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a 501c3 Nonprofit



KIJANA

EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE

Kijana's Mission

Kijana Educational Empowerment Initiative, a nonprofit organization, promotes and cultivates youth empowerment through educational development, cross-cultural dialogue, and sustainable and environmentally friendly economic growth, among underserved Kenyan school communities and American school communities.

What is the Kijana Global Innovation School?

Kijana Global Innovation School is a new model for education. A school that places human collaboration within communities and lifelong personal growth and advancement within an awareness of one's place in the natural world at the forefront. It is built on 35+ years of relationship building between American school communities and Kenyan school communities, and almost a quarter century of classroom teaching in public and private school communities in Kenya and the United States by Kijana President James P. Cummings. The school opened in January 2020 with fifteen students. In July 2024, 235 students are learning to "care, share, and explore" in a creative, connected and nurturing environment.

This profile entry presents a collaborative effort between Kijana and an architectural design team to build a life-changing educational hub on the campus of the Global Innovation School to further advance our mission.





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DID YOU

KNOW?

Why do we need the Kijana Global Innovation School?

Our world needs a much a stronger commitment to investing in education and youth in creative and inspired ways that go beyond narrowly preparing students for the workplace. First and foremost, we are humans sharing life and resources and experiences with billions of other people and multitudes of plants and animals on a fragile planet. We are all parts of communities and we operate and grow and develop in connection with others. The Kijana Global Innovation School aims to nurture a new way of thinking in terms of education. We aim to inspire students to be caring, thoughtful, respectful, engaged, and active agents of a better future. We aim for students to be lifelong learners and community builders who find meaning and purpose and value in life. School should be far more than a preparation for college and a job. Schools must develop a varied set of skills to move through life with enthusiasm, joy, and purpose.

Kenya is a nation with a strong commitment to education and Kijana President, James P. Cummings has unique life experiences in building bridges between Kenya and the United States. Western Kenya is fertile ground for a visionary school as Kenyans yearn for opportunity and they are committed to education. Additionally, citizen leaders are open and eager to engage in creative endeavors to improve their environment and find solutions to challenges, unencumbered by overstretched and overly rigid structures that exist in many other places. Multitudes of talented youth are eager to learn, grow and do good. The Kijana Global Innovation School uniquely provides an opportunity and a model for creative, holistic and energized learning.

- **Of Kenya's youthful population of 58 million people, 24.1 million are under 20.**

- **The Kijana Global innovation School has a small student-teacher ratio (9-1 at present).**

- **Kijana is a member of the Kakamega County Private School Association which has more than 150 member schools.**

- **The first African woman to win a Nobel Peace Prize was a Kenyan, Wangari Maathai.**

- **Kenya is home to over 60 indigenous languages, with English and Kiswahili being the official languages.**

- **Kenya is at the forefront of technological innovations and is often referred to as the Silicon Savannah. Kenya is the regional ICT hub of East Africa, with the country being a leader in broadband connectivity, general ICT infrastructure, value added services (VAS), mobile money, and mobile banking and FinTech services.**



Contact us at kijana@kijana.org for more information!



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Exploring, Discovering, Innovating

Our Curriculum Goals

Students at the Kijana Global Innovation School master:

- Applied Global Education and Problem-Solving
- Collaborative Thinking
- Environmental Sustainability
- Hands-On, Project-Based Learning in a Reflective and Rigorous Academic Setting
- Global Media, Technology, and the Creative Arts
- Competition and Cooperation
- Literacy, History, and the Arts
- Architecture and Learning
- Exploration



Our School's Vision

Kijana Educational Empowerment Initiative has developed a creative, visionary and collaborative curriculum in an architecturally unique setting. Students are inspired and nurtured to fulfill their potential and are prepared to advance to the next stage of their academic journey with confidence, global understanding, and the individual and collaborative skills to compete and contribute to a challenging and emerging world. Kijana's world class Global Innovation School is also a venue for international collaboration as educators and students from other countries are invited to visit, learn from others, and share in a beautiful and culturally interactive environment.

Global Innovation School students learn to be engaged global citizens. They interact directly with their peers, as well as students in other countries. They are taught global challenges and develop skills in analysis and problem-solving in order to be lifelong global citizens. Students at the Kijana Global Innovation School learn how to overcome challenges both individually and collectively.



