduate college or are currently enrolled in college, compared to only 14% of Chicago Public Schools students who graduate from college. Only 6% of African American males in Chicago Public Schools go on to graduate college.

What are the costs of inadequate education?

- College graduates are three times more likely to vote than Americans without a high school degree
- Preschool programs create economic benefits - including reduced costs of crime, drug use, and teen parenting - that range as high as \$7 for each dollar invested
- A high school dropout earns about \$260K less over a lifetime than a high school graduate and pays about \$60K less in taxes
- Increasing the high school completion rates by just 1% for all men ages 20-60 would save the US up to \$1.4B per year in reduced costs from crime
- Health related losses for the estimated 600,000 high school dropouts in 2004 totaled at least \$58B, or nearly \$100K per student
- Annual losses exceed \$50B in federal and state income taxes for all 23,000 US high school dropouts ages 18-67
- A one year increase in average years of schooling for dropouts would reduce murder and assault by almost 30%, motor vehicle theft by 20%, arson by 13%, and burglary and larceny by about 6%
- A shortfall of 7M college educated workers in America is projected by 2012
- High school drop outs have a life expectancy that is 9.2 years shorter than high school graduates
- America loses \$192B - 1.6% of GDP - in combined income and tax revenue with each cohort of 18 year olds who never complete high school
- *"Our findings suggest that an up-front investment in education, even one that costs billions of dollars, can prevent much higher expenditures later on. The 2002 federal No Child Left Behind Act, with its emphasis on improving the performance of all students, also makes the findings of this symposium especially timely..."* Given current trends, between 2000 and

2020, as the educational attainment of other countries is expected to rise, educational attainment in America will be falling for the first time in history.” - Henry Levin

In The Media

- July 2015: Published in <http://www.ednewsdaily.com/cps-social-worker-awarded-20k-grant-launch-chicagos-boarding-school-serve-innercity-youth/>
- November 2015: Published on Moxie Lady website <http://www.moxieladyonline.com/ryan-banks-academy-aims-to-support-disadvantaged-chicago-youth/>
- December 2015: Published on the Chicago NBC website <http://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/CPS-Social-Worker-Wins-Grant-for-Urban-Academy-361432601.html#comments>
- May 2016: RBA Founder was chosen out of almost 1,000 applicants to be a part of the I Am Chicago campaign which looked for “dynamic trail blazers and game changers who embody the passion and innovation of Chicago”; this was a national campaign that included print and digital media as well as being featured on a double decker bus
- July 2016: Featured in a segment on the CBS news: chicago.cbslocal.com/2016/07/15/slain-chicago-boy-inspiration-for-boarding-school-project/
- October 2016: Featured in The Chronicle for Social Change: <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/featured/victim-of-chicago-gun-violence-inspires-creation-of-boarding-school/21896>
- November 2016: RBA Founder, Valerie Groth, referenced in a Chicago Tribune article about innovative education initiatives: “She’s right on the cusp of building something that I think is going to disrupt a lot.”
- December 2016: Featured in the Chicago Reader: <http://people.chicagoreader.com/who/valerie-groth/profile/>
- December 2016: State finalist in the Samsung Solve For Tomorrow contest
- April 2017: Featured on the Steve Cochran radio show: <http://wgncradio.com/2017/03/24/steve-cochran-full-show-03-24-17-soup-for-a-sick-steve/>
- April 2017: Hosted an event with comedian/actor Jeff Garlin
- April 2017: Featured on WGN TV
- April 2017: Featured on Windy City Live
- April 2017: Featured on the Eric and Kathy radio show
- April 2017: Featured on the Roe Conn radio show
- April 2017: Hosted an event with actor/comedian Jeff Garlin

The Ryan Banks Academy Founder

Valerie Groth MSW, MA, CV ACC:

Valerie Groth received her Bachelors degree in Psychology from Indiana University, attended Dominican University where she received her Masters in Social Work, and most recently received her second Masters degree in Educational Leadership from Concordia University. For many years, Val worked as a school social worker on the west and south sides of Chicago in CPS. She provided social/emotional support for individuals, groups, and families, and she also provided crisis and grief counseling. Valerie currently runs an executive life coaching practice and is also an international speaker, workshop facilitator, and the author of *The Power of the Possible: The Dire State of Inner City Education and One Woman's Revolution to Fix It* which will be published Summer 2017.

