



A Clear Vision for Action

Position Paper on Accelerating Development of
Performing Public Schools in St. Louis



“ Education is not preparation
for life; education is life itself.”
John Dewey

Introduction

An Urgent Issue of Paramount Importance

This paper is offered as an outline for expanded action on making quality schools for all St. Louis students an everyday reality. This paper focuses on charter public schools because in St. Louis, and elsewhere, such schools have been shown to provide new opportunities for quality schooling.

This is not an either-or choice—traditional public schools or charter public schools. Above all things, we seek quality schools—great schools for all St. Louis children. We support charter public schools precisely because we desire quality traditional public schools. We believe that the positive attributes that are defining and driving charter public schools are not only essential to their success, but also to the long-term success of traditional public schools.

And because of those same positive attributes, charter public schools can offer a model better aligned for today's globalized Information Age.

To succeed in this new era, social and economic institutions must be flexible to adapt to the speedy change that characterizes the times. To successfully adapt, they must spur innovation, as fast change often demands new ways of thinking. They have to be highly accountable for results—as today's interconnected world is unforgiving of failure. And such institutions must also empower the most precious resource in this creativity-rewarding, knowledge-driven-age: their employees.

Innovativeness, flexibility, accountability and individual empowerment—when authorized and managed well, charter public schools embody all of these attributes; they constitute the DNA of such schools.

All schools, irrespective of their denomination, now must also embrace those attributes. They must, whenever possible, be guided by them. They must, whenever possible, be governed by them.

This involves a matter of paramount importance.

It demands a breadth and depth of vision that peers both beyond a widening horizon and across a shrinking globe. It also requires a keen understanding of history to discern what the generations past can teach us to inform our work for the generations ahead. As part of a new globalized economy, America now faces unprecedented competition with new nations of vast potential.

We are also in a new digital age where far-reaching technological change is occurring at a breathtaking rate. Today, economies, and societies, everywhere can be changed in seconds by a screen touch anywhere. The new, fiercely competitive 21st century marketplace does not grant paid leave for communities to get their educational affairs in order. If we do not adapt to the speed of global change, then that change may speed right past us.

To keep apace, we have to think differently, act creatively and move expeditiously. The stakes are simply too high to do otherwise. The growth and competitiveness of our entire region is dependent on a highly educated workforce.

St. Louis must not be left behind.

A More Interconnected, Faster World

Globalizing Economy: Some Facts

For much of the past century, America dominated the world's economy, and while international trade had always been a component of our economy, most of the economy, most of the time, was largely immune from the ebbs and flows of international commerce. Today, America still has the world's largest, most innovative economy—but competition from emerging powerhouses like China and India is growing increasingly more intense.

And ever-more powerful information technology is rendering geographical borders wholly inconsequential. In the 21st century, there are few places left to hide from the impact of global commerce, whether for good or bad. In 2007, the year the Great Recession began, a Research Associate at the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis published these comments:

Developments in information and communication technology (ICT) (i.e., cellular phones, e-mail, and streaming video) have increased the speed of globalization in the latter part of the 20th century....In 1966 exports accounted for 5% of gross domestic product (GDP), and the United States imported only \$37 billion worth of goods and services, the equivalent of 4.7% of GDP. In 2006 exports accounted for 11% of GDP, and imports measured \$2.2 trillion, the equivalent of 17% of GDP....By 2006, U.S. companies were investing \$181 billion across the globe and foreigners were investing \$235 billion in the United States, or 1.4 and 1.8% of GDP. Advances in ICT have done more than just increase the speed of globalization; they have also changed the face of globalization....Recent estimates suggest that developments in ICT will allow 20 to 30% of all jobs to be *potentially* shipped overseas.¹

Since those observations were published, the U.S. economy has become further globalized. Exports as a share of the economy was a record 13.9 percent in 2012, and imports, as of 2011, were up to 18 percent of the economy.²

1 Charles S. Gascon, "Economic Globalization," Economic Information Newsletter, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, November 2007.

2 "U.S. Trade Overview 2012," U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration.

3 Imports of goods and services (% of GDP), The World Bank: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.IMP.GNFS.ZS>.

4 "Pearson Student Mobile Device Survey 2013, National Report: Students in Grades 4-12," Harris Interactive, April 5, 2013, p. 7.

Information Revolution: What May Lie Ahead

Personal computers. Tablet computers. Smartphones. The Internet and the World Wide Web. Facebook. Twitter. The products and services of the Information Revolution have become familiar features of our daily lives. A 2010 survey found that two-thirds of New York City children aged 4 to 7 had used an iPhone.³ Nearly half of U.S. students in grades 4-12, according to a 2013 survey, had harnessed smart phones in their schooling—in class, at home or someplace else.⁴

In 2012, over 2 billion people used the Internet; twice the number using it in 2007.⁵ Today, most of us are on the Internet from time to time. Tomorrow, the Internet may be *in* everything all the time.

From cars to home appliances, the Internet is emerging as a mass network of "things," a utility that may be as all-encompassing as electricity. Some research firms predict as many as 170 million wearable computer devices, such as Google Glass, by 2017.⁶ According to ABI Research, "more than 30 billion devices will wirelessly connect" to what they call the "Internet of Everything" by 2020.⁷



5 "Digital Revolution," Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_Revolution.

6 Reuven Cohen, "The Next Big Thing In Enterprise IT: Bring Your Own Wearable Tech?," Forbes, August, 14, 2013: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/reuvencohen/2013/08/14/the-next-big-thing-in-enterprise-it-bring-your-own-wearable-tech/>

7 "More Than 30 Billion Devices Will Wirelessly Connect to the Internet of Everything in 2020," ABI Research, May 9, 2013.

Public Education: The Key to America's Greatness

America's response to the sweeping economic and technological changes of the 19th and early 20th centuries was to apply new approaches to public education. The speed and breadth of 21st century technological innovation, and the resulting social, political and economic changes, require America to once again apply a new approach to education.

America's public school system was born during the Industrial Revolution and matured in the immediate decades thereafter. Prior to this era, America had been an agricultural nation and schooling was largely private and reserved for the wealthy few.

The Industrial Revolution spawned important new technologies, such as the cotton gin, the steam engine and the railroad, which generated entirely new sectors of manufacturing and industry. New factories required trained and educated new employees. And the dynamic new industries needed new consumers—namely, a large new middle class—who could afford to purchase the goods and services those industries planned to mass produce.

America needed to develop and grow a new type of schooling to meet the unprecedented economic and technological challenges of the new Industrial Age.

The first public high school was opened in Boston in 1821. Free elementary schools were established in all U.S. states by 1870, and as the century turned, there were more public secondary schools than private schools. By the end of World War I, in 1918, all U.S. states had laws requiring children to finish elementary school. Formal training of teachers was another important innovation resulting from this period of public school growth.

Free and widely available public education contributed greatly to America's ascent to the position of world's greatest nation during the 19th and 20th centuries. A bright spirit of farsightedness, experimentation and innovation helped create America's public schools during that time of great change and opportunity. And today, we urgently need to bring a similar bright spirit of farsightedness, experimentation and innovation to America's schools during our time of great change—to create a viable system of learning for all students so that this generation and future generations can prosper and America can remain great.

“Collectively, the educational equipment of the whole population contributes to our national character—our freedom as a Nation, our national security, our expanding economy, our cultural attainments, our unremitting efforts for a durable peace.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Charter Public Schools: Innovative Public Schools for a New Century

The last 30-40 years of global technological and economic changes are in some ways no less great than those produced by the Industrial Revolution. The advent and proliferation of the personal computer, the Internet and mobile communications are altering all facets of society, creating a true Information Revolution -- which has helped induce a rapid globalization of economies that has been unique in world history in its impact.

