



DESTINY  
CONCEALED

*A film by Eagle Academy Public Charter  
School and Insite Media Network*

## PRESS RELEASE

# Eagle Academy PCS Unveils Documentary, Honoring Founders and Marking 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

*Destiny Concealed* chronicles Eagle Academy's unique founding and honors late co-founder Cassandra S. Pinkney.

Washington, D.C. — Eagle Academy Public Charter School announced the release of *Destiny Concealed*, a documentary film honoring its founders and marking its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Eagle's inaugural campus was established on M Street Southeast in 2003 with 114 students. After rapid expansion, a second location opened its doors a few blocks away on New Jersey Avenue Southeast in 2010. Today, Eagle operates two state-of-the-art campuses in the Congress Heights and Capitol Riverfront neighborhoods of Washington, D.C., bettering the lives of hundreds of children across the city.

*Destiny Concealed* not only pays tribute to the countless staff, parents, and community members who molded a generation of Eagle Academy students, but it also highlights the immense contributions of its late co-founder Cassandra S. Pinkney. Mrs. Pinkney co-founded Eagle alongside Dr. Joe Smith in 2003. “She was a superwoman,” Dr. Smith insisted, “She raised a child with special needs on her own after losing her partner to the Vietnam War,” he continued. “But, she felt D.C. public schools were lacking, especially in the majority Black communities east of the river, and that there was a real need to get kids in school earlier to set them on the right course for the rest of their lives.” He concluded, “I am honored to have played a small part in making her dream a reality.”

Mrs. Pinkney's only surviving child, Onari Jackson, recounted her mother and Dr. Smith's unstoppable allyship in the film. As a Black woman with ties to the community, Mrs. Pinkney “could get into rooms that he couldn't,” and, as a white man with extensive experience in the charter school space, Dr. Smith “could get into rooms that she couldn't and sometimes it would take for them to go into those rooms separate[ly] and once they were appreciated and understood in that room then bringing the other person in...”

Although the story of *Destiny Concealed* has been two decades in the making, it was only when the COVID-19 pandemic shut the world down that Eagle's leaders had time to stop and reflect on the immense impact of Mrs. Pinkney, who passed away unexpectedly in 2016. Subsequently, over a 16-month period, a small but mighty five-person production team executed 38 interviews with Eagle staff, community members, local activists and politicians, as well as attended numerous school events to capture the lasting legacy of its late founder.

“As a minority-woman founder myself, I took great pleasure in telling the story of Eagle and, by extension, the story of Cassandra,” Insite Media founder and *Destiny Concealed* director Cheryl Montalvo relayed. “While Cassandra won't get to see this film for herself, this documentary ensures her legacy lives on forever. I cannot wait to share it with the world.”

*Destiny Concealed* was selected for the 2023 WRPN Women’s International Film Festival in Rehoboth Beach, DE in May 2023, where it won an Award of Excellence. *Destiny Concealed* was also selected for the 2023 Piermont Film Festival in Piermont, NY in June 2023, where it won Best Documentary and will open the festival. *Destiny Concealed* was also awarded the Best Non-Fiction Award at the Spring 2023 A Show For A Change Film Festival. Additionally, *Destiny Concealed* was selected to the Women’s International Film Festival 2023, held in Newark, NJ in July. The film has been submitted and is in consideration at several other film festivals across the country.

### **About Eagle Academy**

Eagle Academy Public Charter School was founded by Cassandra S. Pinkney, Dr. Joe Smith, and a diverse group of education, business, and medical leaders in 2003. Eagle Academy was Washington, D.C.’s first charter school focused on early childhood education that also catered to children with special needs. Other defining features of Eagle include an on-site pool and swimming lessons for every student, a sensory room for students with special needs, and a “Dean of Positive Behavior.” Eagle operates two campuses in Washington, D.C.’s Congress Heights and Capitol Riverfront neighborhoods. The school is celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2023.

