



Mrs. Khadijah Turner
Principal of UAFA
High School

Education: Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Music from Ramapo College, Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from Saint Elizabeth University, both in New Jersey; Specialist's Degree in Education Leadership from the University of West Georgia.
Family: Married for 18 years; three sons ranging from ages 16-23
Hobbies: Singing and Reading
Favorite Education Movie: *Lean on Me*
Last Book Read: *The Let Them Theory* by Mel Robbins

Utopian Academy Welcomes New High School Principal

The Utopian Academy for the Arts Charter School Network is pleased to announce some new administrative changes to elevate the growth, innovation, operation, and academic success of UAFA High School and its feeder elementary and middle schools.

Khadijah Turner, a veteran educator of more than 20 years, has been appointed by the Governing Board of Utopian Academy for the Arts to serve as the new principal of UAFA High School starting July 1, 2026. She assumes the role of school administrator following the departure of former UAFA High Principal Kyle Kenan, who has been promoted to serve as a UAFA Charter School Network instructional coach and administrator.

Turner, of Newark, N.J., is an expert in arts education, having spent her formative years as a student at Arts High School of Newark, the nation's first performing arts high school, and later studying music in college.

"It was almost euphoric to attend a creative arts high school, especially when you are growing up in an environment as I did in New Jersey with a lot of crime and a lot of poverty," Turner said. "My school was like a safe haven. Music itself was always an escape for me."

Turner is a trained professional singer with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Music from Ramapo College and a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from Saint Elizabeth University, both in New Jersey. She has a Specialist's Degree in Education Leadership from the University of West Georgia.

Following in the footsteps of her great aunt, Turner began a career in education in 2005. She was hired as an early childhood teacher for the federal Head Start program and was quickly promoted as a multi-site center director. After 10 years with Head Start, Turner continued to advance in her administrative career, serving next as an executive director for a nonprofit, state-funded preschool program in collaboration with Trenton Public Schools. With her background in the arts and experience in early childhood development, she was

inspired to write a proposal to open an arts-focused charter school in New Jersey. The charter petition, however, was impacted by changing priorities at the start of the global pandemic. Turner relocated to Georgia in October 2021, bringing her vision for an arts-integrated academic experience for young creatives with her. She was soon hired as an assistant principal at McDonough High School, where she worked for four years to improve academic achievement.

"Knowing about child development made me stand out as an administrator in a high school environment. I was able to really form strong and trusting relationships with kids," Turner said. She served 1,400 students. "I found that a lot of students were reading way below grade level and some of their writing looked elementary. It reinforced the importance of early childhood education and the foundation that we gave the kids before we sent them off."

Turner implemented programs to address learning gaps and created incentives to help students improve their attendance, self-confidence, and scholarly development.

She will spend her first months at UAFA High meeting with faculty, staff, students, and parents to learn more about their hopes for the school's future as she develops a strategic plan to enhance the student experience and expand the curriculum.

"Working at Utopian Academy allows me to focus on arts integration in education, which is my passion," Turner said. "In my other roles, there was always a limit to what could be done in the arts because the focus was really on testing and other priorities. Research shows that high-needs students are more successful when you bring the arts into the picture."

"It improves attendance, helps them learn, and gives them something to look forward to. If anything God had created specifically for me, this position at Utopian Academy High School has to be it. I'm super excited. I haven't been this excited about a role since my first teaching job. I'm looking forward to helping to grow the program and school."