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A Comprehensive Education Program

Kijana's Global Innovation School is empowering youth through education, art, and culture. The school stands as a beacon of hope and opportunity for students of all backgrounds. Through its innovative approach to education, promotion of artistic and cultural excellence, and steadfast dedication to preserving heritage, the Global Innovation School is transforming lives and communities across western Kenya.

The Kijana Global Innovation School is opening doors to learning by making education accessible and effective for all students. Through a diverse array of educational programs, the school caters to a wide range of learners, including:

- **Early Childhood Programs:** Fostering early development and preparing young children for a lifetime of learning.
- **First Generation Students:** Providing support and resources to empower students who are the first in their families to pursue higher education.
- **Financial Support:** Ensuring financial accessibility through scholarships and our donor funded Sponsor-A-Scholar initiative is making education a reality for economically disadvantaged students.
- **Special Education:** Tailoring programs to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities, promoting inclusivity and equal access to education.
- **Youth Services:** Engaging youth through leadership programs, and extracurricular activities to nurture their talents and potential.

Through these initiatives, Kijana is breaking down barriers to education and empowering students to achieve their fullest potential.

[Learn more: Sponsor-A-Scholar Program](#)



Contact us at kijana@kijana.org for more information!



**UNIQUE
ARCHITECTURE**

Multipurpose Education Hub | Library & Amphitheater



Our next major physical addition to the school will be a beautiful library, media center, and amphitheater. We are fortunate to have pro-bono guidance from two award-winning New York architects, Harpreet Dhaliwal, Principal at BSKS Architects, and Chris Dameron, Founder of Dameron Architecture, who are jointly leading the design team.



With their collaboration, a library committee held many design meetings to create a visionary building plan which is appropriate to the local setting and for creative and cooperative learning. Dhaliwal and Dameron visited the school and community in February 2022, learning about the site and materials and collaborating with our local key architect, Jeremiah Awori, and other members of the Kijana team and community.

Harpreet Dhaliwal was a 7th and 8th grade student of Kijana President, James P. Cummings, at The Prairie School, in Racine, WI. Dhaliwal and Dameron have been collaborating with our team since the spring of 2021 in designing a unique and functional space that will allow students to explore, discover and innovate.

Kijana held a groundbreaking ceremony in April 2024 to prepare for construction which will begin later this year. The library, media center, and amphitheater has an anticipated open date of January 2026.

The team has produced several renditions of the educational hub, ultimately producing the design renderings displayed on this page and following pages.





Harpreet Dhaliwal is a principal at BSKS Architects in New York City and an expert in public space architecture. She has served as project lead of numerous notable architectural creations in NYC and New York state, including the Minnewaska State Park Visitors Center, which opened last year and an ecologically inspired playground at the Battery, which opened last month. Earlier work includes the LEED platinum comfort station in Washington Square Park, the New York Hall of Science Playground and many more endeavors. Presently, she is designing a Queens public library. Harpreet Dhaliwal believes that "true architectural brilliance emerges most often from consistent hard work and thoughtful editing, rather than from a single burst of inspiration." She is providing her support for this project pro-bono. We are grateful for her contributions and look forward to a marvelous product



Christopher Dameron is founder of Dameron Architecture, a Brooklyn based multi-disciplinary studio that specializes in ecology inspired projects and the art of adaptive reuse. They "design fantastical, expressive buildings and living landscapes that connect people with nature." The team at Dameron Architecture is drawn to projects that nurture, innovate and inspire and work to integrate people, architecture and nature." Dameron Architecture recently received a design award from AIANY (American Institute of Architects NY) for their design for Carroll Hall in Brooklyn. We are excited to partner with Christopher Dameron and Dameron Architecture as well and provide an avenue for sharing their visions in a collaborative way to new places internationally. Mr. Dameron is also providing his expertise and time pro-bono.



