

Access to a 'free and appropriate education' is the right of all taxpayers in the United States. While our public education system may be providing the "free" delivery of academic programs, there exists a great opportunity to provide an "appropriate" education when defining such as providing all students with the academic, practical, social and emotional tools to become successful, economically sustainable citizens. This gap is especially evident in the outcome of students that are disproportionately living in areas plagued by cycles of poverty, violence and exclusion on a variety of levels. The urban core of the City of St. Louis, MO is no exception. While the St. Louis Public School District has recently regained 'fully accredited' status, when looking at subgroups—particularly that of Black, Hispanic and male students—it becomes evident that not all students are reaching successful levels of achievement. This phenomenon strongly correlates with geographic areas in the city impacted by social and economic disenfranchisement, health and safety concerns and overall neighborhood decline. To help address these issues and create access to a holistic, high-quality education model founded on principles of sustainability, Vernare Learning, was created.

Vernare Learning is a public charter school management organization and nonprofit specifically designed to contribute to the development of sustainable communities by providing the academic, social and "green" resources to support St. Louis's children, while providing a vehicle for building families and creating networks to strengthen the community-at-large. Enhancing the Vernare Schools model will be its embedded wraparound services deployed through the Vernare Community Resources program. This unique program will help connect much needed resources (health and social services, academic enrichment, community engagement and volunteerism) to Vernare School students and families, and will be grounded in the research-based Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework promoted by Head Start and Early Head Start Programs across the nation. Its primary objectives are to promote family engagement and support parents' ability to—first—create strong, positive relationships with their children and also help them strengthen relationships with their children's teachers, educators and healthcare providers. In addition to parents, guardians and caregivers, community volunteers will also be trained to participate in the various outreach activities organized by Vernare Learning—ranging from home visits to community service projects. This powerful program component will further establish Vernare Learning schools as centers of education, development and empowerment in the community, thus supporting the integrated mission of this school network. When activated, Vernare Learning will deploy a system that fosters healthy kids, healthy families and healthy communities.

MO DESE agrees that there is a great need for the Vernare Learning Model, as the charter was approved in the fall of 2015. Yet, this program has been delayed due in large part to difficulties in procuring an appropriate facility. Fortunately, the procurement of the perfect location has finally happened and all efforts are focused on activating our plans. Vernare Learning is applying for the **Grants to Charter School Developers for the Opening of New Charter Schools (CFDA 84.282B)** to support the successful launch of Vernare School for the 2019-2020 School Year by enabling the hiring and training of the founding school administration team and support community engagement and recruitment efforts, as well as technology support for a successful school opening. This grant proposal request amounts ████████████████████