

Media Contact:
Colleen Brannan
704.458.2289
colleen@branstorm.com

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CHARLOTTE LAB SCHOOL COMING TO FIRST WARD THIS FALL

– K-8 Tuition-Free Charter Will Use Queen City as a Classroom –

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (June 11, 2015) – As this school year comes to a close, a new charter school is under construction in the First Ward and will open in August. Charlotte Lab School, a K-8 Tuition-Free Charter, located at 301 E. 9th Street, across from UNC Charlotte’s Center City Building, has exceeded its first-year target of 280 students with over 300 enrolled and a waiting list at every level.

Founder and Head of School, 20-year-educator Dr. Mary Moss Brown, moved to Charlotte from New York City in 2011 and could not find the right school fit for her elementary-aged children. Given her background as a principal at two start-up schools in New York City and most recent role coaching principals for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and New Leaders, she decided to start her own.

“Our children need to learn how to be critical thinkers and creative problem solvers,” said Moss Brown whose kindergartner and third grader will be part of the Charlotte Lab School inaugural class. “It’s time to rethink what elementary and middle school should look like. Our students need opportunities to do work that matters and to use the resources of the city to learn in real and meaningful ways.”

The First Ward Redevelopment, anchored by First Ward Park, Imaginon and UNC Charlotte Center City provided the ideal environment and when Developer Daniel Levine, president of Levine Properties, met Moss Brown and heard her vision, he knew the charter school would complement the nine-block area he is developing Uptown.

“Just as we are reimagining the First Ward, the Lab School is reimagining school so it’s a perfect fit,” said Levine. “I love the idea of using our surroundings, such as Imaginon and First Ward Park, as a classroom to better prepare children for real life.”

Moss Brown says word of the new charter school spread quickly through grassroots outreach in lower income communities and info sessions at Mecklenburg Library branches. Of the over 300 students enrolled, 40% are of Color and 25% qualify for free or reduced lunch. “It’s a great start but our ultimate goal is to mirror the diversity of Charlotte,” she said.

In its first year, Charlotte Lab School will serve over 300 students in grades k-4, with plans to ultimately serve approximately 540 students in grades k-8. As part of the curriculum, first graders will help design the playground and 4th graders will have a hand in the lunch menu. Partnerships with Children's Theatre of Charlotte and Discovery Place have already been negotiated.

Before the doors have even opened, in May 2014 Charlotte Lab School was one of nine school models nationally named a "Breakthrough Model" for innovation through the Next Generation Learning Challenge and received a \$100,000 grant. It was also awarded a \$250,000 grant from the Charter School Growth Fund. To support start-up costs, the school also received a \$400,000 loan from Self Help and has launched a capital campaign.

As the co-author of *How to Innovate: The Essential Guide for Fearless School Leaders* (Columbia University Teachers College Press, March 2014), Moss Brown was an elementary, middle, and high school teacher for seven years, working in NYC, Atlanta, Boston, and Fayetteville, NC. She then served for seven years as principal of two technology-rich, student-centered start-up schools in the New York City Department of Education, including Mott Hall II, a progressive one-to-one laptop middle school. She is the Co-Founder of the NYC iSchool (NYC DOE's pilot high school for 21st century learning and innovation.)

Moss Brown is joined by Co-Founder and Assistant Head of School Vikki-Rose Tunick, former teacher and literacy expert from Union County. Tunick's children, now one and four, are also future Charlotte Lab School students.

The Lab School's Board of Directors, chaired by Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority CEO, Tom Murray, includes a diverse group of Charlotte education, business, and non-profit leaders. Moss Brown and Murray met serving on NC Governor McCrory's Talent and Work Force Development Committee. Both agree on the important role schools play in attracting businesses to the Charlotte area and in preparing the next generation.

"The long term growth and economic development of the Center City is dependent upon differentiators like the Charlotte Lab School," said Murray. "From a workforce development perspective, I see this as a real selling point for Charlotte and I'm proud to be a part of this breakthrough concept."

To learn more, visit www.charlottelabschool.org

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