



Spring 2024

An open letter to current and future friends of Esperanza Academy...

Last summer a short clip of one of our rising eighth graders, Chenaiyalin Santos, captured a beautiful vision for a place that Esperanza could one day call home. In the video, Chenaiyalin holds up her colorful drawing and thoughtfully outlines spaces deserving of Esperanza's dedication to community, literacy, food insecurity, and sustaining support. She imagines a place for graduates to return for comfort and help. She envisions a fridge full of free food. She visualizes a library with over 1,000 books. She dreams of dedicated spaces for after-school activities. She explains how gardens can be used to grow everything from peppers to pumpkins.

Some people might hear Chenaiyalin's wishes and dismiss them as childish dreaming. But not at Esperanza Academy. We took her ideas, along with the sketches of her classmates, the stories of their families, the impressions of our alumni, and the needs of our faculty, and created blueprints for the future that will hold and uplift our school community for generations. This year-long exploration, boosted by guidance from design justice advocate Liz Ogbu, helped the many diverse voices that make up Esperanza harness their intrinsic power and contribute to our shared vision.

This work has not been easy, but pursuing dreams is not for the faint of heart. Every day, I hold close to me the vision of what we are trying to create for our girls and it fuels me. That is why I am thrilled to share that we have over \$26M pledged to realize this bold dream. Those commitments reflect gifts from eight lead donors and six foundations. Of that \$26M raised, \$21M is designated for the capital project, and \$5M is allocated to The Esperanza Fund for operating support. At this stage, we are working to raise an additional \$5M. It's wildly ambitious but entirely possible.

Later this year, as Chenaiyalin enters the tenth grade at Concord Academy, Esperanza Academy will break ground on our new home— a 31,000 square foot building on the banks of the Merrimack River in Lawrence. It's a place of deep history and limitless possibility. We have secured a 75-year ground lease, with the option to buy the land underneath our building in as soon as 15 years. This plan, carefully vetted by Trustees and lawyers, sets us up for long-term sustainability and success.

We are now 4 years from when we first whispered this idea out loud. We are less than 750 days from our planned move-in date. Milestones and timelines and dollars and cents still keep me up at night, but there's never been a better time to revisit the enduring wishes of Chenaiyalin and how they directly translate to our future school.





- Our **Cafeteria**, located in the heart of the new school, will continue to bring the community together around hot breakfasts, nutritional lunches, and delicious snacks.
- Our in-school **Bodega** will provide no-cost and no-stigma access to healthy food, school supplies, and winter layers.
- Our **science laboratory**, and two additional STEM classrooms, will help our students see themselves as engineers, doctors, and astronauts.
- Our new **Wellness Center** will support enhanced music and arts programming with creative therapy services for individuals and groups including students, graduates, and families.
- Our **Graduate Success Center** will host alumni for college and career workshops where they can also catch up with old friends in the salon chair or take advantage of quiet places to study.
- Our **library** will overflow with shelves of culturally relevant stories that build on the lived experiences of our students, and, of course, plenty of cozy places to get lost in a book.
- Our generous **movement** space will support dance, exercise, and athletics programming. Esperanza girls are already dreaming of a school volleyball team!
- Our student-curated **gallery** will welcome visitors into the school and celebrate marginalized voices and immigrant women's histories.
- Our **grounds** will draw students and teachers outside, with safe play areas and garden space for hands-on learning.
- Our five dedicated **lower school** classrooms will support a 115% increase in enrollment when we grow down to start serving students and families in Kindergarten.

Our project will truly come alive in the next few months. While we're excited and grateful to be at the 85% mark in our overall campaign, we know we're not done yet. Every week we welcome potential supporters to visit Esperanza and learn more about our visionary project. If you, or a friend or family member, might be interested, we'd love the chance to take you on a tour and share more about our plans.

This project has always been about more than bricks and mortar. I hope you can see the value of this dream and believe in its potential to lift our students out of poverty.



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