



INNOVATIONS
IN
EDUCATION



Successful Charter Schools

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT



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Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the third publication in the Innovations in Education series: *Successful Charter Schools*. This series, published by my Department's Office of Innovation and Improvement, identifies concrete, real-world examples of innovations flourishing throughout this great land in six important areas: public school choice, supplemental educational services, charter schools, magnet schools, alternative teacher certification, and school leadership.

Twelve years after the first charter school was launched, the charter school movement is now entering its adolescence. Like many pre-teens, it's had its share of growing pains, but I am confident that it is about to hit a growth spurt. That is because charter schools are enormously popular with their primary clients—parents and students—and because they are starting to show promising results in terms of student achievement. The basic tenets of charter schools—give them room to be innovative, hold them accountable for results, and let parents decide if they meet the needs of their children—are perfectly aligned with the historic No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which also focuses on accountability for results in return for more flexibility, and with providing more options for parents than ever before.

One of the promises of charter schools is that they can serve as laboratories of innovation—they can be public education's "R&D" arm. Because they have greater autonomy than traditional public schools, and since they tend to attract pioneering educators, they can try out new approaches to education that, if proven effective, can be transplanted back into the larger public education system. It is in this spirit that we highlight eight of the most successful charter schools in the United States.

These schools were chosen after an exhaustive national search. They were primarily selected because they have demonstrated success over time in boosting student achievement. Surely many more charter schools could have been identified, and these should not be considered "the best" charter schools in the nation. Nevertheless, they are among the best, and each has much to teach other charter schools—and traditional public schools—about teaching and learning, management strategies, staff development, and many other topics.

One of the most striking features of these schools is their diversity. While they are all producing impressive results—and meeting the "Adequate Yearly Progress" requirements of NCLB—they span the educational spectrum. Some are fairly traditional, with a laser-like focus on the basics. Others are much more open-ended and "progressive," with a more flexible approach to learning. None of these schools is a "testing factory," a stripped down place with no art, music, or time for community. This is an important point, because critics of NCLB—and of standards, testing, and accountability more generally—have voiced concerns that a focus on student achievement will lead schools to do nothing but teach reading and math. These eight schools demonstrate the fallacy of that argument. Excellent schools have always focused on delivering a well-rounded education. Certainly that's the kind of education the children of our nation's elite have always enjoyed, and it's the kind of education all of our children deserve.

I congratulate the schools highlighted herein and urge all educators to consider whether the practices described can help your school serve its students better. Let me finish by quoting one of the slogans of the KIPP Academy Houston—which I am proud to have helped get off the ground: "If there's a better way, we find it." What a wonderful outlook for our entire public education system—and what a fitting description of the ethos of charter schools.

Rod Paige, U.S. Secretary of Education
June 2004



Introduction



The promise charter schools hold for public school innovation and reform lies in an unprecedented combination of freedom and accountability. Underwritten with public funds but run independently, charter schools are free from a range of state laws and district policies stipulating what and how they teach, where they can spend their money, and who they can hire and fire. In return, they are held strictly accountable for their academic and financial performance. To represent what such flexibility and accountability look like in practice, this guide provides a glimpse into the inner workings of eight American charter schools whose freedom to experiment is raising the level of student learning.

Free to experiment how? To lengthen the school day, mix grades, require dress codes, put teachers on their school boards, double up instruction in core subject areas like math or reading, make parents genuine partners in family-style school cultures, adopt any instructional practice that will help achieve their missions—free, in short, to do whatever it takes to build the skills, knowledge, and character traits their students need to succeed in today's world.

By allowing citizens to start new public schools with this kind of autonomy, making them available tuition-free to any student, and holding them accountable for results and family satisfaction, proponents hope that this new mix of choice and accountability will not only provide students stronger learning programs than local alternatives, but will also stimulate improvement of the existing public education system. With charter schools, it is accountability that makes freedom promising. No charter is permanent; it must be renewed—or revoked—at regular intervals. Continued funding, which is tied to student enrollment, also depends on

educational results. “Deliver a quality product,” as Finn et al. put it, “or you won’t have students.”¹

In this guide we take a look at what contributes to a “quality product” as well as how eight particular charter schools (see figure 1) help their students achieve success.

The first charter school legislation was passed in Minnesota in 1991, and as of January 2004, there were 2,996 charter schools operating in the United States.² Across 40 states and the District of Columbia, about 750,000 students take part in this form of public education under varying charter laws.³

Parents choose to enroll their children in charter schools, usually entering a lottery for selection when schools are oversubscribed. The schools are free to determine their own governing structures, which include parents and teachers as active members. In all these configurations, autonomy gives charter schools the flexibility to allocate their budgets; hire staff; and create educational

programs with curriculum, pedagogy, organizational structures, and ways of involving parents and community members that may not be typical of their neighboring schools. In this way charter schools can serve as laboratories, developing new educational practices that can be later replicated on a broader scale. This freedom to experiment is one reason charter schools have been called "education's best hope."⁴