### **About Insite Media Network**

Insite Media Network is a minority woman-owned company boasting a team of creative media professionals with extensive experience in film, broadcast television, radio, and music serving North America, North Africa, and the Middle East. Insite was established to fill a gap in the market for affordable video production services for news gathering outlets, small businesses, NGOs, PR firms, and startups. Traveling domestically and internationally to fulfill client needs, the Insite Media Network team of videographers, photographers, and graphic artists always go above and beyond to deliver high quality content for clients.

### **MEDIA CONTACT**

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## SYNOPSIS

For 20 years, the heart and soul of Eagle Academy Public Charter School has been one of its fearless founders, Cassandra S. Pinkney. As a young mother raising a child with special needs in urban America, Mrs. Pinkney overcame innumerable obstacles to become one of Washington, D.C.,’s most acclaimed educators. Indeed, one of her lasting legacies is the way in which she pioneered high-quality, early childhood education by prioritizing both academic and emotional empowerment of her pupils.

On June 4, 2001, Mrs. Pinkney, Dr. Joe Smith, and a diverse group of education, business, and medical leaders submitted a proposal to the D.C. Public Charter School Board to create the first charter school for grades PK3 – K in the nation’s capital. That application was approved in March 2003 and five months later, Eagle Academy opened its doors in the sixth Ward of Washington, D.C.

*Destiny Concealed* recounts the experiences of those who helped turn Mrs. Pinkney’s vision into a reality. Throughout the documentary, viewers bear witness to the first-hand accounts of triumphs and tragedies that made Eagle Academy into the incredible institution it is today.

As the age-old adage goes, “it takes a village.” This film seeks to pay tribute to the village of dedicated students, staff, parents, and community members who have helped mold a generation of scholars in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Eagle Academy.

This is our story. This is *Destiny Concealed*.

## BIOGRAPHIES



### **Joe M. Smith, Ph.D.**

Joe M. Smith, Ph.D. (he/him/his) is the current Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer of Eagle Academy Public Charter School. He has worked in education for more than thirty years. As a professor of education at The College of New Jersey, he developed and was awarded over \$22 million in grants and contracts. He also served as a graduate advisor to the Master of Arts in Teaching and the Secondary School Principals programs. During his tenure, he managed several large grants for the Teacher Corps, Project BUILD, and

Alternative Routes to Teaching.

Dr. Smith went on to work as an educational consultant, utilizing his research to enhance instructional methods at twenty-seven partner school districts and several corporations, including the Johnson & Johnson Medical Division, GPU Nuclear, and Mercer Community College. His methods have been featured in national outlets, including *The New York Times*, and his research has been published in *Educational Leadership*, the *Peabody Journal of Education*, and *Phi Delta Kappan*. Dr. Smith earned his Doctorate in Philosophy from the Union Institute & University and his Master of Arts degree from Rowan University.



### **Cassandra S. Pinkney**

Cassandra S. Pinkney (she/her/hers) co-founded Eagle Academy alongside Dr. Joe Smith in 2003. As a young mother with limited resources raising a child with special needs in urban America, Mrs. Pinkney was not satisfied with the options available in D.C. public schools, particularly in the majority Black communities east of the river. Mrs. Pinkney also felt that children needed to start their educational journeys earlier to set them on the right course for the rest of their lives.

Starting her career in an early childhood education classroom, Mrs. Pinkney went on to spend four decades in education before passing away on September 30, 2016. After her untimely death, Eagle Academy established The Cassandra S. Pinkney Foundation, which strives to bolster Eagle's mission to provide high-quality, early childhood education to every child in need.



**Karen M. Alston**

Karen M. Alston (she/her/hers) is Eagle Academy’s Chief Marketing Officer, spearheading the organization’s strategic communications strategy. These efforts include serving as an executive producer of *Destiny Concealed*, establishing key corporate partnerships, managing vendor relationships, and propelling community initiatives for each of the schools. Beyond managing this diverse portfolio of projects, Ms. Alston serves as treasurer of The Cassandra S. Pinkney Foundation.

Ms. Alston is a proud graduate of Howard University and founder of The Spectrum Circle, which aims to empower and educate women interested in business and entrepreneurial endeavors.