As with the Industrial Revolution, some of the ongoing effects of the Information Revolution and economic globalization have been disruptive to traditional institutions and long-standing industries, which struggle to adjust to the rapid changes that have been occurring. And just as their 19th century forebears worked to create a school system that fit the needs of their age, American educational leaders today have been working to revitalize America's public school system for our new globalized, digitized Information Age. Charter public schools are an innovative approach at the very forefront of these efforts.

Birth and Growth of Charter Public Schools

Well into the 20th century, America's system of free public elementary and secondary education had been the envy of the world and helped produce a middle class unparalleled in any other country and at any other time in history. Yet, by the 1980s, America was seen as falling behind. A 1983 watershed report, *A Nation At Risk*, outlined the indicators of education decline in America, and had spoken to the dangers that lied ahead for a democracy that did not adequately educate its children. One finding stated: "We conclude that declines in educational performance are in large part the result of disturbing inadequacies in the way the educational process itself is often conducted."⁸

What followed was a national call for changes in school district performance, state accountability systems, curriculum and expectations. Mounting pressure for wide-scale and immediate improvements created an opportunity for a new way of delivering public education.

Charter public schools were created in response to this pressure. The first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992. The sector has seen rapid growth since. By 2000, there were over 1900 charter public schools nationwide. Today, there are nearly 6,000 charter schools in 42 states and the District of Columbia, serving nearly 2 million children.

Yet, as fast as that growth has been, charter schools today account for just 6 percent of all public schools.

Public policy analyst and author David Osborne identifies the stages of historical development for charter public schools: "In its first 10 years, the charter community focused mostly on quantity: getting charters open. Over the past ten years, it has focused increasingly on charter school quality."⁹

What Makes Charter Public Schools Different?

Charter public schools develop models that focus on the needs of children without the excessive hindrances of bureaucratic red tape. Charter public schools offer the benefits and legal safeguards that traditional schools provide—such as free tuition, open enrollment and public funding—but also offer distinct advantages over traditional public schools: greater flexibility and expanded freedom to innovate. Charter public schools are established outside of traditional school districts to allow for such flexibility and innovation.

This flexibility often leads to a unique brand of school, connected deeply to the local community, that allows the school to not only affect the children it teaches, but also to strengthen the broader community it serves.

To operate, charter public schools must first obtain a charter (a kind of license) from a sponsor—usually a state education agency, a local school board, a university, or some other designated institution. In exchange for more flexibility and freedom to try new things, charter public schools are more directly accountable for their academic performance and quality.

Charter public schools generally operate under a contract for five to ten years (generally five years in Missouri)—and they can be closed if they are not performing or being managed sufficiently well. Charter public schools thus have a greater formalized incentive to induce student achievement. Charter public schools are required to conform to the most important federal and state laws and regulations that govern all public schools, but charters are given more latitude and freedom in their day-to-day operations.

⁸ "A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education, by The National Commission on Excellence in Education, April 1983, p. 1.

⁹ David Osborne, "Improving Charter School Accountability: The Challenge of Closing Failing Schools," Progressive Policy Institute, 2012

For example, and perhaps most critically, charter public schools can, and do, offer longer school days and longer school years to support teaching and learning. Charter public schools also have the flexibility to adjust curriculum to meet the various needs of students. They have the freedom to introduce new technologies and teaching techniques, such as online instruction, to enhance the educational process.

Charter Public School Model: Innovative Accountability

A crucial difference between charter public schools and traditional public schools lies in the accountability required for continuing operations. Charter public schools are highly accountable to their sponsors for their performance. Charter public school sponsors monitor a variety of key indicators and outcomes in the schools' academic, organizational, fiscal and governance performance, grounded in legal and binding contracts with the schools. Charter public schools know that if they fail to measure up in their performance and quality, they face revocation of their charters.

School closings' data unmistakably demonstrate how central this accountability is, and has been, to the charter school model. The Center for Education Reform recorded in 2011 that "of the approximately 6,700 charter schools that have ever opened across the United States, 1,036 have closed since 1992."¹⁰

As a comparatively new model of public schooling, charter public schools, in the aggregate, are still learning what works and what doesn't work. Mistakes have been made and failures have occurred as these schools have continued to evolve. Some charter schools are still not performing adequately and may need to close.

Studies by the Stanford Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) found that in states where authorizers regularly close failing charter public schools, charter students perform much better than their traditional public school counterparts on state math and reading tests. In places where authorizers have failed to close failing charter public schools, charter students do worse than traditional public school students.¹¹

Yet it is the very nature of the charter public school model that augers well for its long-term success. Precisely because the

charter system is so much more flexible, it is that much more capable of learning well from failures of the past — by adapting new techniques to create successes in the future.

Positive Educational Outcomes

Various studies and other indicators from multiple states and localities clearly show the noteworthy progress that charter public schools have made in creating positive educational outcomes and in outperforming traditional public schools.

In New Orleans, for instance, greater than 80 percent of students are now attending a public charter school. The passing rate there on state tests has soared from 35 percent before Hurricane Katrina hit, in 2005, to 60 percent today.¹² In Washington, D.C., public charter high schools have a graduation rate that is 24 percentage points higher than traditional schools.¹³ A 2013 M.I.T study found that Boston charter public schools are outperforming other public schools on the Massachusetts state tests and the SAT and Advanced Placement exams.¹⁴

A 2013 study by Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) of 26 states with charter public schools, including Missouri, found that "students attending charter schools have eight additional days of learning in reading and similar learning gains in math compared to their peers attending traditional public schools."¹⁵

Most notably, the CREDO study found that those students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds appear to particularly benefit from charter public schools: "Students in poverty, black students, and those who are English language learners (ELL) gain significantly more days of learning each year in both reading and math compared to their traditional public school peers. Performance differences between charter school students and their traditional public school peers were especially strong

¹⁰ "Charter Schools Closure Rate Tops 15 Percent," The Center for Education Reform, press release, December 11, 2011.

¹¹ David Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹² Adam B. Kushner, "The Cajun Comeback," The National Journal, May 2, 2013.

¹³ David Osborne, *op. cit.*, p.11.

¹⁴ James Vaznis, "Charter schools in Boston score higher on key tests," The Boston Globe, May 22, 2013.

¹⁵ "New Study: Missouri Charter Schools Outperform Districts," Show-Me Daily, July 2, 2013": <http://www.showmedaily.org/2013/07/new-study-missouri-charter-schools-outperform-districts.html>.

among black and Hispanic students in poverty and Hispanic students who are ELL in both reading and math.”¹⁶

Charter public schools are making gains nationwide vis-à-vis traditional public schools while also receiving, on average, according to one study, about 20 percent less money per student!¹⁷ The Center for Education Reform finds even more striking data: “Charter schools across the United States are funded at 61% of their district counterparts. On average, charter schools are funded at \$6,585 per pupil compared to \$10,771 per pupil at conventional district public schools.”¹⁸

The American public has continued to be strongly supportive of charter public schools. The 45th annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, released the summer of 2013, found that 68 percent of Americans support the idea of charter schools, and 59 percent approve a “large increase” in the number of charter schools operating in the U.S.¹⁹

Charter Public Schools in Missouri: 15 Years and Counting

Missouri charter public schools marked their 15th anniversary in 2013. They were authorized by the Missouri General Assembly in May 1998. The first charter public school in Missouri opened in 1999 in Kansas City. The first charter public schools opened in St. Louis in 2000. Today, there are 46 charter public schools in the state—24 in Kansas City, 22 in St. Louis. Charter public schools today serve over 8,000 students in St. Louis out of a total public school enrollment of about 25,000 students. Until 2012, state law limited the operation of charter public schools to just the St. Louis and Kansas City school districts. Missouri enacted new legislation in 2012 that, under certain conditions, allows for the expansion of charter schools statewide.