What does this promise look like in action? For this guide, a number of charter schools that are considered successful were carefully examined. The schools were selected first on the basis of student performance: They met 2003 Adequate Yearly Progress goals for their states and demonstrated three years of student achievement growth on standardized tests. They were also selected to represent a range of school types, serving differing student populations and various grade configurations. From over 250 schools nominated, many demonstrated that they were doing an excellent job of educating urban students who have been largely underserved in traditional public schools. A second set of charter schools seem to be meeting the demands of parents in more affluent communities who want an alternative to the local public school program. Very small schools—charter schools in rural areas, virtual technology schools, and home-schooling charter schools—were generally not eligible for consideration in this report because their size made it difficult to meet the testing criteria for participation. Ultimately, eight schools were selected for site visits. While not intended to represent "the best" charter schools in the country, they do provide a window into how autonomy, flexibility, and accountability can work to transform public education. Each school visit took place over one or two days, with observers visiting classes, collecting

FIGURE 1. Demographics of Profiled Charter Schools

School and Location	Year First Chartered and Authorizer	Grades	Enrollment
The Arts and Technology Academy Public Charter School Washington, D.C.	1998 Special charter school board	Pre-K-6	615
BASIS School, Inc. Tucson, Ariz.	1998 State	5-12	246
Community of Peace Academy St. Paul, Minn.	1995 Local district	K-12	546
KIPP Academy Houston Houston, Texas	1994 State	5-8	346
Oglethorpe Charter School Savannah, Ga.	1998 Local district	6-8	319
Ralph A. Gates Elementary School Lake Forest, Calif. (Los Angeles Basin)	1999 Local district	K-6	850
Roxbury Preparatory Charter School Boston, Mass.	1999 State	6-8	180
The School of Arts and Sciences Tallahassee, Fla.	1999 Local district	K-8	226

Student Ethnicity	English Learners	Subsidized Meals	Special Needs	Per Pupil Spending	Distinctive Programs and Features
98% Afr. Am. 2% Other	0%	97%	7%	\$8,650	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic skills plus arts Extended day/year Mosaica national management affiliation
74% White 12% Hispanic 4% Afr. Am. 10% Asian Am.	1%	Not applicable	1%	\$5,339	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European academic tradition 12 of 30 courses qualify as Advanced Placement Only Arizona school to have scores above the 90th percentile on math SAT 9 in all grades
70% Hmong 20% Afr. Am. 10% Hispanic, Eritrian, White, Vietnamese, & Am. Indian	75%	80%	10%	\$10,355	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-violent community focus and award-winning character education program High levels of support for English language learners Looping to build relationships and support
77% Hispanic 21% Afr. Am. 2% Asian Am. & White	8%	86%	5%	\$8,670	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KIPP, Inc. national college prep program Extended day/year 85% of students enter college; 94% are first-generation college students
51% White 38% Afr. Am. 4% Asian Am. 3% Hispanic 4% Other	0%	20%	5%	\$6,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent contract to donate 20 hours a year Core Knowledge curriculum Character education focus
72% Hispanic 22% White 2% Asian Am. 2% Filipino 1% Afr. Am. 1% Multi-racial	44%	63%	5%	\$5,367	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School facility houses two-way Spanish-English immersion charter program for 43% of students Multiple language programs during and after school for students and parents Regrouping across classes and grades for reading and math
80% Afr. Am. 20% Hispanic	0%	56%	7%	\$12,910	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 66% of students enter below grade level; 100% continue in college prep high schools Mandated homework support, Saturday school, summer school for poor grades Curriculum developed by staff based on student performance on school comprehensive exams
62% White 22% Afr. Am. 6% Hispanic 3% Asian Am. 7% Multi-racial	2%	19%	22%	\$5,750	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-age classrooms, looping Developmental, project-based approach No grades; student portfolios

FIGURE 2. Framework for Site Analysis

I. Mission

- » Is the school's mission clear, concise, and achievable?
- » Can the whole school community articulate the school's mission, expectations of students and faculty, the school's educational program, and the school's values?
- » In what ways does the school's mission guide educational practice and improvement over time?

II. School Operations and Educational Program

- » What is innovative about the school's structure and programs?
- » How does the school meet the needs of its student population?
- » How is the school using data to influence the curriculum, the instructional program, interventions for students, and improvements in the program over time?
- » How has the school built organizational capacity, including professional development for staff?
- » How has the school achieved and maintained financial stability?

III. Stakeholders

- » How does the school ensure that all stakeholders have shared expectations?
- » How does the school attract parents and respond to their input?
- » What community partnerships contribute to the school's success?

IV. Chartering and Accountability

- » Why did the school go the chartering route?
- » What is the school's relationship with the chartering agency?
- » What is the school's comprehensive accountability plan?
- » How do the conditions of chartering (flexibility, accountability, and choice) influence the school's operations and its success?

artifacts that represented aspects of the school's program, and interviewing parents, students, teachers, board members, administrators, and district liaisons. At each school, a set of questions guided the observations and interviews (see figure 2).