**Onari Jackson**

Onari Jackson (she/her/hers) is a proud, married mother of four and the founder and CEO of Healing Broken Wings, Inc., a non-profit focused on bolstering professional networks and available resources for women throughout the D.C.-Maryland-Virginia region. She has been featured on *WHUR Daily Drum* and *Café Mocha*. She has also appeared at The Howard Theater and helped organize key community initiatives throughout D.C.’s Ward 8 with D.C. City Councilman Trayon White.

Mrs. Jackson also serves as a healthy life assistant and motivational speaker. Through these professional experiences, she has been able to forge partnerships with Fresh Wind CDC, Empower DC, Winn Companies Atlantic Apartment Homes, the United States Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia, and the United Planning Organization, among others, to empower and provide services for women in the District. A native Washingtonian and graduate of the District of Columbia Public School system, she earned her B.S. in Psychology from Virginia State University. She credits her leadership style and dedication to service to her late mother, Cassandra S. Pinkney, and serves as the Executive Director of the foundation that bears her name.



**Ivana Thornton**

Ivana Thornton (she/her/hers) is a writer, creative, and operations manager who serves as Eagle Academy’s executive advisor. Originally from New Jersey, Ms. Thornton moved to Washington, D.C., in 2012 to attend Howard University and has since lived in the city. Ms. Thornton began working at Eagle Academy upon graduation and, through various roles, has grown into an operational decision-maker while also pursuing her passions for writing, podcasting, and blogging. For Ms. Thornton, Eagle Academy is a daily reminder of the importance of learning from others. Eagle’s founding principles will

remain with her no matter what her future has in store. Ms. Thornton is currently pursuing her Master of Business Administration degree at American University.



**Mikaela Smith**

Mikaela Smith (they/them/theirs) is a multi-medium creator, frontline civil rights activist, and passionate storyteller. Throughout their life, they have used various platforms to tell stories that highlight self-expression and advocacy. After serving as a special education teacher at Eagle Academy during the pandemic, Mx. Smith left the classroom to exclusively focus on content creation. They are a two-time graduate of American University.



**Cheryl Montalvo**

Cheryl Montalvo (she/her/hers) is a director, producer, documentary filmmaker, and the founder and CEO of Insite Media Network, a minority woman-owned company offering affordable, engaging, and high-quality video solutions. Boasting an innovative team of videographers, photographers, animators, and editors, Ms. Montalvo’s leadership has helped secure the company’s place as a trusted content creator for local and national brands, NGOs, and agencies through distinctive campaigns that resonate with key stakeholders.

Ms. Montalvo began her unique journey in broadcast media with the first Arabic television and radio network in North America, *ANA Television & Radio Network*, serving as Vice President of Finance and Administration for over a decade. She went on to become part of MBC Group’s North America team that launched *Al Arabiya News Group*, which resulted in a high-profile co-production of Michael Jackson’s first televised Arabic language special. Throughout these endeavors, Ms. Montalvo has trained and managed award-winning journalists and produced original content and programming for *CNN*, *HuffPost*, *Fusion*, *NowThis News*, *The Hill*, *MiSK*, and numerous broadcast channels in the MENA region.



**Myles Montalvo**

Myles Montalvo (he/him/his) is a videographer, photographer, and editor with an extensive background in news gathering. His growing passion for content creation led him to co-found Insite Media Network.

Before Insite, Mr. Montalvo began his career as a cameraman and live shot satellite engineer, covering news and politics in Washington, D.C. for channels based in the Middle East and North Africa. Mr. Montalvo also served as a cameraman for a millennial news source, capturing content for *CNN* and *HuffPost*, among other notable outlets. Mr. Montalvo led the video production team responsible for capturing Mark Cuban’s music and ideas festival RECESS, and he has filmed content for *NowThis News* and *Bravo’s Real Housewives of Potomac*.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **What are the origins of the documentary?**

During the height of the pandemic, *Destiny Concealed* Executive Producer and Eagle Academy Public Charter School Chief Marketing Officer Karen Alston conceived of the idea to craft a documentary on the school's story. The motivation behind the film was to honor Eagle's late co-founder Cassandra S. Pinkney, document the school's history, and celebrate its 20th anniversary.