For over 30 years, St. Louis public schools have struggled to meet the state of Missouri’s equity and quality standards. The state’s largest school district was involved in one of the nation’s largest desegregation cases, beginning in 1980.

16 “Charter Schools Make Gains, According to 26-State Study,” Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), press release, June 25, 2013.

17 David Osborne, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

18 “Choice & Charter Schools,” The Center for Education Reform: <http://www.edreform.com/issues/choice-charter-schools/facts/>.

19 “The 45th annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools,” September 2013, p. 17.

By the end of the case in 1998, the year the charter school law was passed, the district met the conditions to be unaccredited, but was given provisional accreditation status in the settlement agreement.

From the inception of the first charter public school in St. Louis in 2000, the path toward quality charter public schools in the city has not always been an easy one. Failures have sometimes pockmarked the road, and schools have had to close. Consistent with the principle of perform or close, 13 charter public schools in St. Louis have been closed since 2005. The very fact that poor performing charter public schools have been forced to close, while obviously not the ideal outcome, does demonstrate that the charter public school model has a quality-control mechanism that traditional public schools currently lack.

We must never gloss over past mistakes by St. Louis charter public schools, but instead continue to learn from these experiences to avoid their reoccurrence.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recently released new data on school performance through the fifth version of its Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP5). MSIP5 applies new and higher standards to assess Missouri public schools. These new standards include a greater contribution of academic progress and individual student growth measures toward the district’s accreditation. The data from MSIP5 for the St. Louis Public School (SLPS) district (non-charters) show the district and its schools are lagging well behind state standards. These districts received a low score of just 24.6 percent (receiving 34.5 points out of a possible 140 points). Districts scoring below 50 percent are considered unaccredited; 50-70 percent are considered provisionally accredited; and above 70 percent are considered accredited when reviewed for accreditation.

Missouri charter public school students participate in the statewide Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) and are required to reach state standards, as agreed upon in each school’s individual charter. Charter public schools are also subject to the Annual Performance Review of MSIP5, which is a component of Missouri’s school district accountability system. The vast majority of St. Louis charter public schools earned strong MSIP5 scores and/or showed significant improvement.

Charter public schools North Side Community School and City Garden Montessori earned perfect scores of 100 percent of eligible MSIP5 Performance Standards points, while Grand Center Arts Academy (98 percent), Gateway Science Academy of St. Louis (87.9 percent), KIPP St. Louis (85.7) and St. Louis Charter School (80.6) all received high scores.

Other assessments are also showing major progress by Missouri charter public schools. The aforementioned Stanford University national study of charter schools (“CREDO”), released in 2013, reports that Missouri charter public schools have added 14 days of reading learning and 22 days of math learning over their traditional public school counterparts.²⁰

Observed Missouri Charter Public Schools Association Executive Director Doug Thaman:

Another exciting finding is that between the release of the last CREDO study, in 2009, and this study, the schools that have been closed [in Missouri] were leading to a decrease of 72 days of learning in reading and 80 days of learning in math. This point shows that Missouri's charter schools and their sponsors are demanding student achievement and are responding when results are not produced. And this demand for accountability is continuing. The just-released study uses 2010-2011 numbers, which would include the recently closed Imagine schools in St. Louis and two low-performing charter schools in Kansas City.²¹

While not all boats will necessarily rise with the tide, the more a state government works at improving the general educational environment, the more likely all types of schools can accrue benefits. It is highly commendable that the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is aspiring to push the state's overall performance in college-entry testing into the top ten states by 2020. Missouri now ranks a little higher than the middle of the pack of states—23rd—in terms of its composite score (21.6) for student college-entry ACT tests.

20 Elisa Crouch, “Missouri Charter Schools Outperform National Average,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch, June 28, 2013: http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/education/missouri-charter-schools-outperform-national-average/article_df4aeaf8-1c69-5fe2-9fbo-e73e2981ba47.html.
21 Douglas Thaman, “Missouri Charter Schools Stand Out in Latest Study,” Letters to the Editor, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, July 06, 2013.



City Garden Montessori

Innovation in Action

Motivated by an overwhelming desire to excel, charter public schools in St. Louis are demonstrating creativity and innovativeness in the areas of academic techniques, governance, operations, and/or collaborations with other organizations. The schools highlighted below represent the diversity of inspirational strategies being employed to produce quality public schools. These strategies can be replicated in other charter public schools and, most importantly, in traditional public school districts.

City Garden Montessori School

City Garden is a public charter elementary school serving five neighborhoods in South St. Louis City. Operating as a small private preschool since 1995, the school was established as a charter school under the sponsorship of Saint Louis University in 2008, with the following mission: to provide a high-quality education to a diverse student population following the philosophy of Maria Montessori, and to cultivate young people who value and respect themselves, others, the environment, and the world community.

One of the highest-performing charter schools in Missouri since 2010, City Garden recently received a perfect 100 percent score according to MSIP5, DESE's new method of evaluating and accrediting school districts. The school was awarded the “Charter School of Excellence” by the Missouri Charter Public Schools Association in 2012, and is becoming a model for innovation in urban, public education. In 2012, City Garden moved from a church basement into a newly renovated, LEED-certified building that more than doubled its enrollment capacity.

Innovative Practices at City Garden Montessori School— In the School’s Words:

“City Garden’s individualized, Montessori approach has provided the philosophy and framework for City Garden to achieve exceptional academic outcomes, on par with high-performing suburban districts, while meeting children’s holistic needs, rooted in deep respect for the child and his or her individual development. As part of its mission, City Garden actively chooses to take on one of the most pressing challenges our city faces: racial and economic segregation. City Garden is intentionally designed to serve neighborhoods that are economically and racially integrated, and to serve a student population that reflects these demographics.

Through its curriculum, programming, professional development and parent engagement, the school aims to build an institution that is actively anti-racist and anti-bias. City Garden’s neighborhood focus also establishes the school as an anchor for the neighborhoods served. This, combined with the school’s very high level of parent engagement, establishes an environment in which children are thoroughly supported by the adult community surrounding them.”

St. Louis Language Immersion Schools

St. Louis Language Immersion Schools (SLLIS), which first began operating in 2009, is comprised of three different schools— teaching comprehensive language skills in Spanish, French or Chinese. The Schools mission is to “position all children for success in local and global economies through holistic, intellectually inspiring language immersion programs.”



St. Louis Language Immersion Schools

The curriculum follows the International Baccalaureate Organization (IB) that bring together the best and most successful educational models and practices. All three elementary schools implement the Primary Years Programme (PYP) and The International School (opening 2014) will implement the Middle Years Programme (MYP) and Diploma Programme (DP). As such, SLLIS will be the first public school in the U.S. to provide total immersion education and the IB continuum for all students.

The school’s progress has already garnered international attention: In 2013, the Education Office of the Embassy of Spain recognized the Spanish school with the 2012 Academic Excellence in Spanish School of the Year Award. The application for this award was open to all U.S. charter, district and private schools who serve elementary, middle or high school students. The Missouri Commissioner of Education commended the school on its award, and SLLIS Founder and President Rhonda Broussard said: “Our children love speaking Spanish and take great pride in showing the greater community that everyone can be bilingual.”