Among the eight schools represented in this guide, three consider themselves middle schools, one is a comprehensive K-12 school, one is 5-12, another is K-8, and two are elementary schools, one of which includes a preschool program. Student enrollment ranges from 182 at a middle school to 850 at an elementary school. At three of the schools, more than 80 percent of the students qualify for subsidized meals; at three other schools, the percentage is about 20 or less. Three of the schools are chartered by their state, four hold a charter from the local district, and one is chartered by a special chartering authority. The oldest of these schools has been in existence for 10 years; most are five or six years old. Programs vary from college prep to project-based learning, from an arts emphasis to bilingual education. Several programs feature non-violence or character education. Part II presents a concrete portrait of each school, a snapshot seeking to capture the particular ambience of the school culture, its distinctive mission and instructional program, and how it has gone about creating a learning community for its particular school population.

As remarkably diverse as these schools are, they share certain fundamental qualities, core features that seem to be at the heart of the charter process. Part I of the guide highlights those necessary elements of creating an effective charter school.



Part I: Elements of Effective Charter Schools

All charter schools are someone's creation. A visionary or, more likely, a group of people sees a need or opportunity and decides to start a school. To be effective, a charter school begins with a mission and stays mission-driven: Everyone associated with the school knows what it stands for and believes in its vision. Each school engages parents as real, not nominal, partners. Each school fosters a culture that is highly collegial and focused on continuous improvement. And each effective charter school has a strong accountability system, not just to please its authorizers but also its "clients," the parents.

Getting a Good Start

Who starts charter schools? Thoughtful community members, concerned parents, dedicated teachers, university educators, and political and business people are among those who have come together to create charter schools. KIPP Academy Houston was started by two former Teach For America teachers using two classrooms within a pre-existing public school. The BASIS School in Tucson was started by a husband and wife team of college educators. Roxbury Prep in Boston, the School of Arts and Sciences in Tallahassee, and Community of Peace Academy in St. Paul, were launched by educators with a vision for an academic alternative to the public schools in their local communities. Others such as Oglethorpe Charter School in Savannah, and the Arts and Technology Academy in Washington, D.C., were developed by groups of parents working together with community members on a grassroots level.

As new public schools, they all experienced immense start-up challenges, including developing the mission and vision for the school, thinking through every facet of the school program, writing the charter, hiring staff, making decisions about curriculum, and securing the building and funds needed to open. One comment resurfaced at each school: They could never have anticipated how much hard work would be involved and how many decisions they would have to make to create the systems to start a charter school.

Some charter schools begin from scratch; others are conversions from pre-existing public schools. Some handle every aspect of running a school—from curriculum to accounting. Others contract out administrative and business functions. Education management companies can provide charter schools with an operational structure and a curriculum model. For example, Mosaica Education, Inc., contracts with 24 charter schools nationally, including the Arts and Technology Academy,

to provide the company's education model as well as central office functions (see figure 3). The Core Knowledge Foundation contracts with the Oglethorpe Charter School, providing curriculum and teacher training. Other charter schools such as KIPP Academy Houston are part of a network of schools that ascribe to a particular school organizational model. The KIPP, Inc., national office helps to support the training of principals and the replication of new KIPP charter schools around the country. But however a charter school originates, each starts with a clear mission, a unifying vision of what the founders want students to know and be able to do, and why.

Leading With a Mission

At the heart of each charter school is a well-conceived and powerful mission, a shared educational philosophy that guides decision-making at every level. The spirit of the mission appears in slogans on hall placards, banners, and T-shirts and resounds in chants, assemblies, and informal conversations. During site visits and interviews for this guide, parents, teachers, students, and board members easily articulated their school's mission, demonstrating the basic condition that they all begin on the same page.

In some schools, the mission is to prepare low-income, urban students for higher education, students, for example, who enroll with below-grade-level skills and aspire to be the first members of their families to attend college. Such a mission led Roxbury Prep to structure the school day so that every student takes two periods of reading and two of math. Awareness of the school's daunting challenges drives a highly rigorous academic program. Other schools may develop a mission focusing on the needs of the whole child. The Community of Peace Academy, for example, strives to "educate the whole person, mind, body and will for peace, jus-

tice, freedom, compassion, wholeness and fullness of life." This means helping students grow not just academically, but emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Founders of the School of Arts and Sciences spent a year researching and designing a school grounded in developmental theory and dedicated to learning by doing. Their mission, centering on the belief that kids are naturally curious, seeks to foster students' self-directed learning, with a strong emphasis on the arts.

Visits to classrooms in these charter schools found students engaged, on task, and learning. A strong, clearly articulated purpose focuses the work, creates a pervasive positive spirit, and promotes consistent expectations from class to class. Teachers are deeply aware that they are creating change, both for their students and also within the larger public school system. At a mission-driven school, it is easier to focus on what will enable students to reach the school's goals and objectives. A clear vision also makes it obvious when teachers are not in sync with the school program and empowers administrators and governing boards to hold the staff accountable. Above all else, the mission serves to inspire and motivate the teachers, parents, and students to make the necessary effort to assure that their school will thrive.

