

CDFIS: EXPANDING ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ST. MARY'S SOUTH SIDE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

A "94-YEAR-OLD STARTUP" HIGH SCHOOL SECURES ITS FUTURE WITH CDFI SUPPORT

St. Louis, MO

CDFI: IFF

St. Mary's South Side Catholic High School in St. Louis, a vital anchor and educational institution in the Dutchtown neighborhood since 1931, faced closure in 2022 when the Archdiocese of St. Louis announced a citywide consolidation plan of its parishes and parochial schools. Recognizing the devastating impact this would have on the community and the low-income students they serve, school leaders, decided to transition St. Mary's into an independent Catholic school under a new 501(c)3 organization. This was a monumental undertaking, requiring them to quickly secure a religious sponsor, raise \$3.3 million in donations to cover initial operating costs, and completely rebuild the school's operational structure. Crucially, they revised the curriculum, creating a fully funded pre-apprenticeship program in partnership with the Missouri AFL-CIO and an internship with SSM Health, effectively making the "94-year-old startup" more than just a high school and preparing students directly for high-wage careers.



The school's new path soon revealed a critical need for campus ownership after two major roof failures presented repair bills exceeding half a million dollars for a property the school did not own. This realization led them to seek financing to acquire the 22.5-acre campus from the archdiocese, a challenge for a newly independent entity with no credit history or assets. To facilitate the campus acquisition, and to ensure that St. Mary's remained an anchor in the Dutchtown community, IFF provided the school with a \$1.11 million loan from IFF in July 2025. Owning the campus secures St. Mary's long-term future, allowing investments in the property to directly benefit students and enabling the school to build net assets. Since gaining independence and securing its campus, the school has seen a 17 percent increase in enrollment and has been able to offer competitive raises to teachers, cementing its position as a permanent pillar of opportunity in the community.

PARTNERSHIPS ABOUND AT NEW MONTESSORI SCHOOL

BANK, CDFIS HELP OBTAIN 'THE PERFECT LOCATION'

Grand Rapids, MI

CDFI: NORTHERN INITIATIVES

The search for a new home for Everbloom Montessori included important criteria. The facility needed it be within the borders of the City of Grand Rapids, located in a child care desert, and on a bus line. It took more than a year, but Everbloom found their perfect location.

The \$1.2 million property needed \$2 million in renovations and, despite having worked for five years to find funding, school leaders were still scrambling as the property sat enticingly for sale. To finance the purchase and renovation of the property, Everbloom turned to Northern Initiatives, which partnered with West Shore Bank and First Children Finance, a national nonprofit dedicated to expanding access to childcare.

The new, 14,263 sq. ft. building on Grand Rapids' south side has "the shape, layout and size (that would) have been how we would have built it if we did it from scratch," said Kate Robinson, Director of Growth and Partnerships. "We just think more high quality, early childhood education is needed everywhere, and working in the 49507 neighborhood is the right place to start," Robinson said.