Innovative Practices at St. Louis Language Immersion Schools—In the School’s Words:

“SLLIS’ primary innovation is to provide these two rigorous international education frameworks to all students in an intentionally diverse school community. Language immersion education and IB have long been implemented in private schools, affluent suburban district schools or gifted and magnet urban programs. SLLIS recognizes the value of bilingualism and IB learning for all students to truly prepare them for the 21st century. In addition to the language and critical thinking skills, SLLIS students learn to question, engage, work and celebrate with peers from different economic, ethnic, linguistic and geographic experiences. Through our active social equity campaign, SLLIS engages students, parents and staff in anti-bias self-study to transform our school community and assist all of us in building a new normal for public education.”

KIPP St. Louis

KIPP St. Louis in 2009 opened its first school, KIPP Inspire Academy (KIA). Today, KIPP Inspire Academy has risen from a single class of 80 fifth graders to a full-capacity school of 330 students in grades five through eight. KIPP St. Louis plans to open its second charter school in 2014. Though many students enter KIPP performing several grade levels below where they should be for their age, the school has made significant progress in closing the achievement gap: the percentage of entering students proficient in math and communications arts has more than doubled between 2010 and 2013, as measured by the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP).

By 2013, KIPP 8th graders far exceeded St. Louis Public Schools and surpassed the state's average for all 8th graders in math and communication arts. St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay praised KIPP's academic achievements: "Improving educational options is a top priority for my administration. I like what I see happening at our KIPP charter school and the beneficial effect it has on the Fox Park neighborhood."

Innovative Practices at KIPP St. Louis—In the School's Words:

"The KIPP model has many programmatic components to assist students on the mountain climb to and through college. There's a focus, for example, on using data to inform instruction. Upon entering KIPP Inspire Academy, students are given a battery of tests to determine their grade level, reading abilities, and mathematical abilities. Teachers then use this data to start targeting instructional programs for individual students.



KIPP Inspire Academy

KIPP teaching interventionists provide small group instruction in reading and math, and additional tutoring for students who need further remediation. Blended learning, online lessons supported by classroom teaching, is being utilized in reading and math, providing individualized and differentiated instruction for all students.

The computer programs used by KIPP also collect and analyze data that provide immediate feedback for students and teachers, empowering our team to make real time instructional adjustments. KIPP St. Louis, our regional network, is also developing a leadership pipeline to select and nurture future KIPP leaders. This pathway offers on-the-job training to outstanding team members to train them in various aspects of leadership."

"Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource."

John F. Kennedy

Gateway to Great Schools

St. Louis: Guiding Principles for Action

The Missouri Charter Public School Association partnered with St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay in 2006 to develop a high-quality charter school growth strategy. The result has been a sector that has grown in scale and quality. Yet thousands of St. Louis children still lack access to quality public schools. *Gateway to Great Schools* will embrace the guiding principles listed below to accelerate the growth of great public schools by developing additional charter schools and by working to provide traditional schools with transformational practices from which they can immediately benefit.

Our Future Depends on Educational Innovation

The great effects of the Information Revolution on the workplace and the job market have been self-evident for decades. The job market of the Information Age will increasingly demand critical-thinking skills, creativity and flexibility, and the capacity to adjust and adapt to change. Our schools will need the same attributes.

In St. Louis today, employers report that many job applicants lack such crucial skills as critical thinking and creativity, among other abilities. According to the State of St. Louis Workforce 2013 survey, “[f]or the first time since the survey began, the shortage of workers with knowledge or skills is the most cited barrier to expanding employment after general economic conditions.”²²

The Information Age’s digital technology may be affecting learning, or the lack thereof, in unexpected ways. Recent studies and surveys of teachers, for example, are revealing that new technologies may be hindering the learning process. A 2012 Pew Research Center survey reported that almost 90 percent of teachers surveyed said that new technologies were resulting in an “easily distracted generation with short attention spans.”²³ Another survey of teachers, by Common Sense Media, had a similar finding: 71 percent of teachers indicated that they

believed that “entertainment media” (including the Internet, texting, iPods, and video games) was damaging attention spans either “a lot” or “somewhat.”²⁴

Other surveys have found a striking difference of views about technology in the classroom between school administrators and students and parents. A 2011 survey of 416,000 students, parents and educators reported that 56 percent of middle school students and 59 percent of high-school students indicated that they would like to use their own personal mobile devices as learning tools in the classroom, with considerable support from parents; however, 52 percent of school administrators said that they do not permit students to use personal mobile devices in class.²⁵

In this uncertain era, fixed, rigid thinking about approaches to teaching and learning will likely be recipes for failure. Teaching techniques may have to evolve, continuously, as new information technologies are introduced and their impact on society is better understood.

It should be apparent by now that the only constant in the Information Age will be change—profound changes in the way we work, in the way learn, in the way we live. Flexible schools that can adapt to these changes, that can foster innovation and creativity while remaining highly accountable for performance results, must no longer be seen as educational alternatives but as educational imperatives.

To successfully adapt to this fast-changing, knowledge-based economy, we must move away from one-size-fits-all, overly rigid bureaucratic school systems to portfolios of flexible, innovative schools that operate in environments that help these schools to thrive. Our rapidly evolving new age will likely tolerate nothing less.

No Patience for Poor Performance

Closing poor performing charter public schools in Missouri has served to strengthen the overall public school sector. Poor performing charter public schools not only do a severe disservice to the students they are supposed to serve, but also undermine community confidence in all public schools.

We must use all means available to replicate success, wherever and however it occurs, and not repeat failure. Closing a poor

22 “State of St. Louis Workforce 2013,” Workforce Solutions Group, St. Louis Community College, p. 2.

23 Matt Richtel, “Technology Changing How Students Learn, Teachers Say,” *The New York Times*, Nov. 1, 2012: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/01/education/technology-is-changing-how-students-learn-teachers-say.html?pagewanted=all>.

24 “Children, Teens, and Entertainment Media:

The View From The Classroom, A National Survey of Teachers About the Role of Entertainment Media in Students’ Academic and Social Development,” Common Sense Media, Fall 2012, p.7.

25 Katrina Schwartz, “Schools and Students Clash Over Use of Technology,” KQED Mind/Shift, May 21, 2012: <http://blogs.kqed.org/mindshift/2012/05/schools-and-students-clash-over-use-of-technology/>.

performing charter public school should be viewed as the logical outcome of that school's failure and as evidence that the charter sector is successfully holding schools accountable.

The closing of a poor-performing charter public school should occur in a methodical, transparent fashion and should not occur in a precipitous, sudden fashion. Failing schools should be regularly informed that failing to meet minimum performance requirements after a designated period of time may result in their closing. Closings must also be done with upmost sensitivity shown to the parties most affected: parents and students, funders and the local community.

School Quality Requires Comprehensive Approach to Fostering Quality

Raising the quality of schools absolutely demands enhancing all things that impinge on the quality of schools—authorization, management, instruction, curriculum and infrastructure. Piecemeal approaches to quality will mean piecemeal progress. Only a sustained comprehensive strategy can work. Of fundamental importance as to whether charter public schools can mature into quality schools is the authorization process from which they originate. The National Association of Charter Schools Authorizers (NACSA), citing findings from the earlier-cited Stanford CREDO study, notes that “charter schools that start strongly tend to remain strong, while schools that stumble badly out of the starting blocks seldom recover and catch up.”²⁶

For charter public schools to start out strong and remain so, they must be authorized in a manner that is explicitly defined as an *ongoing process* not as a one-off event—as a process meticulously crafted to plant both the seeds for school success and to sustain that success over time. Those seeking authorization must, in turn, clearly demonstrate that they have the requisite capacities to develop and maintain quality schools.