Innovating Across the School Program

In effective charter schools, the mission drives every aspect of the school program, and in each case the school program reflects the school's freedom to experiment, to be creative in terms of organization, scheduling, curriculum, and instruction. "The way we are going about closing the achievement gap for our kids," said Roxbury Prep's principal, "simply would not be possible under the present confines of the public school system." The schools are infused with the spirit of

FIGURE 3. Mosaica and the Arts and Technology Academy

Not all charter schools want to start from scratch. One option for charter schools is to contract out services such as accounting and other central office functions to “education management organizations.” In addition, these management organizations can provide charter schools with an operational structure and curriculum model. Such are the arrangements in place between the Arts and Technology Academy in the District of Columbia and Mosaica Education, Inc., which has relationships with 24 charter schools nationally.

The Arts and Technology Academy (ATA) operates as an LEA with a budget of just over \$5,320,000 (2001–02). The school pays Mosaica an annual fee of \$610,000 to provide central office management functions and the Mosaica Educational Model. Aspects of this model in place at ATA include the extended school day and calendar year, a commitment to student and teacher facility with technology, foreign language instruction beginning in kindergarten, and Mosaica's interdisciplinary Paragon “world ideas” social studies curriculum, which complements ATA's and Mosaica's focus on the arts. Direct Instruction in reading and mathematics are also a Mosaica feature adopted by ATA. In addition to all that ATA has implemented from the Mosaica model, the school has negotiated variations from the model as well. For example, when a new principal came to ATA, he asked the school board to add the 100 Book Challenge to the school's reading program, to balance the existing skills focus with more literature. The board president and principal noted both a “healthy tension” between ATA and its management company and the importance of a strong board for negotiations.

Mosaica Education's Web site is <http://www.mosaicaeducation.com/index.html>.

innovation. At one charter school, innovation takes the shape of a longer school day; at another, it is in the teaching pedagogy or scheduling configuration. While such practices may have been developed and tried in other places across the country, the novel ways charter schools can put them together often results in a school culture and operational structure quite different from those in neighboring schools.

MISSION-RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

At the School of Arts and Sciences in Tallahassee, curriculum and instruction are responsive to the developmental approach to learning called for in the school's mission. The program features thematic, interdisciplinary instruction, project-based learning, and portfolios in

place of grades. The rubric in figure 4, used for self-reflection and program monitoring, shows how the school defines this approach. In St. Paul, responsive to its mission in a gang-infested neighborhood, the Community of Peace Academy has created a whole co-curriculum, in and outside of class, focused on peace building and fostering justice and a non-violent lifestyle.

With a mission to challenge their students academically, KIPP Academy Houston and the BASIS School, in Tucson provide accelerated curricula (see figure 5). Some schools, like Roxbury Prep and the School of Arts and Sciences, develop their own curricula and do not typically use textbooks. Other schools have adopted external models such as the Advanced Placement curriculum

FIGURE 4. The School of Arts and Sciences Thematic Instruction Rubric

Stage 2 – Thematic, Multi-age Classroom
 In addition to Stage 1 components.

Environment	Curriculum	Expectations	Indicators
The prepared environment* is aesthetically pleasing (calming colors & music), neat, and orderly. There is a calm, relaxing atmosphere.	The learning process reflects a triangle flow of information between teacher, student, and environment. Hands-on skill lessons are laid out in a progression so that students can start at their own level and progress.	Students work independently. They show respect for the materials and handle them appropriately.	Teachers set their Professional Development Goals driven by student data.
Classroom materials are student-centered. The teacher's personal resources are located at home or other designated storage areas to make room for student materials.	Developmental checklists assist teachers in tracking student development and planning for instruction.	Students are taking charge of their learning.	Students progress in academic skills, as well as projects, performances, and productions. Scores on classroom assignments & FCAT reflect their growth.
The environment is clean, uncluttered, and ordered to encourage motivation, concentration, and independence.	Themes continue to be an integral part of the curriculum, culminating in whole school programs or festivals. Students make books centered on themes they study.	Students take initiative to research topics, work on projects, and develop presentations.	Students are learning how to set goals and follow through. They maintain daily job charts, wallets, or learning tickets.
The schedule allows the class to have an uninterrupted work time every day.	Special area subjects are fully integrated into the classroom themes when possible.	Students are engaged in their work and treat each other well. They continue to work on the Life Skills.	Students produce beautiful portfolios based on the 8 Intelligences. Self-evaluation is part of the process.
Students understand all procedures and ways of work.	Teachers use student assessment data to plan instruction.	Inter-cluster and intra-cluster collaboration is happening between teachers.	The whole class is focused on learning and hums with productivity. Students work individually, paired, or in small groups more often than whole class instruction.

taught at BASIS, the Core Knowledge curriculum used at Oglethorpe, and the Paragon curriculum and direct instruction model at the Arts and Technology Academy.

