

Surge Institute Releases Short Film on Chicago's Legacy Charter School, Where Eight Surge Alumni Lead and Teach

New film captures what becomes possible when a school community is shaped by leaders developed through the same values-driven pipeline.

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, May 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Surge Institute today released a new short film spotlighting Legacy Charter School in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood, where eight Surge alumni, including the school's principal, lead, teach, and shape the daily experience of more than 450 scholars. The film is available to [watch now](#).

Founded in 2005, Legacy Charter School is a public, tuition-free school serving students in kindergarten through 8th grade on Chicago's West Side. Ninety-nine percent of Legacy scholars are African American or Latino, and 95 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The eight Surge alumni currently on staff each completed either the Surge Fellowship or The Leadership Collaborative, the cohort program of Surge's Black Principals Network.

The five-minute film takes you inside the school, where you hear staff and students' perspectives on the transformation taking place. And what unfolds is about more than representation in leadership. It is also about trust, belonging, excellence, and possibility taking root throughout an entire school community.

"As someone whose own leadership journey has been shaped by Surge, this film is deeply personal," said Will Collins, Interim CEO of the Surge Institute. "I have had the privilege of watching Surge grow from a bold vision into a transformative force for Black and Brown educators and the communities they serve. Serving as Interim CEO during this chapter has only deepened my pride in what we are building together. When you see a school community led by Surge alumni, you are witnessing the power of investing in leaders who not only understand the community, but love it enough to help transform it."

The Legacy Charter School staff featured as Surge alumni include:

- Sheila E. Foster, Principal (TLC25)
- Nicholas Jones, Associate Director of Programs and School Partnerships (CHI24)
- Justin Walker, Dean of Culture & Climate (CHI25)
- Ifunanya Odume, Senior Director of Secondary Success (CHI24)

- Sameka Gates, Dean of Culture & Climate (CHI22)
- Scott Tillman, Founder and Executive Director, STEAM & Dream Liberation Labs (CHI22, Angels '24)
- James Fields, Founder and Executive Director, Field of Dreams Chicago (CHI22)
- Wisam Fillo, 4th Grade Teacher (CHI22)

Ulric Shannon, Executive Director of the Surge Fellowship Chicago, framed what the film reveals about the work being built city by city. "What we see at Legacy Charter School is Surge's mission made visible," Shannon said. "This is the infrastructure democracy requires: prepared leaders, rooted in justice, moving together across roles to shape the conditions young people experience every day. When that kind of leadership surrounds a school community, the impact is real, young people are seen, supported, challenged, and positioned to build a freer future for all of us."

For Principal Foster, the impact is felt every day inside the building. "To have multiple Surge alumni on my school team has been phenomenally transformative," she said. "It has brought a new, upbeat, life-breathing change to Legacy. I believe that each one of them has brought fresh wind to the work that really needs to be done on the West Side of Chicago."

About the Surge Institute

Founded in 2014 by Carmita Semaan, the Surge Institute is an education leadership accelerator with a mission to educate and develop leaders of color who create transformative change for young people, their families, and our broader communities. Surge's programs, including the Surge Fellowship, the Black Principals Network, Surge Academy, Surge Angels, and the recently launched Surge@Work, have built a national family of hundreds of alumni working to reshape the landscape of education. Learn more at surgeinstitute.org.

About Legacy Charter School

Legacy Charter School is a public, tuition-free charter school in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood serving more than 450 students in kindergarten through 8th grade. Its mission is to be an outstanding center for teaching and learning that recognizes and nurtures the full potential of every child, provides a foundation for a college education, and educates scholars to be creative and critical thinkers and responsible citizens in school, at home, and in the broader community. Learn more at legacycharterchicago.org.

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