The Ryan Banks Academy Board of Directors

{Listed in alphabetical order}

Jeff Bell:

Jeff is Founding Head of School at Beacon Academy in Evanston, Illinois. Prior to this role, he was the academic dean at St. Andrew's-Swanee School in Tennessee and prior was the assistant academic dean at Lake Forest Academy, a boarding school in Lake Forest, Illinois.

Jeff Garlin:

Jeff Garlin is a comedian, actor, producer, voice artist, director, writer, podcast host and author. He is known for his role as Jeff Greene on the HBO show *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, for which he was nominated for seven Emmys in his role as Executive Producer and two wins for Producing from the Producers Guild of America. He currently stars in the ABC sitcom *The Goldbergs*.

Sandee Kastrul:

Sandee Kastrul is the president and cofounder of i.c.stars; founded in 1999 i.c.stars provides opportunities to break the cycle of poverty that limits inner-city youth. Through training in technology, in leadership and in business skills i.c.stars prepares change-driven, inner city future leaders to develop skills in business and technology for high-level careers in information technology (IT) and community leadership. Sand's career in education has included focused work on cross-curricular arts integration strategies, diversity training and curriculum development. She worked as a teacher and consultant from early childhood classrooms through adult education affording her a wide perspective in effective project based learning techniques, leadership development, reverse mentoring and asset based pedagogy.

Amanda Lao

Amanda Lao has experience working in many industries, having transitioned from a career and accounting and finance to one in interior design. She is involved with and gives to a variety nonprofit organizations in Chicago and nationally, focusing on the issues of hunger and nutrition, sustainable food supply, women's issues, and arts and arts education. She and her husband are members of The Kitchen Community, a nonprofit based in Boulder that builds learning gardens in city schools, and was instrumental in helping to bring the program to Chicago. As an immigrant to the US at a young age, she attended public schools both overseas and in Chicago, and through personal experience of the very different systems, has come to firmly believe in the major role that one's educational environment plays in shaping one's future.

Ryan Lazarus:

Ryan Lazarus is a serial entrepreneur and venture capitalist. He is the CMO for Blacknight Holdings as well as the Co-founder and COO of Vue Capital, an early-stage venture capital fund. He is also a co-founder of Windo Global Partners, a consulting firm that works primarily with U.S. companies looking to expand to India and vice versa. Ryan is involved with multiple civic organizations in Chicago, and was the first board member to join our founder Valerie back in 2014.

Kiley Russell, MA, Ed. Dr:

Kiley worked for many years as a teacher as well as an assistant principal and also the Chief Academic Officer for a charter school. She now works as an educational leadership consultant and also runs her own business, and her success has been featured on Oprah.

The Ryan Banks Academy Board of Advisors

{Listed in alphabetical order}

Samantha Allen:

Samantha Allen graduated from Purdue University Northwest earning a bachelor's degree in elementary education. She now works as an elementary school teacher.

Dave Benoit:

Dave Benoit is an education business leader with a track record as an innovator, capable of launching new companies and fixing underperformers. He has over 25 years of experience in sales, marketing, operations and senior management. Dave's successful ventures include Lightspan(IPO-2000), Co-nect (sold to Pearson in '05), Connections Academy(sold to Pearson in '11), Middlebury Interactive Languages (sold to K12 in 2016, won award for excellence at Serious Play Conference in 2011), and ScholarCentric (sold to Advance Path in 2015),. He also received the EdNet Rookie of the Year Award as best new company and product (Waking Minds, Writing) in the K-12 market for CDI America, an English language company he launched in 2004. For the past two years, Dave has been leading global business development for Stratasys, one of the largest 3D printing companies in the world. In this role, he has developed strategic partnerships with Dell, Learning Blade, STEMconnector, Job for America's Graduates and Jason Learning. In addition, he is married with three sons, mentors college football players for his alma mater (Northwestern – '86), has served on several boards and advises a number of companies in the education market.

