

# TEAM CHERRY HILL

*OUR COMMUNITY, OUR HISTORY,  
OUR STORIES*



**FLAMBOYAN**  
FOUNDATION

National Family Engagement Fellowship



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# TEAM OVERVIEW

*// You guys come in here and do all these surveys, and nothing ever changes. I am no longer putting the energy into it. //*

—Cherry Hill parent, 2022

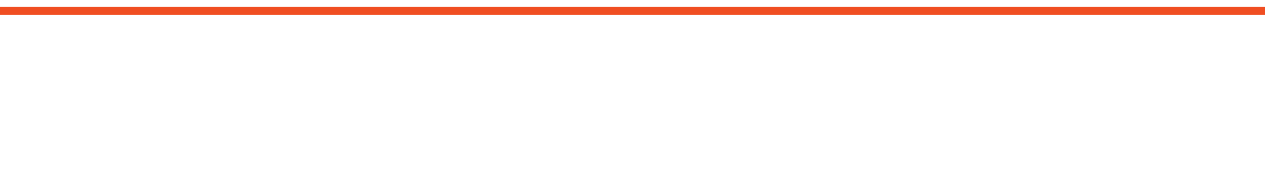
This quote is very commonly heard in far too many Black and Brown school communities throughout our nation. Yet for the Cherry Hill Team out of South Baltimore, it has served as a reminder to be better, to do right by the families and the community of Cherry Hill.

Cherry Hill was the first designed segregated community in the country for African American soldiers returning from WWII and The Korean War. This community structure has had a unique impact on the families here and is why the Cherry Hill Team, anchored by Baltimore City Public Schools, has been working diligently with organizations like Cherry Hill Strong and Dream BIG to elevate this community of Baltimore.

Through Landscape Assessment interviews, families have elevated the yearning for three key needs:


- ▶ Strong and consistent two-way communication between families and schools.
- ▶ Respect and care that creates space for families to advocate for themselves and their children.
- ▶ Trust and safety so that everyone feels safe and welcomed when in the school building.

# TEAM OVERVIEW



These listening sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic led to a pilot where families received hand-delivered wellness bags to communicate care and concern from Arundel Elementary School and Historic Cherry Hill Elementary-Middle School (CHEMS). This concerted effort led to more students returning to in-person learning and increased attendance throughout the Spring months of 2021.

Throughout their Fellowship experience, the Cherry Hill Team has been lucky enough to have strong community partners that are supportive of their work and who have pledged resources to help address the concerns raised by the families of Cherry Hill. Together, they are all helping move towards the improvement and growth of two-way communication between families and schools as well as the strengthening of the transition process and feeder pattern between Arundel ES to CHEMS, a major goal for Baltimore City Public Schools. The tireless efforts and diligent work from the Cherry Hill Team is and will continue to erode this notion that “nothing ever changes” for the families and community of Cherry Hill.



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# VISION

## *OUR COMMUNITY, OUR HISTORY, OUR STORIES*

Cherry Hill schools are a place where authentic, trusting relationships between schools, families, and the community are central. Families in Cherry Hill are partners in decision-making and play a key role in the creation of strategies that impact their children and community. This partnership fosters academic success, student wholeness, and the strength of the Cherry Hill community.

# STRATEGIC PLAN

## OUTCOMES

(What needs to happen in the next 1-3 years to put your team on track to realizing your vision?)

1

Families and students have trust with school and feel it is a place that both supports student learning and provides resources to support their family.

2

Family voice is present and valued at decision-making tables across the Cherry Hill community.

3

Families are regularly seen engaging with schools in different capacities, including leadership opportunities.



# BARRIERS

(What are the barriers to achieving your 1-3 year outcomes?)

- ◇ Leadership, staff, and families lack the time, technical assistance, and ability to build the capacity needed in order to do this work well.
- ◇ Change is slow and the immediate effects may not be seen by families.
- ◇ There is a mistrust of the school system from families due to past actions and from their own past experience with school.

# STRATEGIES

(How can you overcome the barriers to achieving your outcomes?)