Many schools incorporate project-based learning and internships for older students to develop connections between classroom learning and real world professions. At BASIS, the last two weeks of the school year

are devoted to project-based learning. For example, some students developed and produced an opera as part of the Metropolitan Opera Project, while other students went to Mexico to visit a marine biology lab. Each Friday, middle school students at the School of Arts and Sciences work with science professionals in the community. Among their many projects, students have worked on DNA studies, animal studies, robotic

FIGURE 5. BASIS Course Requirements

Course and Graduation Requirements List BASIS High School 2003/04

Course Group	Course	Requirements		
		Grade offered	Credit	AP Exam
English	AP English Language & Composition	9	1 Required	1 Required
	European Literature	9 & 10	1 Required	
	American Literature	11	1 Required	
	AP English Literature	12	1 Required	
Math	Algebra I	7, 8	1 Required	1 Required*
	Algebra II	8,9	1 Required	
	Geometry	With Algebra I and Algebra II	1 Awarded	
	Pre-Calculus	9-12	1 Required	
	Calculus	9-12	1 Required	
	AP Calculus	10-12		
	AP Statistics	11-12	1 Required	
Science	Honors Chemistry	9-11	1 Required	1 Required
	Honors Physics	9-11	1 Required	
	Honors Biology	9-11	1 Required	
	AP Chemistry	10-12	2 Required	
	AP Physics	10-12		
	AP Biology	11-12		
Social Studies	Political Science & Philosophy	Not offered in 2003/04		2 Required
	AP World History	Not offered in 2003/04		
	AP European History	9- 10	1 Required	
	AP U.S. History	11	1 Required	
Foreign Language	Foreign Language I	9	1 Required	Optional
	Foreign Language II	10	1 Required	
	Foreign Language III	11	1 Required	
	Foreign Language	12	1 Optional	
	AP Foreign Language	9-12	1 Required	
Sports	Sports			
Fine Art	Music	9-12	1 Required	
	Art	9-12		
	Drama	9-12		
Computers	AP Computer Science	9-12	1 Optional	Optional

Enrollment in a minimum of 7 courses/ year is required for students in grades 9-11
 BASIS does not award ½ credits for completing a single term of a two-term course at BASIS
 * 2003/04 11th grade students are not required to take AP test in Statistics or Calculus

programming, and electron conduction studies with university researchers, veterinarians, and engineering scientists. As part of their science class, students conducted an archeology project for Cornell University, and while sifting through sediment from a site, discovered the wing of a pre-historic beetle. Their findings became part of a research study.

In many of these charter schools, student motivation is enhanced by providing an element of choice within the curriculum. At Oglethorpe Charter School, students pick electives and clubs for Friday activities. At the School of Arts and Sciences, students organize their own progress through a set of assigned math activities or writing exercises. Likewise, the topics of their project work represent personal choices, related to a class or

school theme. At Community of Peace Academy, students using the Accelerated Reader program select the books they will read in class based on their improvement and reading level. At the BASIS School, students can choose to take a full menu of Advanced Placement classes and graduate after 11th grade.

FLEXIBLE STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS

In schools driven by a mission, structure should be at the service of function. The flexibility afforded charter schools allows them to carry out their missions in many different ways. Some schools use a traditional model with 50-minute classes, while others use a block schedule with 80- or 90-minute classes. Some use a combination. The structure depends on what the school is trying to accomplish—whether, for example, to expose students to a full liberal arts curriculum or to focus on particular areas or allow for extended projects. At the School of Arts and Sciences, a developmental approach is supported with multi-grade classrooms and allowing students to progress on a developmental timetable. A lead teacher and an assistant teacher work across three grade levels in each classroom.

Because many charter schools have an extremely ambitious mission, they provide a longer school day than their local counterparts. At the Arts and Technology Academy, children attend school one hour a day longer and 20 days more a year than the regular District of Columbia schools. The added time can be calculated as three extra years of schooling by the time children reach high school. At KIPP Academy Houston, students are in school from 7:25 in the morning until 5:00 in the afternoon, with Saturday school required twice each month.

Behind the scenes, administrators at these schools have created program schedules to support teacher collabo-

ration. Shared meeting time for teams of teachers during the school day gives them the opportunity to plan, develop curriculum, discuss student issues, and conference with families. Special Friday schedules at Roxbury Prep allow teachers a weekly three-hour block for professional development. Afternoon teacher meetings are a weekly feature at the BASIS School, as well.

RESPONSIVE STAFFING

Each charter school has the autonomy to hire staff that fit its program. Gates, for example, hires teachers with specialized certification to work with English language learners. The school also hires a number of part-time teachers to reduce group sizes during core academic instruction and created a position for a teacher leader to oversee the school's complex array of programs. BASIS looks for teachers with strong academic backgrounds, but not necessarily teaching credentials, to teach their advanced courses. KIPP and Roxbury Prep look for young teachers with lots of energy. Roxbury Prep plans its program in anticipation of frequent teacher turnover; other schools, like Community of Peace, have stable faculties that have evolved the school's program over time.

