

Case Statement: Langston High School Renovation Project

About LEAD

LEAD is an acronym for Langston Education and Arts Development, Inc. Founded by the alumni of Langston High School in Johnson City, Tennessee, along with many friends and supporters from the community, LEAD has as its mission to: preserve the integrity, legacy and historical value of Langston High School campus for the posterity and enhancement of the community. LEAD is committed to providing responsive educational and multi-cultural opportunities designed to bring diverse groups of people together in a safe learning environment.

LEAD is working with the City of Johnson City to preserve the historical campus of Langston High School, which served our Black community from 1863 to 1965. The organization seeks to preserve the cultural relevance and heritage of the Langston High School site and hopes to utilize the building as a multicultural community center for educational and artistic programs. Once the renovation is complete, LEAD members are committed to providing youth programming focused on computer science, theatrical arts, and mentoring in the facility. Further, the site is a highly-visible structure that serves as a gateway to the downtown Johnson City community, which can substantially impact improvements to downtown aesthetics and redevelopment.

Introduction

The historic Langston High School campus is in a highly visible location just off the Watauga/Unaka exit from Interstate 26 in Johnson City. It has housed the City's school maintenance division for a number of years. School maintenance has been moved to another facility and the building is in disrepair and requires renovation in order to be useful. A firm has created the following renderings for the renovation of the building. The first exceeds the project budget by approximately \$500,000. The second is a revision that fits the current City budget for the project. The key differences are:

- Eliminating the grounds improvements, primarily fencing;
- Eliminating the addition of a foyer/reception area; and,
- Moving the elevator tower to the interior of the building which reduces usable square footage and significantly impacts the overall layout of the interior.

LEAD's goal is to accomplish a capital campaign of \$500,000 for the renovation so that the original design can be implemented and so that the facility will be better suited to serve as a multicultural center to house educational and arts programming.



History of Langston High School

Dr. Hezekiah Hankal, one of the Founding Fathers of Johnson City, purchased town lot number 12 from Henry Johnson in June 1869 for \$300 as a site for the Colored Christian Church. Dr. Hankal helped start a number of historic black churches throughout Northeast Tennessee. Born a slave in 1825, he was reared in the Dutch home of James and Nancy Hankal in what is now Gray, Tennessee and was fluent in Dutch and several foreign languages.

The cholera epidemic in July 1873 brought Dr. Hankal's medical skills into prominence in the white community as his patients lived while many of his white colleagues' patients died. An interracial medical practice began that continued until his death in 1903. Dr. Hankal also was elected alderman in Johnson City in 1887 and his unique combination of medical expertise, educational and spiritual leadership, as well as service as an elected official, is noted by several Tennessee Historical Society markers in Johnson City.

Johnson City began a school building program in 1892 and one of the three newly designated schools was established for colored children. The school was named Langston Normal School for noted black leader John Mercer Langston, a Congressman from Virginia. Dr. Hankal, along with Dan Reeves and Alfred Hyder, were instrumental in securing approval for the new school which was located at the corner of Myrtle Avenue and Elm Street.¹

In conjunction with a 1925 renovation of the school, Langston High School became a Rosenwald School. Booker T. Washington of the Tuskegee Institute and Julius Rosenwald, philanthropist and president of Sears Roebuck, built state-of-the-art schools for African-American children across the South. The effort has been called the most important initiative to advance black education in the early 20th century.

Attending a Rosenwald School put a student at the vanguard of education for southern African-American children. The architecture of the schools was a tangible statement of the equality of all children, and their programming made them a focal point of community identity and aspirations.

When a 1954 Supreme Court ruling declared segregation in education unconstitutional, Rosenwald Schools became obsolete. Once the pride of their communities, many were abandoned or demolished. In 2002, the National Trust joined forces with grassroots activists, local officials, and preservationists across the country to help raise awareness of this important but little-known segment of our nation's history, placing Rosenwald Schools on its 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list. Of the 3,537 schools, shops, and teacher homes constructed between 1917 and 1932, only 10–12 percent are estimated to survive today.

LEAD is the grassroots organization in Johnson City, Tennessee spearheading the effort to save our Rosenwald School.

Need

America is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse every year. As our population evolves, so too must our understanding and enriching of the community as a whole. Several studies have shown that this rapid multicultural growth is on a path of continuance for the next several decades³. LEAD is in a unique position to bridge a gap in our community's development.

Johnson City and the surrounding region as a whole lack a focal point and home for multicultural programs and endeavors. Having such a hub for multicultural programs helps to create a welcoming environment for the increasing diversity in our population. Having a welcoming environment for diverse populations is increasingly vital to economic development, especially illustrated by our regional employers' need to retain a diverse workforce.

In addition to the value of creating a welcoming environment, the need for arts education and STEM education is on the rise. STEM jobs alone have grown 17 percent, which is much faster than the nearly 10 percent growth rate in all other areas⁴. Diverse youth are going to be tomorrow's leaders, parents, consumers, and visionaries. By providing our youth with an environment committed to their development, LEAD can help lay the foundation for strong, well-rounded, and happily diverse future generations.

Vision

It is LEAD's vision that a renovated Langston High School campus serve as a hub and a home for multicultural programming for Johnson City and the region. The goals of LEAD are to provide an impactful learning, developmental, continuing educational environment and experience that would:

- Encourage positive and personal interaction between participants and leaders in the multicultural community.
- Create, promote, and develop cutting edge and competitive programs that would focus on interactive activities across various fields of interest such as, Science and Engineering, Computer Science, Performing Arts, and Mathematics differing from the classical school classroom settings.
- Promote programs that will continue to be advantageous to the community, encourage competitive, positive attitudes and leadership skills in our future generations, and create sustainable economic success for our City.
- Stand as a steering force for community rehabilitation, improvements and growth, particularly through networking and community building opportunities among diverse sectors of the region.

Impact

There are many proven positive impacts a multicultural, diverse learning environment provides:

- Students who study the arts are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement.
- Music education is shown to not only improve skills in math and reading, but also promote creativity, social development, personality adjustment, and self-worth.
- Multiple studies have concluded that extracurricular art studies and activities help keep high risk students in school.

- The arts contribute 4% of the US economy's GDP.
- 1 million high school freshmen declare an interest in STEM fields.
- After school STEM programs increase both interest and confidence in tackling math, computer, and science classes/projects.
- Increases in STEM knowledge also tend to lead to gains in communication, teamwork, and analytical skills.
- Studies have shown these after school programs lead to an increase in higher test scores and graduation rates.

1. <http://www.stateoffranklin.net/johnsons/langston/langston.htm>
2. https://savingplaces.org/places/rosenwald-schools?gclid=EA1aIQobChMIr9K2gpWb1wIV1LbACh0FPAWSEAYASAAEgLGWvD_BwE#.WfiVGVtSy00
3. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/morganstanley/2016/06/17/multiculturalism-americas-competitive-advantage-infographic/#53743c136baa>
4. <https://www.ced.org/blog/entry/the-economic-impact-of-early-exposure-to-stem-education>
5. <https://www.informalscience.org/news-views/common-outcomes-and-potential-impacts-stem-afterschool-programs>