- ◇ Focus on building the capacity of School, Family and Community Councils (SFCC) to ensure that these entities are strong at both Arundel and Cherry Hill Elementary-Middle School (CHEMS) and that there is a strong feeder pattern between these two schools.
- ◇ Develop and broadly share a clear vision for transitions between early learning, Arundel, CHEMS, and high school to ensure families know what to expect as they move to a new school. Ensure families continue to see the role that they can play as they continue to partner with new schools to ensure their child's academic success.
- ◇ Implement clear, consistent, and transparent communication across the entire Cherry Hill school community.
- ◇ Audit the current processes and systems that are in place to address systemic barriers. Implement strategies to address any gap areas.
- ◇ Create different vehicles for family involvement that are intentional in nature and seek to address barriers (e.g. Parent Cafés, affinity groups, parent ambassadors, organized parent groups, CHIPP, Class Dojo, etc.)

# MEASURES OF SUCCESS

(How will we know we have been successful?)

- ◇ We will look for consistent involvement in family engagement activities across Arundel Elementary and Cherry Hill Elementary-Middle Schools.
- ◇ We will increase the number of parents who respond to the annual school climate survey and increase parental satisfaction with the school community on this measure.
- ◇ We will conduct a full analysis of what staff/family partnerships looks like around academics. Based on these results, we will develop and implement a plan that shifts how academic partnering operates in the Cherry Hill community.
- ◇ More students transition from Arundel Elementary to Cherry Hill Elementary-Middle School.

# MEET THE TEAM



**Aaron P. Smith, Staff Specialist, Family Engagement Office, Baltimore City Public Schools**

Aaron began his career in Baltimore as a non-profit professional removing barriers for people in need. In his current role, he works closely with school leaders, staff, community stakeholders and families to enhance capacity so authentic partnerships can be formed with families to assist with learning at home. Previously, Aaron worked as Project Manager at Child Maltreatment Solutions Network (Center for Healthy Children), where he led programming across Pennsylvania to combat child sexual abuse. Born and raised

in Baltimore, Aaron is a proud graduate of Towson University.



**Dr. Angelique Jessup, Founder and Principal Consultant of The Connectus Group**

A political scientist by training, Angelique brings nearly 18 years of experience in education and nonprofits focused on youth development, workforce development, DEI, and social justice. Angelique has a decade-long track record of building relationships within the Baltimore education and non-profit space as a results-driven leader committed to capturing multiple voices and perspectives to make real social impact. She received her B.A. with honors from the College of New Jersey and her M.A. and Ph.D. in

Political Science from the University of Michigan (Go Blue!).



**Carrie Finkelstein, Program Director of the Cherry Hill Education Initiative, Baltimore City Public Schools**

In her current role, Carrie works closely with Arundel Elementary, Cherry Hill Elementary-Middle, community leaders, and non-profit organizations to increase educational outcomes in Cherry Hill.

Prior to this, Carrie worked as Manager of Strategic Projects in the Office of Engagement and Community Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh. She began her career in Baltimore at the Fund for Educational Excellence. Carrie is a proud graduate of both the

University of Pittsburgh's School of Social Work and of Goucher College, where she graduated with her B.A. in English.



**Kelley Keyser, School Social Worker, Arundel Elementary, Baltimore City Public Schools**

Kelley is in her seventh year with City Schools and her fourth year working in Cherry Hill's Arundel Elementary School. Prior to working in Baltimore, Mrs. Keyser was a School Social Worker and Mental Health Clinician for eight years in San Diego, CA. She has worked in a variety of settings, but she is most passionate about working in schools because she believes schools are the hub of outreach and support for children and families.

She received her Bachelor's degree in Journalism from the University of Maryland and her Master's degree in Social Work (MSW) from San Diego State University.



**Octavia Sanders-Hike, Community School Coordinator, Historic Cherry Hill Elementary-Middle School, Elev8 Baltimore**

Octavia is an experienced servant leader, having worked with Baltimore City Public Schools students for almost 7 years. In her current role, she serves as the Communities in Schools coordinator for Cherry Hill Elementary-Middle School.

She leverages partnerships, resources, and services that support the needs of our scholars, families, and community members. This aligns with the National Model for Community Schools to support Family Engagement, Health and Social Supports, Collaborative Leadership, and Extended Learning. She has a Bachelor's of Business Administration from Towson University.



**Shar Hollingsworth, Staff Specialist, Family Engagement Office at Baltimore City Public Schools**

In her current role, Shar leads School Family and Community Councils, a district wide initiative focused on creating systems and spaces of equity, voice, and advocacy for school stakeholders and staff aimed at increasing academic achievement.

Prior to this role, Shar was the Director of Scholar Support Services in a Baltimore City Public School. She comes to the Fellowship team as a mental health clinician with eleven years of experience, including time in the United States Peace Corps. She received her Bachelor's in Psychology at Towson University and her Master's in Psychology at Frostburg University.







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