### **What is the documentary about?**

The documentary chronicles the obstacles Eagle Academy overcame to open its doors in 2003. Over a 20-year period, viewers witness firsthand the impact Eagle has had on the families and communities it serves in Washington, D.C. The film also highlights the award-winning early childhood educational model that Eagle has pioneered over the past two decades and the people who helped mold the school into the incredible institution it is today.

### **What is the meaning behind *Destiny Concealed* as a title for this documentary?**

*Destiny* refers to the happenstance of Cassandra and Joe meeting, becoming the “dynamic duo” or the “tandem.” *Concealed* refers to the Southeast and Southwest communities of Washington, D.C., whose residents and students are often forgotten when it comes to educational achievement and public safety. Together, the first two letters of *Destiny* and *Concealed* allude to the location of the documentary as well – Washington, D.C.

### **When was the school founded?**

On June 4, 2001, Cassandra S. Pinkney, Dr. Joe Smith, and a diverse group of education, business, and medical leaders submitted a proposal to the D.C. Public Charter School Board to establish the first charter school for grades PK3-K in the nation's capital. That application was ultimately approved in March 2003 and five months later, Eagle opened its doors.

### **How did Cassandra S. Pinkney and Dr. Joe Smith meet?**

Education consultant and mutual friend Nancy Opalack introduced Cassandra Pinkney and Dr. Joe Smith. Their first meeting was over margaritas. The second time they met, Mrs. Pinkney invited Dr. Smith to her Washington, D.C. home for a homemade breakfast.

### **What sets Eagle Academy apart from other charter schools?**

Eagle Academy was the first charter school in Washington, D.C., to focus on early childhood education. At the time of its founding, there were no charter schools in the District serving the PK3 population. Likewise, reaching the 20-year milestone is a rarity in the charter school world, as it is difficult to manage a not-for-profit elementary educational institution. Other defining features include the school's on-site pool and swimming lessons for all students, a sensory room for students with special needs, and a “Dean of Positive Behavior.”

**What challenges has Eagle faced in the past two decades?**

Eagle, like all schools, faced a great deal of adversity during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the campuses, particularly the Congress Heights location, are located in the Southeast quadrant of Washington, D.C., which experience a great deal of food insecurity and gun violence. Through it all, Eagle has pushed forward and prospered through its strong community ties and leaders.

**How many interviews were conducted for the documentary?**

38 interviews were conducted for *Destiny Concealed*, on average lasting 45 minutes to an hour.

**What notable individuals were interviewed for *Destiny Concealed*?**

Aside from students and teachers, many current and former politicians as well as community leaders were interviewed for the film. Notable interviews include D.C. Ward 8 Councilman and Mayoral Candidate Trayon White, D.C. Chief of Police Robert J. Contee III, Widow of the late D.C. Mayor Marion Barry Cora Masters Barry, *Washington Post* Enterprise Reporter John Woodrow Cox, and D.C. Public Charter Schools Board Executive Director Michelle Walker Davis.

**What is the plan for the documentary moving forward?**

*Destiny Concealed* was selected for the 2023 WRPN Women’s International Film Festival in Rehoboth Beach, DE, in May 2023, where it won an Award of Excellence. *Destiny Concealed* was also selected for the 2023 Piermont Film Festival in Piermont, NY, in June 2023, where it won Best Documentary and will open the festival. *Destiny Concealed* was also awarded the Best Non-Fiction Award at the Spring 2023 A Show for A Change Film Festival. Additionally, *Destiny Concealed* was selected to the Women’s International Film Festival 2023, held in Newark, NJ, in July. The film has also been submitted and is in consideration at several other film festivals across the country.

**Who oversaw the film’s production?**

*Destiny Concealed* was directed by Cheryl Montalvo, the CEO and founder of Insite Media Network. Along with Director of Photography Myles Montalvo, Ms. Montalvo produced the documentary, devoting hundreds of hours to interviews and editing.

## DOCUMENTARY AWARDS



## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

**Shooting Format:** Digital

**Aspect Ratio:** 16x9

**Audio Format:** Wave

**Run-time:** 1 hour and 13 minutes (73 minutes)