Jeremiah Awori has been our longstanding project architect and contractor. He was born and raised near Mwituha, where we rebuilt the school from 2005-2012. He has diplomas in Quantity Surveying from Mombasa Polytechnic and Technical Education from Kenya Technical Trainers College. He has served as the principal at St. Matthias Emukunzi Vocational Training Center since 2017. He visited Florida in the fall of 2018 as a Kijana Cultural Ambassador. He has been developing structures in western Kenya since 2000. Additionally, he is a farmer, agriculturalist, and teacher. His brilliant amphitheater at Mwituha is a notable landmark in the region. The Kijana Global Innovation School Library/Amphitheater will be an even more dramatic educational and physical contribution to the world.



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The Architectural Concepts and Team





Experienced Local Project Management: Ebby Shiroya Cummings

The central figure in putting all the pieces together in terms of construction and managing the school is Ebby Shiroya Cummings. She has been instrumental in the entire school development and will be key to the construction and development of the new library, media center and amphitheater. Ebby Shiroya Cummings brings more than two decades of business acumen and entrepreneurial skill development to the table. She began her career selling vegetables on the roadside in the 1990s and since then has developed and managed multiple small businesses, including a bar and restaurant, taxi, tuk-tuk, boutiques and has overseen multiple construction endeavors, as well as all the buildings at the Kijana Global Innovation School. She hires the workers, researches and purchases materials and is in constant communication with Kijana President, James P. Cummings, local architect Jeremiah Awori and others. Additionally, she makes sure all resources are invested properly and the buildings rise in a timely and proper way.





Visonary Hub



Collaboration Brings Communities Together

The collaboration between Kijana and our partners in architecture exemplifies the illuminating power of community engagement. Together, we are building more than just a physical space—we are laying the foundation for a brighter future, where education, creativity, and community thrive in harmony.

- **Impact on Education:**
 - Central to our mission is the belief that access to knowledge is fundamental to empowerment. The education hub will house a diverse collection of resources, from books to digital media, providing students and community members alike with the tools to explore, discover, and innovate.
- **Cultural and Social Hub:**
 - Beyond its educational role, the library, media center, and amphitheater will serve as cultural and social catalysts within the community. It will host events, performances, and workshops, nurturing creativity and celebrating diversity while fostering a sense of unity and pride.
- **Community Empowerment:**
 - At its core, this initiative embodies the spirit of community engagement. By involving local stakeholders, and experts, we are not just building infrastructure but cultivating a sense of ownership and responsibility among all those involved.
- **Sustainability and Innovation:**
 - The design of the hub incorporates sustainable practices and innovative technologies, setting a precedent for environmentally conscious construction. This commitment reflects our dedication to creating a lasting impact on both the community and the environment.

This collaborative project stands as a testament to what can be achieved when passion, expertise, and a shared vision unite for the greater good. It is with great pride and optimism that we submit this entry for the Anthem Award in Community Engagement, celebrating our collective commitment to making a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.



Library/Media Center Collaborative History

2020:

- Kijana President James P. Cummings begins to explore idea of building a library.

2021:

- Kijana President James P. Cummings reconnects with former student Harpreet Dhaliwal through Facebook, discovering that she and her husband, Chris Dameron are award-winning architects. They come on board and a series of collaborative design sessions are held throughout the year.

2022:

- Harpreet Dhaliwal and Chris Dameron and their family travel to Kenya to collaborate with Jeremiah Awori and get on the ground understanding of construction resources and procedures in Kenya. Design collaboration continues. Fundraising event was held in September in NYC to begin raising funds for the library/media center and amphitheater. Harpreet Dhaliwal and Chris Dameron collaborate in developing a new two-story building, which we decided to build first as the foundation of the junior secondary school.

2023:

- Design and collaboration continues. Fundraising events were held in North Palm Beach and at The Prairie School, in Racine, WI. Two-story building completed, which includes a temporary library.

2024:

- Library and Media Center Honorary Campaign Co-chairs Stephanie and John Pew pledge \$500,000 toward construction of the library with an initial contribution of \$250,000 donated in May 2024. Research and consultation with various contractors continues and intensifies. Design development and collaboration continues. Small ground-breaking ceremony held in April 2024. Actual work on excavation and foundation slated to begin in August 2024. Fundraising to continue. A Macalester College Alumnus, Mary Ratkovich reaches out to Kijana President, James P. Cummings with offer of a few containers of books for youth (about 65,000 in each container) to donate to Kijana. The two collaborate to ship the first container of 65,000 books to Kenya. Shipment is expected to arrive on October 2024. The books will serve as a start for the school and will also be distributed to regional schools, advancing collaborative relationships with the area.

