

# Major funding a big step forward for new Midtown schools

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In a major step toward bringing new schools to Midtown, three major philanthropic organizations are contributing \$2.65 million dollars to help the Midtown Community School Initiative (MCSI) open new schools next year.

The funding comes from the Ewing Marion Kaufman Foundation, the Walton Family and the Hall Family Foundation, and will go toward plans by the Citizens of the World Charter (CWC) Schools, which has partnered with the Midtown Community School Initiative, for opening two new elementary schools in Midtown in 2016.

“This announcement is a testament to the fact that when the power of community and parents is bolstered by the generous support of foundations, we can fuel change in our neighborhoods and city at large,” said Kristin Littrell, co-leader of MCSI.

“This collaboration, with schools and foundations that value community, excellence and diversity, is great news for Kansas City as well as for the many families who are deciding to stay and invest in this neighborhood, because of these new schools,” Littrell said.

The Midtown Community School Initiative began bringing community stakeholders together in 2013. The group, which includes Midtown parents, said they were frustrated with watching friends and neighbors move out of Midtown as their children reached school age. They decided to work to increase the number of high-quality schools in Midtown.

The initiative began by meeting with parents and other people interested in Midtown schools, and then issued an RFP requesting high-quality charter organizations to consider opening schools in Kansas City.

CWC Schools, a California-based charter school organization, responded to the RFP and agreed to partner with the local initiative. CWC Schools currently has five schools in California and New York.

They plan to open two K-1 elementary schools in April of 2016 and keep adding grades until 2027-28, when they hope to be running four schools and offering elementary, middle and high school classes to 1,650 students.

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The schools will be located between State Line and Prospect, between Union Station and Brush Creek, and will be economically and racially diverse.

“We are proud to partner with so many parents who have taken the initiative to give even more families high-quality public school options and now with foundations who are giving back to strengthen communities,” said Kriste Dragon, co-founder and CEO of Citizens of the World.

According to a CWC Schools announcement, the Kansas City-based Kauffman and Hall Family foundations contributed \$1 million and \$650,000, respectively. The Walton Family Foundation contributed \$1 million. The total \$2.65 million funding will be used to ensure a successful launch of the first CWC schools in the 2016-2017 school year. CWC Schools’ immediate priorities include applying for the charter, establishing a local board, identifying affordable facilities, and continuing to engage families and local leaders.

“The Kauffman Foundation has been committed to great public schools since day one,” said Wendy Guillies, acting president and CEO of the Kauffman Foundation.

“A key component of our new education strategy is promoting access to quality public school options in Kansas City,” Guillies said. “We are pleased to collaborate with other funders and partners to help bring Citizens of the World Charter Schools to our community.”

Tracy McFerrin, vice president of the Hall Family Foundation, said, “We feel that Citizens of the World is a very promising model for this community. By supporting this network of quality public schools, we are thrilled to be contributing to the larger efforts of the broader school system in Kansas City to bring change to our schools.”

“We are committed to seeing that students and parents in Kansas City have a number of quality school options,” McFerrin added.