At minimum, all charter public school authorizers should adopt and follow the NACSA Index of 12 Essential Practices. And as part of those Essential Practices, all authorizers should:

- publish application timelines and materials;
- have comprehensive, documented criteria for charter application evaluations;
- furnish an annual report to each school on its performance;

- utilize expert panels, which include outside parties, to review charter applications;
- create and disseminate a coherent mission for quality authorizing;
- grant charters five-year terms only; and
- establish clear criteria for renewal and revocation of charters.²⁷

In defining a quality charter public school, the factors weighed should be the extent of increased student achievement over time, demonstrated success in closing identified achievement gaps between population subgroups, attendance and retention rates, high school graduation rates and college attendance rates.

To help provide guidance to charter public school and engender a culture of educational quality, the Missouri Charter Public School Association in 2012 released *Quality Standards for Missouri's Charter Public Schools*. The standards were developed through research and stakeholder input. Quality charter public schools are defined through five standards: substantive academic performance, quality leadership, responsible governance, organizational financing and sustainability, and engaged parents and community.

State and Local Laws Must Be Supportive

State and local laws must be designed to support—not impede—efforts to ensure charter public school quality. Supportive laws can help create environments where creative energy in the schools can be unleashed and innovation can flourish. The Center for Education Reform finds a “direct correlation between strong laws and successful charter schools. According to the Center, “of those states with strong laws, 65 percent show positive achievement gains; of the weak states, only two demonstrate the same level of progress.”²⁸

26 The State of Charter School Authorizing: 2012, " National Association of Charter School Authorizers, p. 12.

27 These address the specific deficiencies of Missouri charter authorizers identified by The National Association of Charter School Authorizers' Index of 12 Essential Practices, 2012, pages 42-43.

28 "Choice & Charter Schools," The Center for Education Reform: <http://www.edreform.com/issues/choice-charter-schools/facts/>.

29 "Choice & Charter Schools," Laws & Legislation, The Center for Education Reform: <http://www.edreform.com/issues/choice-charter-schools/laws-legislation/>.

The Center identifies four criteria for defining such strong laws: *number of schools and applications; multiple charter authorizers; waivers and legal autonomy; and full funding and fiscal autonomy.* According to the Center, “[t]he best charter laws do not limit the number of charter schools that can operate throughout the state. They also do not limit the number of students that can attend charter schools. Poorly written laws set restrictions on the types of charter schools allowed to operate (new starts, conversions, online schools), hindering parents’ ability to choose among numerous public schools.”

Regarding charter authorizers, the Center determines that “[s]tates that permit a number of entities to authorize charter schools, or provide applicants with a binding appeals process, encourage more activity than those that vest authorizing power in a single entity, particularly if that entity is the local school board.” Waivers and legal autonomy, according to the Center, “allow charter schools to innovate in ways that traditional public schools cannot.”

As to fiscal and funding matters, the Center states: “A charter school needs to have control of its own finances to run efficiently. The charter school’s operators know the best way to spend funds, and charter law should reflect this need. Similarly, charter schools, as public schools, are entitled to receive the same amount of funds as all other conventional public schools.”²⁹

Missouri lawmakers took a major step forward in 2012 in strengthening Missouri education law by enacting legislation designed to expand access to charter public schools as well as to hold such schools and their sponsors to higher standards of academic performance and management. Among its provisions, the new law requires charter public school sponsors and the schools to sign performance contracts to be used for measuring the schools’ performance. The law also permits more organizations to become charter public school sponsors, including a newly created statewide Missouri Charter School Sponsor Commission.

The law further allows charter public schools to operate in any unaccredited school district in the state and in those that have been provisionally accredited for up to three years. However, as only a small percentage of Missouri’s school districts are unaccredited or provisionally accredited, which includes St. Louis and Kansas City, the vast majority of Missouri students will continue to lack access to charter public schools.

Charter Public Schools Can Help Traditional Schools

Charter public schools thrive best in regions when traditional public schools provide quality educational options for families. Moreover, the positive attributes that are defining and driving many charter public schools – innovativeness, flexibility, accountability and individual empowerment – are not only key to their success, but also, the keys, to the long-term success of traditional public schools. This is supported by preliminary findings from a new Brookings Institution research study, released in September 2012.

The first part of the Brookings study involved identifying educational approaches found to be most successful in New York City charter public schools. Five approaches were determined to be most successful: “(1) focusing on human capital [largely through training and professional development of teachers], (2) using student data to drive instruction, (3) providing high-dosage tutoring, (4) extending time on task [extending school days and the school year], and (5) establishing a culture of high expectations.”

The authors of the study then initiated projects testing the adoption of these same five approaches at a sample of traditional public schools in Houston and Denver—including, during the 2010-11 school year, “nine of the worst-performing schools in the Houston Independent School District.” According to the study’s 2012 report, “the results thus far suggest student test scores improved dramatically. In fact, the magnitude of this increase was strikingly similar to that seen among the best charters.” The study’s authors conclude that “[a]lthough these experiments are ongoing, preliminary results suggest that those reforms that were shown to boost achievement in charter schools can be successfully implemented in traditional public schools as well.”³⁰

The charter public school sector believes that an open, transparent relationship with traditional school districts can benefit both school types. Charter public schools can be seen as kinds of research & development (R&D) labs for traditional school systems. On-going communications about effective strategies

29 “Choice & Charter Schools,” Laws & Legislation, The Center for Education Reform: <http://www.edreform.com/issues/choice-charter-schools/laws-legislation/>.
30 Roland G. Fryer Jr., “Learning from the Successes and Failures of Charter Schools,” The Hamilton Project, Brookings, September 2012, p. 6.

can provide for a rapid deployment system from charters to traditional schools. Traditional school resources made available to charters can result in cost savings for both groups. And coordinated approaches to school openings and closures would not only benefit the planning within each sector, but could also greatly benefit students, parents, communities and investors.

Recent efforts between the KIPP St. Louis charter public school and the St. Louis Public School Superintendent illustrate the value of these types of relationships. KIPP is sharing best-practices information on such matters as KIPP's success at training skilled principals, and SLPS is providing KIPP with a former SLPS school building.

Charter Public Schools Enhance the Community

Simply the presence of a quality charter public school in a community can enhance the community and the larger city – offering hope for a better future to children, parents and all city residents. When charter public schools begin operations in a neighborhood, particularly one that is economically depressed, an important message is sent to the entire community: precious new resources are being invested in what is most critical to the community's future: *its children*.

KIPP St. Louis charter public school, located in the St. Louis neighborhood of Fox Park, is just one example of the positive impact nationwide of successful charter public schools on low-income communities. Fox Park community residents have noticed healthy changes in the community since the school opened its doors. Mary Wilson, a parent of a KIPP student, and an active member of the Fox Park community for over 25 years, has observed a decrease in drug-related crime that once dominated Fox Park, located just a few blocks away from KIPP. “Since KIPP came, the community has taken back the park. Families use it, KIPP uses it for school activities, and we even hold bible study there in the summer. Before KIPP, there was no way that would have been safe for us to do.”