2025:

- Construction expected to continue through much of the year. Interior finishing expected to begin by June 2025 with building complete and operational by January 2026. Fundraising continues.







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Campus Expansion | More Classrooms & Junior Secondary School



Kenya's government modified the educational structure of the national school system in recent years, creating a new Junior Secondary system, for 7th-9th grades. Consequently, we moved quickly and constructed a new two-story building as the core structure for our junior secondary school. Our expert and volunteer team of Harpreet Dhaliwal and Christopher Dameron provided valuable insights into the site plan and design. We began construction at the beginning of October. Under the leadership of Kijana School Director, and Construction Project Manager, Ebby Shiroya Cummings, the core of the building was completed in a little over four months. Additional finishes transpired over the next 15 months and the building was painted in 2024. In early February, students and teachers began learning within its classrooms. It incorporates four large, open classrooms with much natural light, and a spacious multi-purpose room.



Teachers and students are enjoying the new environment. Twenty-three 7th grade and 8th grade students were members of our inaugural group of learners. The building is a landmark in the community and the construction of it provided more than 50 local people with regular work. Any building or work we do, not only increases the local educational capital base, and increases opportunity for improved education, but fuels the local economy with daily income for multitudes.

On May 28th, 2023, the building was officially opened and named the "Gail and James Cummings Junior Secondary Building, in honor of founder James P. Cummings' parents who, with their longstanding commitment to value-based education have made his life journey possible. A companion building is planned and a small courtyard will connect the two buildings. Initial landscaping of the area was started in April 2023.



PROMISE YOURSELF...
To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own



KIJANA EDUCATIONAL
EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE



**THANK YOU
JAMES & GAIL
CUMMINGS**

Decades of commitment to value-based and international education

Without the Cummings's, the Kijana Global Innovation School would not be changing the educational landscape in the region and beyond. Please enhance the building they made possible by donating in their honor to add resources & technology.



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Creative Designs

Creative Design in Community Space Inspires Optimism

The Kijana Global Innovation School features an architecturally innovative campus that blends modern design principles with local architectural styles and sustainable building practices. Buildings are designed to maximize natural light, ventilation, and energy efficiency.

One of the innovative hallmarks of our school is the creative and artistic design of the school environment. Our unique zigzag classroom design, ideated by Kijana Vice-President, Bruce Huber and created with the oversight of Kijana Architect, Jeremiah Awori, forms a foundation for architectural creativity. Our school is also home to numerous creative educational murals, recycled glass art and furniture from Nani's Kitengela Glass and Anselm's Kitengela Glass and a flourishing green landscape full of trees and flowers.

The school buildings are also home to over 50 collaborative educational murals, designed by Palm Beach County graphic artist, Claire Salmon and painted by local artist, Jesse Otukho. The series adds to the beauty and inspirational environment of the school.

The beautiful educational surroundings contribute to a significantly enhanced student experience, adding energy, creativity, and optimism to learning. This view was enhanced and strengthened by Kijana's Founder and President, James P. Cummings teaching experience at The Prairie School, in Racine, WI, where a premium is placed on creative architecture, the arts and aesthetics.

In addition, Kijana strives to incorporate green campus initiatives such as; recycling programs, water conservation projects, and organic gardening. These initiatives not only educate students about environmental stewardship but also contribute to a sustainable campus environment.



Some Initial Collaborative Visitors



Ethan Bloomberg and Family

In April 2024, former fellow WorldTeach volunteer, Ethan Bloomberg and his family visited the Global Innovation School. He lives in the Boston area and had previously shared a set of our Kijana Heroes Poster series with his daughter's school. The school displayed the posters for the month of February and they are still on display. We enjoyed sharing stories and memories with him and his family. We look forward to future collaboration with Ethan and family and continue to welcome others to our school and community.