Allison Bush:

Allison Bush is a grant writing professional who enjoys working with nonprofit organizations who are making a difference in the world.

Cecilia Bissoli, MFA:

Cecilia has several years of design work in the US and South America. She obtained experience that prepared her to be a rigorous thinker and a good problem solver. She strives to develop solutions that are inviting and interesting but also mirror her core values. She strongly believes that designers have the mission to create graphic solutions that inspire others and give back to the community.

Toya Nicole Benson MBA:

LaToya Nicole Benson is a speaker, writer and consultant who helps build bankable brands through social media and empowers women to walk boldly into the life and business they are purposed for. With over a decade of corporate experience as a marketing manager and sales professional for a Fortune 200 transportation company, Toya Nicole proved her executive leadership working with multi-billion dollar corporations like: McDonald's, Walgreen Co, John Deere, 3M and Caterpillar. LaToya holds a BBA in Marketing from Texas A&M and received an MBA from University of Dallas.

Kendra Bostick LCSW:

Kendra Bostick is a passionate Licensed Clinical Social Worker who has four years of school social work experience and two years of experience within inpatient child and adolescent behavioral health units in Chicago. Kendra is bilingual in Spanish and has immersed herself in many global endeavors including working in a therapeutic day center in London, teaching English in Thailand and coordinating mental health workshops in Ecuador. Kendra is currently obtaining her second Masters degree in Education with a focus on how to use Adventure Programming and Experiential Education to build a compassionate community that maximizes meaningful learning within the education system.

Katie Cahnmann LPC:

Katie Cahnmann is a Master's level Certified School Counselor and Licensed Professional Counselor with almost two decades of providing individual, group, and family counseling; mentoring; tutoring; advocacy; fundraising; event planning; and more. She is also the founder of www.nowyouknowevents.com, one of the top Chicago events calendars.

Adrienne Colvert:

Adrienne Colvert has experience in both the professional and nonprofit arenas. She worked for many years as a financial consultant with Deloitte and then continued as a sub-contractor with the firm while raising her children. She is currently working part-time as Manager of Research and Administration with Cambridge Consulting (an Executive Search Firm) as well as serving as the President of Hope's Front Door, a human services agency in DuPage County. Adrienne holds an MBA from Loyola University of Chicago.

Samantha Conrad:

Samantha is currently a student at Columbia College Chicago with several years of experience in design. Her forte includes creative and aesthetically pleasing work focused on inventiveness and practicality. Her passion aids with accomplishing goals and in creating beautiful things. She is honored and excited to be working with the Ryan Banks Academy.

Meggie Cramer:

Meggie Cramer is an Assistant Director at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business focusing on fundraising and advancement. Meggie is an award-winning writer and storyteller who has worked with filmmakers, nonprofits, and advocacy groups around effective fundraising campaigns, long-term sustainability, and development of strategies combining high-impact donations and high-quality messaging leading to increased capacity and influence. She has worked for multi-national film and television companies Showtime Australia and HBO, spent time at Tribeca Productions and @radical.media, and has collaborated with documentary filmmakers across the country on social justice films with robust engagement campaigns. In addition to serving on the Board of Ryan Banks Academy she is part of the IFP Chicago Board of Directors and continues to advise content creators across platforms. As an alumnae of boarding school education, she's uniquely dedicated to Ryan Banks Academy's mission.

Hilario Dominguez:

Hilario Dominguez grew up in Chicago where he attended Chicago Public Schools and became a product of the neighborhoods he surrounded himself in. He went on to complete his bachelor's education at Johns Hopkins University where he received a degree in sociology and public health with a specialization in education. Later, he received his Master's Degree in Special Education from Dominican University. Hilario taught special education for two years before becoming a housing organizer for The Resurrection Project.

