We Are a Village.
Our Mission

The Gestalt mission is to leverage community assets to empower citizens who will be college-ready, career-ready, and community-ready. We will achieve this mission by providing students with an exceptional educational program defined by rigorous curriculum standards, high expectations for academic achievement, integrated technology, and community service.

Our Values

COMMUNITY
Collaboration is key to personal growth and neighborhood revitalization. Partnerships allow us to serve at a greater capacity for maximum impact.

HUMILITY
We are accountable to our scholars, peers, and neighborhoods in which we serve, because the work we do serves a larger purpose.

ACHIEVEMENT
We strive for excellence in the classroom and in the community.

ZEAL
Our drive for success is derived from the compassion for the community we serve.

INNOVATION
We strive to evolve faster than the world around us. We can only be our best if we are willing to reevaluate and refine what we do.

Our Vision

The vision is building better communities through education.
Current Academic Model

**What Drives Our Work**
- High Expectations for Academic Achievement
- Challenging & Collaborative Environment
- Equity & Equality
- College Prep Focus
- Integrated Technology
- Service Learning

**Assessments**
- **NWEA**
  - K-12th-Fall-Winter-Spring
- **Interim Assessments**
  - Quarterly-3rd-12th
- **ACT**
  - 6th-11th-Fall & Spring

**Components**

- **Blended Learning Approach (BL)**
  - Our model combines the best of teacher instruction with integrated technology. Blended learning provides scholars the opportunity to use computers for individualized and digital learning groups. These groups provide assignments based on the individual learner’s skill deficits, thus creating a customized, differentiated assignments.

- **Inclusive Practices (SWD)**
  - Our instructional model ensures students with disabilities are included in general education classes for the majority of the school day. Inclusion provides the structure for students to access and progress in the general curriculum.

- **Response to Instruction & Intervention (RTI²)**
  - Our model is driven by high-quality instruction combined with academic and behavior interventions tailored to meet scholar’s individual needs.

- **Data Driven Instruction (DDI)**
  - Our instructional decisions are driven by the results from multiple student assessments. Data-driven instruction is about using the data to identify conceptual gaps and developing instruction to fill them appropriately.

- **Project Based Learning (PBL)**
  - Our model encourages a variety of real-world learning experiences, which extends beyond the classroom to each scholar’s home, community, nation, and the world. Gestalt scholars, parents, and staff are all charged with the mission to leave our community better than we found it.

- **Social Emotional Learning (SEL)**
  - Our model provides a comprehensive, individualized online reporting tool that brings academic, basic needs, and socio-emotional data together to meet the needs of the scholar.
Nine years ago, we opened our first school, Power Center Academy Middle School in the Hickory Hill neighborhood of Memphis. The year we opened, a tornado touched down and caused a tremendous amount of physical damage. While the tornado shook the community, an even more devastating storm was brewing for the families of Hickory Hill. The tornado exacerbated the community’s existing struggles: the recession had begun, which resulted in businesses leaving the community and one of the highest home foreclosure rates in the state, plus all neighborhood middle and high schools were on the state’s “failing” list. With limited job, housing, and education choices, the community needed a comprehensive plan for revitalization.

The collaboration of school and community would be essential to the revitalization of this community. To this end, we partnered with the local community development corporation, businesses, churches, and families to develop a school to address the community’s needs. It was our moral obligation.

In the first three years of the middle school, we saw emerging and promising results. The community wanted us to replicate and scale. To meet this need, we opened our high school. Again, we saw academic success and a high level of community engagement, as well as trust.

In 2012, we saw a need in another section of Memphis where all schools were failing; the area suffered from the highest poverty rate in the city, and families were moving out of the community. We decided to enter the community and engage in full turnaround work. Again, it was our moral obligation.

That year was the most challenging year for the organization. Our proven practices did not work for this community, and a metaphorical tornado set down within Gestalt. For the first time, we didn’t have the skills or capacity to address the trauma and emotional distress our families faced. We kept trying, though. It was our moral obligation.

After two years, we saw a beacon of light in a 7th grade student who was a runaway with both parents incarcerated; her grandmother was raising her. She refused to attend school. We provided a tremendous amount of support to her and the family, and she started to attend school, engage in the community, and make academic progress. She was our success story. In that same year of her progress, she was killed by a stray bullet. Her tragic death represented a resurrection for our organization. It was no longer good enough to reach a few; we had to build schools that could reach many. It is our moral obligation.
We realized we must pay greater attention to how we serve diverse learners in our community-centric schools. Since 2008, with the opening of our first school, we have yielded favorable results. These results, coupled with the community need and demand, were the catalyst for our growth into a charter management organization in 2011. Now with six schools, more than 2,100 families, and two alumni classes, we have identified a greater need to support both the academic and socio-emotional needs of our scholars. Programs we once viewed as wraparound services are now essential to our academic model.