A *Journal of Housing & Community Development* article from 2003 cited multiple examples of the beneficial community impact of charter public schools. The article, authored by NCB Development Corporation Vice President Robin Halsband, noted, for example, that The LEARN Charter School in Chicago had helped improve the North Lawndale community of which it

is a part. The school partnered with local community developer Cecil Butler who built over 1,600 affordable housing units and a shopping center. “I like to see projects like LEARN [charter school] because [they] keep people in the neighborhood,” observed Butler. “LEARN reinforces community revitalization.” The article also referenced Lawrence Family Development Charter School in Massachusetts:

Lawrence Family Development Charter School has had enough time since its start in 1995 to witness the improvements it helped create in a neighborhood once overrun by prostitutes and drug dealers. On the first day of school eight years ago, the principal and her husband arrived before the doors opened and approached every prostitute, asking each one to leave the school's vicinity. Prostitution has never returned to that corner. Over the years, businesses and homeowners have stayed in the community and renovated their properties. The owner of an auto glass store across the street credited the school for keeping him in the neighborhood.³¹

Parental Empowerment and Community Engagement Are Critical

Numerous studies have demonstrated, and continue to show, the highly constructive effects of parental involvement and community engagement on the education of children. A 2010 University of Chicago assessment of poor performing Chicago elementary schools determined that “parent, school and community ties,” was one of five pivotal factors in improving poor performing schools.³² Another 2010 study, from the University of Leicester and the University of Leeds, found that “parents’ efforts towards their child’s education achievement is crucial—playing a more significant role than that of the school or child.”³³

Perhaps one of the most comprehensive assessments of the impact of involved parents and engaged communities on student achievement was actually *a study of studies*—a review of 51 studies released by the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools in 2002. There was one “overarching conclusion” in the Center’s evaluation of those 51 studies:

³¹ Robin Halsband, “Charter Schools Benefit Community Economic Development,” *Journal of Housing & Community Development*, November/December 2003.

³² “Beyond Random Acts: Family, School and Community Engagement as an Integral Part of Education Reform,” Harvard Family Research Project, National Policy Forum for Family, School & Community Engagement, December 2010, p. 2.

³³ “Parents’ Effort Key to Child’s Educational Performance,” *Science Daily*, November 5, 2010: <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/10/101029121554.htm>.

Taken as a whole, these studies found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including improved academic achievement. This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students at all ages. Although there is less research on the effects of community involvement, it also suggests benefits for schools, families, and students, including improved achievement and behavior. Among the studies reviewed here, the benefits for students include:

- higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests or rating scales,
- enrollment in more challenging academic programs,
- more classes passed and credits earned,
- better attendance,
- improved behavior at home and at school, and
- better social skills and adaptation to school.³⁴

We should aim to maximize and incentivize parental involvement in the schooling processes, not restrict or diminish it. Maximizing such parental involvement requires, at minimum, that parents be empowered with options for student enrollment in quality schools. Show-Me Institute Education Policy Analyst James Shuls, PhD, stresses that when parents can choose from a variety of educational providers, they “will be more engaged and satisfied with their child’s school and students have the potential to thrive.”

The quality of schooling—or the lack thereof—also substantially affects the well-being of the entire community. Any comprehensive strategy to improving school quality must induce a deeper and broader community engagement—including the children themselves, parents, businesses and all community residents.

Best Practices Must Be Shared; Quality Schools Should Be Replicated

Equality of access to quality schools necessitates that deficient schools can easily learn best practices from more successful schools. Whenever possible, successes must be shared so that all schools can quickly replicate what works.

In this period of broad changes, it will be difficult for any community or any school district, by themselves, to keep abreast of all changes. Thus, it will be critical for educators, as a matter of course, to share widely with colleagues any newly collected

knowledge of new technologies and other learning innovations and of their potential effects on the education process.

StudentsFirst, a national grassroots education reform organization, identifies three reasons for why collaboration between traditional and charter public schools are “transformational policy:”

1. They break down barriers between systems and allow public charter schools and traditional district schools to work together to put students first.
2. They create a powerful alliance between district and public charter schools in support of stronger educational opportunities.
3. They make school systems more equitable.³⁵

Fortunately, to the betterment of the entire educational system, collaboration and the sharing of best practices, among charter public schools and between charters and traditional public schools, appear to be on the rise across the nation. The Massachusetts Department of Education, for example, has created a database of best practices where traditional public schools and charter public schools can share information.

Rhode Island’s Central Falls School District has been partnering since 2007 with the Learning Community charter public school on improving reading skills. The partnership has produced remarkable results, as described by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform:

At the pilot school, 86 percent of the participating students were reading at or above the national benchmark after six months. Based on that early success, the initiative was expanded district-wide in 2009-10 to include every K-2 classroom in every elementary school. Between October and June, district-wide performance increased 30 points, a 54 percent gain.³⁶

³⁴ “A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement,” Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002, p. 24.

³⁵ “Creating Collaborative Partnerships Between District and Public Charter Schools,” StudentsFirst, 2012:

http://edref.3cdn.net/adbd2c1e051fa0ec30_zzm6b9xb3.pdf.

³⁶ Ellen Foley, “A Rare Charter and Public School District Collaboration Benefits Young Readers,” Annenberg Institute for School Reform, January 5, 2012: <http://annenberginstitute.org/commentary/2012/01/rare-charter-and-public-school-district-collaboration-benefits-young-readers>.

The National Charter School Resource Center, which began in 2009 and is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, disseminates important information about successful practices in charter schools. They review the highest quality resources from top researchers and practitioners on a regular basis and then make that information available on their Web site. They also issue monthly newsletters, provide technical assistance and offer webinars.

To help engender successful collaboration between charter public schools and traditional public schools, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in December 2012 awarded \$25 million in grants to seven cities: Boston, Denver, Hartford, New Orleans, New York City, Philadelphia and Spring Branch, TX.³⁷

According to StudentsFirst, 16 cities have partnerships between district public schools and charter public schools that address such critical areas as best-practices sharing; expanding/replicating high-performing charter public schools; providing charters with equal funding and facilities access; sharing data systems; and revitalizing or closing poor-performing schools.³⁸

Information technology, which some educators understandably perceive, in some cases, as potentially disruptive to teaching, also offers opportunities to greatly facilitate the sharing of best practices on keeping apace of Information Age-driven changes. Most obviously, the Internet's social media allows for frequent academic communication and collaboration, and students, at least, seem to see its collaborative value.

Examining the use of social media in schools, education organization Project Tomorrow surveyed over 416,000 K-12 students, parents and educators in 2011. Among its significant findings: Students, in particular, have heightened aspirations for more effectively leveraging social learning tools to enhance their engagement in the learning process, access more interesting and relevant educational content, tap into additional opportunities for collaboration with peers, advisors and mentors and overall, increase their academic productivity.³⁹

Harnessing the Internet, the eMints program, which began in Missouri in 1999, helps teachers integrate technology into their classrooms through collaborative learning groups. Missouri also participates in the federally funded e-Learning for Educators program, which taps into the expertise



of Missouri educators to develop online professional development courses for teachers. These programs should be supported, if not expanded.

Missouri should also assess neighbor Tennessee's STEM Innovation Network, a partnership between Battelle Memorial Institute and the Tennessee Department of Education. This program is designed to engender learning and the sharing of best practices statewide in the critical areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). To help achieve these goals, five "platform schools," serving as "laboratories of innovation" have been created throughout the state. These schools can "put technology in the hands of students on day one, design classrooms with moveable tables and walls to encourage student collaboration, and develop cross-curricular activities to incorporate all subjects into a new way of teaching and learning."⁴⁰

37 Motoko Rich, "Grants Back Public-Charter Cooperation," *The New York Times*, December 5, 2012: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/05/education/gates-foundation-gives-25-million-to-charter-school-collaboration.html>

38 StudentsFirst, 2012, op.cit.

39 "Defining the Emerging Role of Social Learning Tools to Connect Students, Parents and Educators, A Special White Paper based upon the Speak Up 2011 National Findings," Project Tomorrow: <http://www.schoolwires.com/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&ModuleInstanceID=174&ViewID=E870C439-A836-49C9-B574-72A6A1F8213F&RenderLoc=o&Flex-DataID=1117&PageID=210>

40 "Statewide Network Enables Sharing of Best Practices," Tennessee STEM Innovation Network, August 17, 2012: <http://thetsin.org/news/2012/statewide-network-enables-sharing-of-best-practices/>.