One of the striking characteristics of these schools is their ability to provide a high teacher to student ratio. At Community of Peace Academy, there is one teacher per 16 students in the kindergarten and first grade. Elementary grades at the School of Arts and Sciences have two teachers, a lead teacher and an associate teacher for each multi-age classroom. Many of the schools have staff specialists, such as a school nurse, social worker, or counselor; high school or college placement director; parent liaison-translator; special education resource specialist; and librarian. Student needs and priorities determine the staffing and resource allocation.

In all cases, school leaders and staff agree that teachers need to buy into the program or find another home. At the Arts and Technology Academy, for example, turnover was high after the first year with a new principal, when the faculty came together around a vision and expectations increased. Staff not enthusiastic about the school's new demands were encouraged to leave, and 21 of the 41 teachers and instructional assistants did so. The following year, turnover was much lower.

SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Common to these charter schools is a sense that school cares for each student as a family does for its children. At the School of Arts and Sciences, teachers work with the same students for two or more years in a row. This "looping" gives teachers more time to develop strong relationships with students and families and to understand and meet students' educational needs. At Oglethorpe Charter School, an individual "Personal Education Plan" is developed for all students to help monitor their progress toward achieving subject area objectives. There is a widely shared sense that students have specific needs and may require different levels of support in their learning. The focus at the School of Arts and Sciences on individual learning needs has attracted many students whose previous education experiences featured the highly individualized approaches of home schooling.

Students in these relatively small schools are taught to help and support one another. At KIPP Academy Houston, one of the school mantras posted in every classroom reads, "If a teammate needs help, we give. If we need help, we ask. Work Hard. Be Nice. Team always beats individual." At Community of Peace Academy, students are trained to become "Peace Builders," actively working to create a non-violent community based on

trust and acceptance. Teachers make time for proactive classroom discussions about character and responsibility, coaching students to make thoughtful, caring decisions. As one parent said, "Community of Peace works because the teachers create a peaceful environment where the children feel secure and comfortable to learn. The teachers really care about the children." The tone in these charter schools is one of acceptance. For example, students at the School of Arts and Sciences are encouraged to express their creativity, knowing that their individuality will be supported, not teased. Several schools bring everyone together for Friday community meetings, singing together, giving theatrical presentations, and recognizing student achievements and contributions to help create a positive tone schoolwide.

Even in neighborhoods known for rough public schools, these charter schools are peaceful and safe, without violence or disruption among the students. Every school has developed strong expectations for student behavior and systems to help students to do their best. Most of these schools have a dress code or require uniforms. The School of Arts and Sciences is a notable exception, where students are free to wear blue hair and capes if they please. Student incentive programs at KIPP Academy (see figure 6) and Roxbury Prep keep students focused on being prepared for class and modeling excellent citizenship. At Oglethorpe, students must earn the privilege of clubs and extracurricular activities by keeping their grades up.

To be sure that no student "falls through the cracks," support for students extends from providing for their social and emotional well-being to providing systems for students who struggle academically. At Roxbury Prep, if students are not doing well in an academic class, or need help to master a concept, teachers will pull them for a tutorial during gym or elective periods. Several

FIGURE 6. KIPP Student Incentive System (Excerpt)

KIPP: Houston							There are no shortcuts
Level of infraction	1	2	3	4	5	6	Expulsion
	Not following directions	Incomplete assignment	Academic ticket not signed	Negative attitude	Lying	Copying or cheating	Unacceptable items ² (guns, knives, etc.)
	Not prepared for class	Dress code violation	Unorganized	Porch interaction	Swearing	Inappropriate conduct (harassment)	Gross harassment
	Tardy to class	Missing ticket	Disrespectful	Grossly unorganized	Gross disrespect	Fighting	Other similar offenses at the discretion of the principal
		Insufficient funds to recollect items	Completely missing assignment			Stealing	
		Absent w/o call to school by 8 am					
		Unnecessary items ¹					
		Off task					

¹ An unnecessary item consists of something that should not be brought to school such as electronic toys, game cards, pagers, cell phones, excessive amounts of cash, etc. Such items will be confiscated and held for a parent to recollect.
² Unacceptable items are things no child should have in his/her possession at any time such as weapons, drugs, alcohol, etc. In either of these situations, the item(s) will be confiscated and handed over to an administrator to be picked up by a parent, and the proper authorities will be notified.