This realization spurred the following questions: How can our views, perspective and actions evolve to address the whole child? What, in the evolving model, is scalable and sustainable? What supports are needed for teachers and leaders to implement the model? How do we align community resources and development to support the needs of the scholar and family?

This work is too big to maintain the status quo; our community and families deserve our dedicated commitment to do better and to evolve faster than the world around us. To this end, our goal is to adopt sustainable, innovative practices that will illuminate the following:

**Serve, Support, and Empower the Whole Child, School, and Community:** Our core value of humility leads our work. Humility for Gestalt means this work is too big to do alone. We continue to foster community partnerships, engagement, and development to support our scholars’ educational journeys while also tackling challenges in our community. As we advance our mission, we will consider best practices that address the following:

- Provide school programs and access to community assets to meet the socio-emotional needs of scholars.
- Leverage community resources to develop authentic learning experiences, nurture scholar passion, and foster problem solving.
- Live the Ephebic Oath of leaving the community better than we found it.

**Technology to Accelerate and Enrich the Learning Process:** We have spent the last six years implementing a blended model of instruction with a focus on three areas: direct instruction via whole group, inquiry-based or specialized instruction in small groups, and individualized, independent learning through digital content. Given the advancements in technology, systems, and productivity tools, we will build a model to do the following:

- Accelerate learning to close each individual’s achievement gap.
- Enrich learning to cultivate each scholar’s personal passions.
- Support learning with technology that enables scholars to produce systems and products to solve problems.
- Create an environment that extends learning beyond the classroom to a national and global perspective.
Purpose for this Learning Community

Accelerating Academic Learning and Individual Passion
Our schools will accelerate learning with diverse experiences such as dual enrollment, AP courses, and internships. These opportunities will improve academics while cultivating individual student passion.

Creating the Village
Our work in Memphis illustrates the reality that school alone is not the answer. We want to develop a village where we address individual needs to cultivate and improve the larger village, to build better communities through education.

Producing Intellectual Hum
Intellectual hum is a state where individuals and groups are engulfed by the sights, sounds, processes, and resources of problem solving, learning, or collaborating. Achieving intellectual hum enables rigorous instruction, profound thinking, insatiable curiosity, deep creativity, and critical thinking.

Deploying Scholar-Responsiveness
Our scholars have needs; we will work to understand their needs and ensure they have the support they need to meet them. This will be achieved through each scholar’s collaborative council and adaptive response roadmap, two strategies that serve each scholar as a unique individual.

Key Questions
• Do we have the right systems, curriculum, and processes to achieve this goal?

Key Questions
• Do we have a sound assessment of community resources at the city and neighborhood levels?
• How do we properly measure, assess, and support individual student needs?
• What infrastructure is needed to support our scholars in community engagement and problem solving?

Key Questions?
• What are the characteristics of intellectual hum? How do you describe, identify, and foster the intellectual hum in and outside of school?
• How do we measure, assess, adjust, and track our graduate aims in the context of intellectual hum?

Key Questions?
• What elements are needed on the adaptive-response roadmap to ensure that we capture aspects of the whole child?
• How do we leverage community members to serve on the collaborative councils?
Target Population

Our target population starts in Memphis, but has far reaching potential in the larger educational community.

92% African American
7% Hispanic
85% Economically Disadvantaged
10% Special Population

2,126 scholars

FIVE YEAR OUTLOOK

For more detailed information, click here.
Key Design Constraints

Facilities
Our ideal school space will need to be built.

Funding and Human Capital
We need funding and independent talent to support this R&D change process.

Scaling Innovation
How do we scale innovation while maintaining our core identity?

Time
How do we find the right balance of time to enhance the learning continuum avoiding silos of learning?
Core Beliefs About Learning

All students can learn when basic needs are met.
We believe that in order for our students to meet their full potential, their basic needs (food, clothing, safety and shelter) must be satisfied.

Each One Teach One: Everyone in the Village is a learner.
We believe that all members in our village are teachers and learners; learning is shared and reciprocated.