Barriers to Quality Charter Public Schools in St. Louis

Multiple barriers still hinder efforts to foster quality charter public schools in St. Louis:

Funding & Access to Quality Facilities

Most states, including Missouri, do not provide funding for the facilities of charter public schools. Public charter schools, unlike traditional public schools, lack bonding authority. To issue bonds, charter public schools must solicit the help of such financing authorities as the St. Louis Industrial Authority or the Missouri Health and Educational Facilities Authority. This, naturally, can have adverse consequences for the financial, and overall, stability of charter public schools.

A National Alliance for Public Charter School report complains that “every dollar spent on monthly rent, every dollar that pays off a mortgage or renovation loan, is a dollar that could be spent on instruction.”⁴¹ Another National Alliance for Public Charter Schools study, underwritten by the Kauffman Foundation, observes that the “lack of a dedicated facilities-funding stream not only requires charter schools to spend operating dollars on building needs; it also creates a disincentive for potential lenders to participate in the facilities market.”⁴²

The Alliance also records that Missouri charter public schools “are dramatically underfunded compared to other public schools—a per-pupil gap of 26 percent in Kansas City and 35 percent in St. Louis.”⁴³ Ensuring that all Missouri students have equal access to quality public schools will be an unobtainable goal with severely unequal funding streams. We urge all Missouri policymakers to work diligently to close this funding gap.

A sizeable barrier to helping successful charter public schools expand and replicate to serve more families is affordable access to school facilities. According to a 2012 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools survey, 56 percent of charter public schools surveyed indicated that they will not have adequate space for student enrollment in five years.⁴⁴

Many vacant school buildings (36) remain in St. Louis that could be used by charter public schools desperately needing facilities. Although empty school buildings place an unnecessary financial burden on school districts and taxpayers, fully financed acquisition bids from high-performing charter public schools have often been rejected.



Small, high-performing charter public schools are challenged by exorbitant prices for facilities that require significant rehabilitation. Lengthy processes associated with acquiring vacant school buildings—even for charter schools able to meet school district’s asking price—can also force year-long delays in opening schools, with some deals falling apart altogether. In a commendable step forward, the St. Louis Public School District agreed in 2013 to a partnership with KIPP St. Louis charter public school that allows the school to utilize the vacant Mitchell School for free. This approach should be emulated widely in the future.

More comprehensive actions are still nonetheless needed. The state should enact legislation that would require all Missouri school districts to make available for use by any public school—free of any rent or charge—school buildings that have been vacant or unused for classroom instruction for two consecutive school years.

41 “Making Room for New Public Schools: How Innovative School Districts are Learning to Share Public Education Facilities with Charter Schools,” National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, April 2011, p. 5.

42 “Delivering on the Promise: How Missouri Can Grow Excellent, Accountable Public Charter Schools,” National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, February 2011, p.2.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

44 “National Waitlist Figures for Public Charter Schools Surpass 600,000 Students,” press release, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, June 12, 2012: <http://www.publiccharters.org/PressReleasePublic/?id=781>.

Trained Educators

Trained educators, whether they are teachers or schools administrators, are a fundamental prerequisite to a school's success. The pool of skilled teachers and other educators remains a barrier to expansion of Missouri public charter schools, as well as an impediment to improved performance of all public schools. The Missouri Mathematics and Science Coalition, for example, warns that "Missouri is facing a severe shortage of [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] educators in our public schools."⁴⁵

The aforementioned 2011 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools study highlighted the need for the Missouri public charter sector "to build its human capital, especially that unique blend of academic savvy and business skills that characterize the most effective charter school leaders." Among other actions, the study urges inducing greater involvement of the higher-education community:

Since Missouri universities already have unusually deep connections to the state's charter movement, it would make sense for them to consider creating a preparation program drawing on the best practices of these innovative models. Given the many sources from which effective charter leaders emerge, the best approach would be modular, providing on-demand training in such matters as accounting and contract law for a candidate who's come up from the ranks of public school teachers, and different coursework to ground the non-traditional candidate in oversight of curriculum, assessment, and teacher evaluation. While designed for charter school leaders, such a program could [be] attractive for school leaders in Missouri's traditional systems as well.⁴⁶

The study also recommends that charter public schools endeavor to enhance their boards:

When charter schools fail, the board's fingerprints (or lack thereof) can usually be found. But finding a group of skilled and experienced leaders who can sustain a growing charter school sector through service on trustee boards is no mean feat, and may be beyond the reach of individual schools. For this reason, the state's business community should help identify a pool of trusted individuals able to devote their time and energy to shaping great charter schools.⁴⁷

Philanthropic and Business Support

As indicated, Missouri charter public schools operate at a funding disadvantage relative to traditional public schools. And precisely because Missouri charter public schools do not receive dedicated public funding for facilities, and are forced to use daily operating monies for facilities' costs, they are more likely to need greater support from the philanthropic and business communities.

The Philanthropy Roundtable in 2009 noted the need for more donors for public charter schools:

Today more than ever, the charter sector needs an influx of small and mid-sized funders. Smart investments, even if modest, can be leveraged to produce big results. There is a widespread feeling among charter-sector donors that additional funders must be brought into the charter sector. No one can quantify precisely what it would cost to build the sector from its current size to its potential scale, but the price-tag would surely reach into the tens—perhaps even hundreds—of billions of dollars. Current donors see this need at all levels of the sector, from national organizations needing support for scaled-up efforts to individual schools just starting out.⁴⁸

Considering their highly documented challenges in securing new employees with the requisite work skills, the business community should deem supporting charter public schools as something of bottom-line importance—as their future bottom lines might very well be at stake.

One area that could benefit greatly from philanthropic and business support is charter-school incubation, which involves identifying and cultivating the people, resources and capabilities necessary to operate quality charter public schools. The nation's largest charter incubator, Building Excellent Schools, has achieved impressive success, though the scale of its national impact is still relatively modest (50 schools in 12 states and

45 "Who are we?," Missouri Mathematics and Science Coalition: <http://www.momathandscience.com/mx/hm.asp?id=AboutUs>.

46 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, February 2011, op. cit., p. 40.

47 *Ibid.*

48 "Investing in Charter Schools, A Guide for Donors," Philanthropy Roundtable, April 2009, p. 40.

DC). BES identifies and trains charter school founders, helps them run their schools, and then aims to replicate the schools' success in other schools. Their work, and that of other charter incubators, can serve as models for the philanthropic and business sectors to back.

Politics

It was heartening that Missouri state lawmakers reached consensus last year on major education reform legislation. However, much more public policy work remains to achieve the goal of a quality education for all Missouri students. In Missouri, as in other states, and certainly in our nation's capital, political and ideological divisions still create roadblocks to education reform.

With America now challenged by unparalleled economic competition, the goal of quality education for all children has truly become an issue of national economic security. Yet although the stakes may be high, the politics too frequently sink low. The partisan, factional and ideological divisions that impede progress toward education reform must now stop

at the school-house door. It must be something that bridges divides, not widens them; something that forges substantive consensus not aggravates superficial conflicts.

Reasonable Growth Measures

Another key barrier to quality charter public schools is having a set of reasonable growth measures as a benchmark for schools to meet. Currently, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is basing assessment of charter public schools on status reports like the annual Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores and the department's Annual Performance Report (APR) scores.