Strategies to Redirect Disciplinary Violations
 KIPP implements some of (but is not limited to) the following techniques to help our students learn from their mistakes and make better choices in the future:

- Additional assignments
- Calling/agenda plans
- Khaki plan (excessive dress code violations)
- Detention (Saturday)

Porch students avoid distractions in the following ways:

- Wearing their shirts/jackets inside out to let others know they are "looking inward", reflecting on their mistakes and should not be disturbed (reversible jackets should not be worn while on porch)
- Not being able to communicate (verbal or otherwise) with their peers without first being granted permission from a teacher

schools have "homework hotlines." Oglethorpe created a special class for five students at risk of failing the sixth grade, allowing them the opportunity to accelerate their learning and join the seventh grade mid-year. At BASIS, if students do not pass comprehensive exams in academic subjects, they are offered summer school courses to prepare them to retake the test at the end of the

summer. At KIPP Academy Houston, students who have not completed their assignments are required to attend "Wall Street," staying after school, often late into the evening, until the work is finished. Such measures help these schools maintain their high expectations; parents are supportive and students recognize that they are learning to take responsibility for themselves.

Promoting a Community of Continuous Learning

Commitment to a vision, an innovative spirit, and strict accountability all work to create learning communities in these schools, cultures of continuous improvement.

INTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY⁵

In most charter schools, the whole accountability process, from end-of-term comprehensive exams, to weekly teacher sessions sharing student work, is used to steadily improve teaching and learning. Yearly analysis of progress, taking a hard look at what's working well and what isn't, becomes the basis for a schoolwide improvement plan with new goals for the coming year. Schools give constant attention to refining curriculum and instruction, using student data to make instructional changes. If an analysis of math scores reveals a problem, steps are taken to solve it, whether through professional development, adopting a more effective program, or focused attention to specific areas of the curriculum.

At Roxbury Prep, faculty engage in a rigorous process of self-reflection, analyzing curriculum and student performance down to the level of the questions on comprehensive exams. Students at BASIS participate in a highly articulated examination process, taking mid-year "preliminary" exams in all core subjects followed by "must-pass" year-end exams. Students at Gates are regrouped for reading and math based on tests given every four or five weeks. The Community of Peace Academy hired an outside evaluator to help them assess their overall program. At Oglethorpe Charter School, teachers explicitly reflect on their *own* learning, with each annually submitting a professional portfolio to the school's board of directors. At the BASIS School,

a teacher's pay is partially determined by "performance bonuses" tied to achieving learning goals.

Professional development at these charter schools is driven by school goals. For example, when the Community of Peace staff learned that their students needed better preparation in reading and writing, the school hired a full-time curriculum specialist to support teachers to improve their instruction. When an evaluation showed that the school's approach to English as a Second Language (ESL) needed strengthening, the school made it possible for every team of teachers to work with an ESL specialist, weekly, to help modify assignments and assessments and scaffold learning to accommodate students struggling with a new language or learning disabilities.

At the same time, schools allow for informal, collegial professional development. Across the schools, teachers are provided time during the week for planning and meeting together. During Roxbury's regular Friday afternoon "Inquiry Groups," teachers share problems, analyze student work, reflect on practice, and agree to try new ideas.

Charter autonomy is itself a help in fostering a culture of improvement, by giving schools the flexibility to act quickly to identify areas of concern, make programmatic decisions, and put them into action. As one teacher said, "I see change happen here when we need it." It is control over budget, staffing, and curriculum that allows charter schools' internal accountability systems to work so effectively.

Most of the charter schools visited provide teachers with additional professional development and planning time throughout the year. Some also have summer sessions during which staff build ownership of the school's mission and vision, developing the systems and curriculum that will create the unique culture of the school.

STAFF COMMITMENT

Charter schools attract teachers who strongly share the school's mission and are willing to go the extra mile to achieve it. At Community of Peace Academy, Principal Karen Rusthoven seeks adults who personally live the philosophy of the school and understand the importance of a healthy balance of the whole person, mind, body, and will. Her teachers love the school so much that many have served there for five years and more, a long time in the universe of charter schools, where most are themselves less than five years old. Other schools have a harder time retaining teachers. As dedicated as the young teachers are who come to Roxbury Prep, the work load is grueling. Comparing it to the intensity experienced by recent college graduates at high-powered management consulting firms, the school's co-directors recognize that their young teachers, who "come early and stay late," cannot be expected to remain for years and years. To compensate for the expertise that leaves with each departing teacher, the school has developed systems to retain evolving curriculum knowledge, storing it in school databases and passing it on from one teacher to the next. The KIPP Academy mantra, "There are no short-cuts," applies to staff as well as students. Teachers work hard, long hours, starting their day at 7:00 and teaching until 5:00; they are also on call in the evening to field student and parent phone calls and to teach Saturday school twice a month.

Teachers at charter schools are not in it for the money. They are not earning overtime for their long days. Staff compensation at these schools is usually the same as in the local school districts. In some cases it is less.

In all of these schools, parents rave about the teachers' commitment to the students, their availability and

openness for communication, and their dedication. The challenge is how to support staff who are working so hard to make a school successful. Many teachers say that collegiality with their teammates, the partnership with parents, the climate of support from administrators and board members, and even the opportunity to serve on their school board provide a boost in morale that makes it possible to engage in such all-consuming work.

