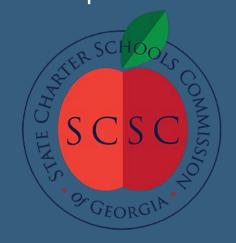
Starting Strong: Best Practices in Starting a Charter School

Peabody College Vanderbilt University

Commissioned by State Charter Schools Commission of Georgia

Lauren Holcomb

Director of Organizational and Resource Development



Background

- Research Partners:
 - SCSC and Peabody College at Vanderbilt University
- Purpose of Study:
 - 1. to identify academic and operational practices commonly employed by high performing <u>start-up</u> charter schools, and
 - 2. to share these best practices with petitioning groups, existing schools, and other external stakeholders.

Methodology

- Three main sources of data:
- 1. Existing literature on best practices
- 2. Interviews with charter support organizations
- 3. Interviews with founders of <u>successful</u> charter schools in Georgia*, Tennessee, and Florida

Methodology

- Successful = Academically Successful
 - Schools demonstrated positive student achievement gains
- Several state charter schools included among Georgia schools:
- 1. Fulton Leadership Academy
- 2. Ivy Preparatory Academy Gwinnett
- 3. Pataula Charter Academy

Findings

- 11 domains of best practices that represent important aspects of operating a high-achieving charter school.
 - MISSION
 - GOVERNANCE
 - LEADERSHIP and CULTURE
 - 4. ACADEMIC PROGRAM
 - 5. BUSINESS OPERATIONS
 - 6. RESOURCE ALLOCATION
 - 7. FACILITIES
 - 8. TALENT MANAGEMENT
 - EXTERNAL RELATIONS
 - 10. ACCOUNTABILITY
 - RECRUITMENT

1. Focus on the MISSION

- Every decision should lead back to fulfilling the mission
- Growing slowly helps to perfect the mission

2. Establish Effective *GOVERNANCE*

- Select board members who agree with the mission and have time to start a school.
- Select board members who can offer vital expertise and resources on all operational areas – and have the time.
- Clarify the board's role in governance and not management – of the school.

3. Establish Effective <u>LEADERSHIP AND</u> <u>CULTURE</u>

- Skills for starting a charter school aren't learned in a book and there are many definitions of an effective leader.
- Leaders will be measured and judged by the work of those they hire; so hire well and treat employees well.

4. Develop the <u>ACADEMIC PROGRAM</u>

- Academic programs should go hand in hand with the mission of a charter school.
- High expectations and rigorous materials help charters get off to a strong start.
- Balance purchasing existing programs and creating all materials in-house.

5. Managing <u>BUSINESS OPERATIONS</u>

- Effective business operations are vital and should be carefully planned
- Verification of finances requires multiple people.
- Utilize the board's expertise on operations and finance.
- Be strategic about contracting out services

6. Acquiring and Allocating *RESOURCES*

- Federal and state grants can be worth the time investment.
- Community foundations, fundraisers and corporate sponsors are other ways to obtain resources.
- Maintain flexibility and a reserve fund.

7. Acquiring *FACILITIES*

- Location matters.
- Use board members, nonprofits and grants to search for and acquire facilities.
- Think outside the box.
- The first building doesn't have to be the permanent location.

8. Managing *TALENT*

- Use the school's mission and vision to attract teachers.
- Compensation should be competitive with the district.
- Recruit from everywhere and think about alternative teaching programs.
- Expect staff turnover.
- Multi-talented people can fill multiple roles.

9. Managing *EXTERNAL RELATIONS*

- Be transparent and clear with parents at all times.
- When dealing with parents, schools are in the business of customer service.
- Emphasize local community partnerships.

10. Performance Monitoring and *ACCOUNTABILITY*

- Accountability to the charter authorizers and state testing set the bar externally.
- Use interim assessments to monitor progress internally.

11. Recruiting <u>STUDENTS</u>

- Stay true to the mission
- Pound the pavement
- Take a stance on transportation

How is the SCSC using this information?

- Sharing with petitioning groups, existing school, external stakeholders.
- Incorporating best practices into SCSC petition application and other processes as applicable.

Conclusion

Starting Strong: Best Practices in Starting a Charter School

Available on the SCSC Website:

https://scsc.georgia.gov/sites/scsc.georgia.gov/files/related_files/site_page/Starting_Strong_final.pdf