

Strategic Plan for Kansas City, MO February 2004

Background:

The charter school movement in Kansas City, MO has reached a critical point, with roughly 17percent of the total public school population attending charter schools. Despite the seemingly robust market-share within the city, charter schools are still fighting for equity. Charter operators are constantly fighting the district to receive 100 percent of the per pupil allotment to which they are legally entitled. **[Autumn: Place \$\$ intel in this section].**

Charter school leaders in Kansas City have begun to mobilize themselves; and with ongoing guidance from The Center for Education Reform, will develop a plan to ensure the following:

- Equitable funding (including facilities assistance)
- Rapid growth of high quality charter schools - which includes a strong emphasis on improving existing schools
- Strengthening the movement's political muscle, and
- Enhanced awareness of charter schools.

CER envisions a 2-pronged approach for improving the policy environment for charter schools in Kansas City.

Part I: Develop a political advocacy campaign to push for legislation that will clarify the funding provisions as was detailed in the original law created in 1998. Part of this effort will require CER to bring key Kansas City charter leaders, business leaders, community leaders, and policymakers together to form a planning committee. The committee will be tasked to define and develop a strategic plan, including message development and grassroots organizing. Part I can be considered the "short-term goal" for these purposes. CER will use programs such as Media Training and Parent Training to be built-in to the advocacy campaign.

Part II: Part II is the long-term goal: to build an association. The movement in Missouri has been driven by a small number of independent support groups. While well intentioned, they have not worked together in a coherent or strategic way. Therefore, an urgent and pressing need exists for an organization created to serve the direct interests of the Kansas City schools. CER will use the programs we've used in five other states (Blueprint and Stages of Development document) to assist in the development of an effective infrastructure that is created to serve the direct needs of Kansas City charter schools.

NOTE: If Part I fails, the committee might have to redefine its mission and pursue other avenues, such as litigation.

- Priorities:
 - Legislative agenda (authorizer funding, expand geographic boundaries for charter schools)
 - Fix funding problem through Board of Fund Commissioners
- Current board: ten charter school operators and charter school board members

Legislative Briefings: Cheri & Kirk met with the following legislators after the senate bill was filed:

- Senator Loudon
- Ed Robb
- Scott Muschaney
- Rodney Hubbard
- Peter Kinder
- Charlie Wheeler
- Sherman Parker (St. Louis)
- Jane Cunningham
- Gary Nodler
- Maynard Wallace

Trying to work with the Black Caucus

- Craig Bland (opposed)
- Yvonne Wilson (supportive)
- Sharon Sanders-Brooks (not supportive)

Strengths/Opportunities that Exist within the movement:

- Charter schools collectively feel empowered to come together and form a group
- High degree of commitment
- Charter schools are showing tremendous progress with the students they serve
- Strong referral system among charter schools and the families they serve
- Washington University is interested in being a sponsor
- Collaboration between KC university sponsors and charter schools is strong

Weaknesses/Challenges:

- Mixed achievement data (when using MAP as the only measure)
- Evaluations that are public are not always accurate, they don't use good data
- University of Missouri St. Louis and University of Missouri Rolla have not shown a strong commitment to sponsoring or supporting charter schools
- The distance between KC and St. Louis adds to the challenges of coming together as a state-wide organization
- Language barriers among parents and charter school leaders (difficult to inform parents, get their support when very few speak English)
- Partisan politics
- Audits/paperwork required

6 charter schools in Kansas City scored above the district average in reading on the MAP in 2005 (Missouri Assessment Program). *Kansas City Star*, 9/14/05. See research database for full listing of statistics.