Mark Leggiro

Mark Leggiro, hails from Florida and has been serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in the local community since January 2024. He is teaching science at a local high school and is an expert at 3D printing and other technology. With that knowledge in mind, Kijana purchased a few 3D printers, which arrived in March 2024. Mark has generously shared his time, knowledge, and talent with us, by setting up the first one and teaching some of our staff how to use it. Our teachers created chess pieces to play the board game. We anticipate that the 3D printers will help form the basis and ability to teach more graphic arts in the future. To our knowledge, the Kijana Global Innovation School now holds the only 3D printers in Kakamega County and several surrounding counties.



Andre Madison

Andre Madison: "My experience interning at the Kijana Global Innovation School was a profoundly enriching experience for a college student like me. As the school's first college intern, my experience during the Summers of 2022 and 2023 consisted primarily of assisting President Jim Cummings and the Kijana Global Innovation School's principals and staff. On site at the school's beautiful Kenyan campus, I was given the privilege to teach the early fundamentals of music through the descant recorder to the many bright pupils of Kijana. Additionally, I was able to develop a technology plan alongside the introduction of tablets to the school. Through my experiences, I was able to make connections with the incredibly hardworking staff, teachers, principal, and other various employees of the institution allowing me to assist them in facilitating an efficient learning environment."



Mildred Acosta & Santino Merchan

Mildred Acosta: "Last year I fulfilled a longtime personal goal to volunteer and contribute to the educational development of global communities. In July, I traveled to western Kenya, teaching and collaborating at the Kijana Global Innovation School. What made this experience remarkable was sharing it with my twelve-year-old son Santino. We worked collaboratively with teachers in Kijana School's Care, Share, and Explore Program which aims to teach students to protect and value all life. The teachers and I worked side-by-side identifying environmental themes in the story The Lorax, by Dr. Seuss, such as air pollution, deforestation, and water pollution. Santino worked alongside helping with crafts, and activities, and assisting the students with developing a skit. In the evenings, Santino interacted with the children who lived nearby, creating objects from recycled materials and exploring the compound. Volunteering at the Kijana Global Innovation School was a life-changing experience that I highly recommend to anyone seeking to explore and help others.

Since 2002, Kijana Educational Empowerment Initiative a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization), has provided a pivotal role in helping to transform education in Kenya, most significantly in Vihiga and Kakamega County in western Kenya.

What began with grassroots investments, resulted in Kijana altering the educational trajectory and raising expectations of citizens. By investing in over 80 schools countrywide, Kijana inspired an educational renaissance in the area. The most dramatic of the investments was that of Mwituha Secondary School, which, with the partnership of the local community, was transformed from the dilapidated remains of an old school to a burgeoning institution of over 400 students. Ebusiloli Secondary School followed suit increasing from 100 to 700 students, which inspired neighboring community Ematsuli to redevelop their school. Where there were once only 100 students obtaining high school degrees, now there are 1500. The first female students began to also continue on to university.

Using this experience in educationally empowering the area through established institutions, our efforts focused toward Kijana's very own Kijana Global Innovation School, built and currently expanding in neighboring Kakamega County. It serves students in Kakamega, Vihiga, and Siaya Counties, which have a combined population of 3 million people. In 2020 Kijana opened its modest doors to less than 20 students. Today there are over 230. The campus has grown alongside the population, expanding and adapting as needed to allow the students to blossom. Each year, Kijana has utilized new technology, constructed new classrooms, added new grade years and classes, developed cutting edge curriculum, and supported the surrounding community.

Not only does Kijana's School serve as educational instituion, it also serves students as a cultural and community hub too. The campus is covered in Kitengela Glass animals and educational murals that inspire pride in the arts. Hot meals are provided to the student body by the kitchen and cook. Festivals, celebrations, dances, and performances occur regularly. Agricultural and entrepreneurial skills are brought in and spread to the community.



IMPACT IN NUMBERS



52,000+

TOTAL STUDENTS SERVED



80+

SCHOOLS SUPPORTED



1,837,672

TREES GROWN as of
JULY 2024



2

SCHOOLS BUILT



Contact Us

✉ kijana@kijana.org

📱 @kijana2002

🌐 kijana.org

☎ (561) 312-1968