While some of these metrics have growth components, most of the metrics are snapshots at a moment in time. Furthermore, DESE and the State Board of Education are using this data for single schools in comparison with the entire districts where the schools reside. Charter schools have different grade-level configurations than an entire K-12 district and should be compared with peer grades in peer schools.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela

Working for Great Schools in St. Louis: An Accelerating Effort

Ensuring that all St. Louis students have access to great schools is not a distant dream, but—as it should be—an accelerating effort, involving many hard-working people and organizations. Below are examples of this ongoing activity:

Funding and Staffing Statewide Charter Commission

Missouri enacted new legislation in 2012 that provides for limited expansion of charter public schools beyond St. Louis and Kansas City while also requiring increased accountability from charter public school sponsors. To help induce quality education outcomes, under the new law, charter public schools are now required to sign performance contracts with their sponsors.

The new law also permits more organizations to become charter public school sponsors, including a newly created Missouri Charter School Sponsor Commission. The new Commission, whose only purpose is to sponsor new charter public schools, is to be composed of nine members, appointed by the Governor, with the approval of the state Senate. Oversight of charter public school sponsors remains the responsibility of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Missouri State Board of Education.

In the spring of 2013, the Missouri Legislature approved \$300,000 for the Commission's operations. Slates of potential appointments to the Commission have also been provided to Governor Nixon for final submission to the legislature. As the Missouri Charter Public School Association stressed, "[q]uick establishment of the Commission as a quality charter school sponsor would help continue to grow Missouri's charter school sector as an option for the state's public school students."

Mayor Slay's Goal of 20 New Quality Charter Public Schools

St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay, as part of his Sustainability Plan, has called for opening 20 additional quality public charter schools in the city over the next five years. Three new charter public schools have opened this school year: Lafayette Preparatory Academy, Gateway Science Academy South and EAGLE Preparatory Academy. Eighteen such schools have opened since 2006 when the Mayor first highlighted the need for more quality charter schools in St. Louis.

In addition to opening new and innovative public charter schools, the Mayor is urging the replication of existing high-performing schools so that other families can access quality public schools in their neighborhoods. "Providing quality educational choices is the number one challenge facing the City of St. Louis," said Mayor Slay. "Too many of our children are in substandard schools, and too many of our families are forced to leave neighborhoods they love to find good schools for their children."⁴⁹

MCPSA Charter Start Program

The MCPSA Charter Start program is a comprehensive and targeted training program offering strategic, technical and hands-on assistance to those interested in starting high-quality charter public schools in Missouri. More specifically, Charter Start supports potential charter school founders as they move through the application process (specific to the laws and rules of Missouri). The program works to ensure that before any application is submitted to a potential sponsor and the state, it is complete and aligned with the MCPSA Quality Standards for Charter Schools, thereby allowing MCPSA to provide a Letter of Readiness.

The MCPSA Letter of Readiness provides assurance to any potential sponsor that the application is one of quality and the capacity exists for the founding group to open, operate, and sustain a high-quality school. Charter Start is designed to support and guide participants at all stages, from conception through opening.

This program serves as an initial gatekeeper for quality charter public schools opening in Missouri. MCPSA works with applicants until it feels that they have a quality charter school application to move forward. Those who are not demonstrating quality and capacity are counseled into helping the public education sector in other ways.

With the legislation passed in 2012 expanding charter public schools outside of St. Louis and Kansas City, MCPSA has begun receiving calls from across the state inquiring about opening a charter public school in their community. MCPSA is working with these groups and seeking funding to expand Charter Start outside of Kansas City and St. Louis to serve these interested parties.

⁴⁹ "3 New Charter Public Schools," press release, MayorSlay.com, April 21, 2011: <http://www.mayorslay.com/news/pressrelease.php?prID=1321>.

MCPSA is also conducting in depth research on unaccredited, provisionally accredited and large population districts for a targeted educational campaign on charter public schools and how they can provide quality educational options in those communities.

Missouri Parent Academy

The Parent Academy, created by the Children’s Education Alliance of Missouri (CEAM), builds a network of informed, engaged and organized parents around the state that are knowledgeable about education policy. Parent Academy graduates are parents that are engaged in policy change and are equipped to communicate with other parents, school and elected officials and the media to create better education policy state-wide. Parent Academy is a multi-part program that provides parents with training in public policy, communications and organizing.

Parents who complete Parent Academy trainings will join other CEAM supporters from across the state as part of a CEAM action network. Parent Academy equips parents

to better understand how education policy impacts their children’s chances of accessing a high quality education and to become more effective advocates for their own children and education policy change.

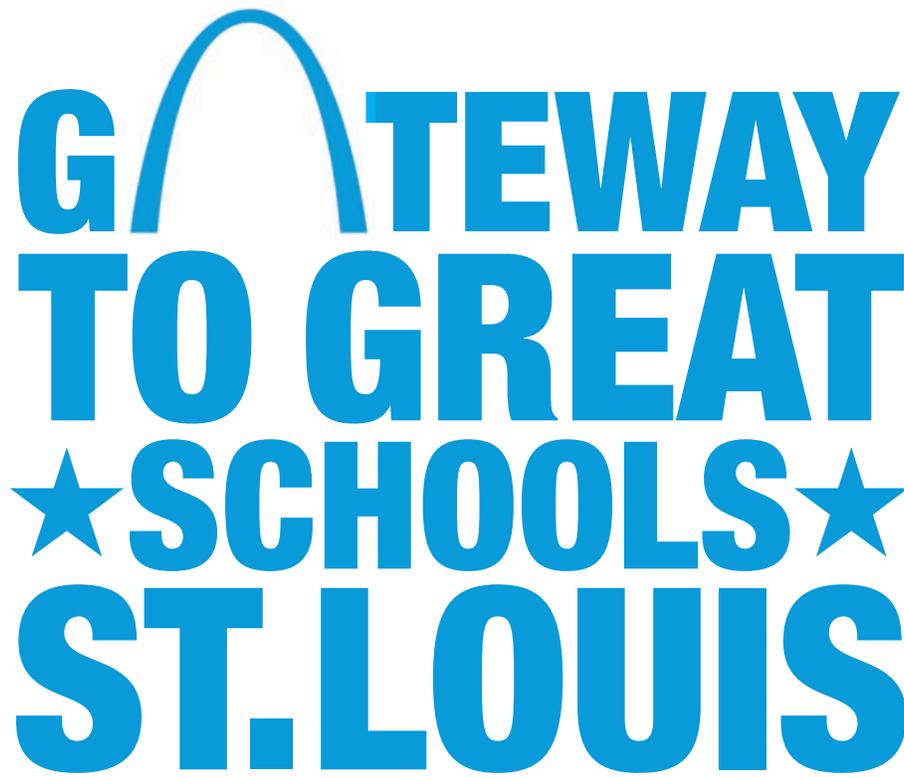
IFF School Facilities Fund

Community development financial institution (CDFI) IFF is creating the IFF School Facilities Fund to address the challenge of facilities financing and development during a charter public school’s initial years. New or expanding charter public schools typically take three to five years to achieve full enrollment and operational stability.

The Fund is an estate lease-to-own program for high performing charter public schools in which IFF will acquire, develop and finance the school facilities, and enter into leases with the schools.

The schools will then purchase the facility from IFF when they have reached full enrollment and operational stability.



The logo features the Gateway Arch as a stylized 'G' at the start of the word 'GATEWAY'. The text 'GATEWAY TO GREAT SCHOOLS' is in a bold, blue, sans-serif font, with two blue stars on either side of 'SCHOOLS'. Below this, 'ST. LOUIS' is written in a larger, bold, blue, sans-serif font. The entire logo is enclosed in a blue rectangular border.

**GATEWAY
TO GREAT
★SCHOOLS★
ST. LOUIS**