Lildella Douglas M.A.Ed, NCC:

Lildella is the President and founder of Spirit of Excellence (SoE) Consulting. SoE offers professional and leadership development coaching for individuals in transition or looking to grow in their authenticity as a leader. With over eleven years in education and community engagement, she encourages the same in the children and families she supports. Her passion is helping others leverage their strengths to realize personal and professional goals. She holds a Bachelors degree in Liberal Arts and a Masters in Education and Community Counseling. In her spare time she enjoys creative writing.

Sandy Demos-Kelley:

Sandy Demos-Kelley is a former Chicago Public Schools administrator who is recently retired. She is also a licensed therapist who currently runs her own private practice.

Regina Drury MBA:

Regina Drury is an accountant from St. Louis, MO with 17 years experience in various industries including real estate, healthcare, and manufacturing. She owns a video production company called Golden Key Productions, LLC.

Leah Hill Ed. D.:

Leah is a licensed school psychologist and a licensed clinical professional counselor. Her professional distinctions include specialized training in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy. For over twenty years, Leah has worked in the field of psychology as a school psychologist for the largest public school district in the State of Illinois and in a private practice setting. She is also heavily involved in volunteer work in the community.

Sanchit Mulmuley:

Sanchit Mulmuley is a former policy researcher for the Wisconsin State Senate, where he focused on Higher Education and Agriculture. He has been actively involved with various startups since 2011, and his experience investing in local food businesses led to the founding of Banyan Technologies, a B2B marketplace for local food based in Chicago. Sanchit holds a bachelor's degree in Economics from the University of Wisconsin - Madison.

Kaitlin Reimann:

Kaitlin is a business and community leader who left consulting to co-found a company she felt would make a difference. This company, uBack, is changing the giving conversation so we can all change the world. Kaitlin believes that we each have the power to create the change we want to see and her desire is to make getting involved as easy as possible.

Michael Soguero Med:

Michael Soguero has been a leader in education reform since 1993 when he was a founding member of Eagle Rock School & Professional Development Center (PDC) development team in Estes Park, Colorado. Michael became the Co-Director of the School for the Physical City in New York City and later the Founder and Director of the Bronx Guild where his work was held up as an exemplar of effective small school leadership.

Nancy Syburg:

Nancy Syburg is a former certified Montessori teacher, school administrator, and chair of the social justice committee. Recently retired, she now runs her own 'emergency nanny' business and has a passion for helping youth.

Trudy Taylor MA, PhD

Dr. Trudy Taylor has worked as an administrator, teacher and parent volunteer in Chicago and Flossmoor, Illinois. While principal of Jesse Owens Community Academy students achieved gains that ranked in the top quartile and the top third in reading and math, respectively in the network. While at New Sullivan, a school with a focus on the arts, as assistant principal Dr. Taylor wrote and received grants from the Illinois Arts Council, The MacArthur Foundation and Ballroom Dancing, which allowed an arts-in-residency creative writing program, band performance in Florida and an appearance on WGN News 9 Chicago. Dr. Taylor's work was awarded First Place with The Chicago Area Alliance for Black School Educators Award; The Cindy Brinkley Parent Volunteer Award in Flossmoor School District 161; and was named teacher of the year at the former Spalding Branch School for children with special needs and at Vanderpoel Magnet School. Her career spans thirty years. Currently she is working in South Holland, IL, serving students with special needs.

Kim Vigsbo:

Kim is a web designer and business coach. He has been in business since 1995 and his company, StoneHill Media, works daily with responsive (mobile-friendly) web design, development and UX Engineering. Kim is also the founder of We Are Fish, a business coaching program primarily for entrepreneurs with learning disabilities such as Dyslexia, AD(H)D and OCD.

Christopher Ziobehr:

Christopher is a Futurologist and Technologist. Owning his own business in the technology space, he focuses on developing opportunities to grow his network and connect people for the success of the Chicago. Additionally he consults business owners who need assistance in scalability and operational strategies. He helps with RBA as an advisor of connectivity.