Socio-emotional Development is as important as Academic Development.
We believe that in order for students to truly be college-ready, career-ready and community-ready, social-emotional development has to be on par with academic development.

Kids should feel loved and known to learn better.
We believe that when students belong to caring communities, they are validated as individuals and are motivated to reach their potential.

All students can acquire enduring learning when given consistent, accurate feedback and varied learning opportunities.
We believe in providing affirmative, concrete, and transparent feedback so that all students know their specific strengths and can articulate how they’ve used them to succeed in and outside of the classroom.

Real world opportunities to practice and acquire new skills are key to enduring learning.
We believe that students need to be exposed to real experiences in order for learning to truly be internalized.
Graduate Aims

Upon graduation from a Gestalt school, our scholars are:

- Critical + Creative Thinkers: Gestalt scholars approach problems from all angles to discover solutions that range from traditional to innovative. Measurable Evidence: Benchmark Assessments, NWEA MAP, State Assessments, & Project Rubrics
- Courageous Explorers: Gestalt scholars seek to solve the biggest problems and knock down walls to do it. Measurable Evidence: Project Rubrics & Scholar-Led Conferences [Academic & Personal Goals]
- Lifelong, Self-Directed Learners: Gestalt scholars are lovers of knowledge who seek truth and understanding in all areas of their lives. Measurable Evidence: Project Rubrics, Review 360/Kickboard Data & Personalized Student Mastery Data
- Community Contributors: Gestalt scholars nurture a passion for helping others and leave their community greater than they found it. Measurable Evidence: Community Service Hours, Service Learning Projects, & Expeditions
- Personal Historians: Gestalt scholars know who they are and where they are going. Measurable Evidence: Myers Briggs and Collaborative Problem Solving
Design Anchors

We are a Village.
Collective Responsibility, Individual Cultivation, and Village Cultivation

We are Scholar – Responsive.
Collaborative Councils and Adaptive Response Roadmaps

We have an Intellectual Hum.
Engagement in relevant, rigorous instruction and problem-solving
We are a Village.

“It takes a village to raise a child.” But then why do so many schools operate alone as they address the comprehensive challenge of serving the whole child, school, and community? To focus on academics without trauma-informed practices inhibits our ability to serve the whole child and garner community transformation. Building a village anchored in humility is the key: Gestalt Community Schools leads with our core value of humility, the understanding that this work is too important to do alone. As a result, we work to leverage community partnerships, educational programming, and community development efforts to build a complete “village.” This village starts with cultivation of the individual student, which includes academic and social-emotional facets of the student’s educational journey. The academic program and the socio-emotional infrastructure work in tandem to serve the whole child. If the needs of whole child are met, then he or she can learn and contribute to the community.
We are Scholar-Responsive.

Through authentic relationships, observations, and assessments, we can understand the needs of the individual scholar. Each scholar will have a Collaborative Council made up of the scholar, family, school members, and community members that is responsible for creating an adaptive response roadmap, which provides a holistic view of a scholar’s successes, challenges, interventions. The gateways to learning include: basic physical needs, identity, academics, individual passion, emotion, motivation, and cognition.

Adaptive Response Roadmap

A comprehensive, individualized online reporting tool that brings academic, basic needs, and socio-emotional data together to meet the needs of the scholar.

NEED

• Provides a comprehensive analysis of each individual scholar
• Offers online reporting anchored into our existing data dashboard
• Leverages parent, child, school, and community to provide support for an individual scholar’s success
• Institutes school interventions, community resources, and family engagement

DESCRIPTION

Each school will have a series of Collaborative Councils, which will review this comprehensive, individualized scholar data to create a roadmap of interventions and community resources. The report includes frameworks around the following: basic needs/readiness identity, academics, cognition and, motivation. Community and neighborhood partnerships are critical to the implementation.
We Have an Intellectual Hum.

Intellectual hum is a state in which scholars are engulfed by the sights and sounds of the learning process. Every Gestalt classroom is characterized by this intellectual hum. The adaptive response roadmap allows each scholar to enter a space of intellectual hum where scholars are learning through varied experiences, flexible groupings, and rigorous content. Scholars practice academic and soft skills within the school for use outside in their collective “villages” or a completely new village. Achieving intellectual hum enables rigorous instruction, insatiable curiosity, deep creativity, and critical thinking.

Stakeholder Journey

Follow this link to experience a day in the life of a scholar, a teacher, and a parent at Nexus Academy Middle, a Gestalt school creating a scholar-responsive village with intellectual hum.

Nexus Middle Stakeholder Journey