Partnering With Parents and the Community

At each of these schools, the culture forged around a shared educational vision creates a strong sense of community. Parents *choose* to send their children, and students know why they are there. The schools tend to be small, which itself allows an intimacy and face-to-face recognition not possible in larger schools. But their family-like feel is intentional, part of the school design. As one teacher explained, "We see the whole school as an extended family." Teachers reach out to create a connection between home and school environments. At Community of Peace Academy, teachers begin the school year with home visits to meet the families and learn about students' home environments. Parents repeatedly commented that they appreciate how frequently teachers communicate with families. Every teacher at KIPP Academy Houston is accessible by cell phone, taking calls until 8:30 at night from students and parents. The sense of shared commitment by parents and staff is formalized in most of these schools in a signed compact like that of the Community of Peace Academy shown in figure 7.

The fact that students are never assigned to a charter school, but are there as a conscious choice, helps create a voluntary civic community.⁶ In the schools visited for this guide, the tremendous commitment on the part of the teachers, parents, community members, administrators, and students was palpable. For some, the

FIGURE 7. Community of Peace Parent Compact

COMMUNITY OF PEACE ACADEMY
HOME/SCHOOL COMPACT
2002-2003

The School Will

- * Teach and model a non-violent lifestyle.
- * Treat parents with care and respect.
- * Provide a Family Handbook in English and Hmong.
- * Visit the home of each parent in the fall of each school year.
- * Return phone calls in a timely manner.
- * Meet with parents upon request.
- * Conduct Parent/Mentor/Teacher/Student Conferences in August, November, and March.
- * Provide Parent/Mentor Nights at least semi-monthly.
- * Provide a Home/School Liaison to assist parents/mentors.
- * Translate important information into the Hmong language.
- * Provide child care and interpreters for conferences and meetings.
- * Provide transportation to important meetings and conferences as needed.
- * Provide a monthly calendar and newsletter for all parents.

The Parent/Mentor Will

- * Teach and model a non-violent lifestyle.
- * Treat school staff with care and respect.
- * Read the Family Handbook and High School Handbook and support the philosophy and policies therein.
- * See that the child is in school and on time every day.
- * See that the school has accurate emergency numbers, phone numbers, and addresses for the parent/mentor at all times.
- * Attend Parent/Mentor Registration Night and all scheduled conferences and meetings concerning their child, or call the school prior to the meeting if not able to attend.
- * Return phone calls and answer requests for meetings and conferences in a timely manner.
- * Return important school documents in a timely manner.
- * Support the community as able by attending Parent Nights, volunteering, and attending school events.

Names and grade levels of children attending Community of Peace Academy

Name	Grade	Name	Grade

School Official: _____ Date: _____
 Parent/Mentor: _____ Date: _____
 Parent/Mentor: _____ Date: _____

BY SIGNING THIS FORM YOU BECOME AN OFFICIAL MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY OF

creation and development of their school community has involved unexpected challenges, including political conflicts, facility nightmares, and funding struggles, to name a few. But with the generosity of community partners, who have donated everything from office space and auditorium facilities to new reading programs and a music teacher, who have served on the schools' boards and mobilized parents, these charter

schools have become part of the fiber of the local communities that they serve.

Parent involvement is widely recognized as a benefit to children and schools, and these charter schools engage parents as authentic partners at many different levels. Parents at Roxbury Prep, KIPP, and BASIS formally agree to support their children through these schools'

FIGURE 8. Oglethorpe Parent Volunteer Options

How Do You Earn Volunteer Hours?

Parent volunteers are a critical component of our program at Oglethorpe Academy. In fact, all parents at Oglethorpe sign a contract agreeing to serve the school for 10 hours (if single) or 20 hours (couples).

We provide many activities for which you may “earn” hours:

- Attending day-time school events and field trips
- Extra-curricular parent-planned dances and parties
- Preparing food for special school events
- Attending school functions (athletics, concerts)
- Parent conferences
- Saturday workdays to spruce up our facilities
- Working in the media center
- Assisting with health screenings
- Acting as a team coach or coordinator
- Leading a club
- Working from home: collecting box tops, pop tops, completing character assignments, doing research, etc.
- Participating in committee work
- Serving on the Governing Board

Parents are provided with a quarterly “report card” (sample attached) so that they can monitor their progress. To ensure that all families do their fair share, only those families who have fulfilled their family contract are allowed to re-enroll their students at Oglethorpe Academy for the following year.

We believe that parent participation is part of our student success formula!

very demanding academic requirements. At Oglethorpe, parents sign a contract to provide 20 service hours annually (see figure 8). Parents were often visible at these schools, helping in classrooms, supervising student activities, and organizing school programs. At all these schools, parents serve on governing boards of directors, making policy decisions that shape the schools' operations and futures.

Some of the schools see that supporting parent education is part of their broad commitment to the com-


munity, as well as a way to support student learning. Gates, for example, opens up its computer lab for English as a second language classes (see figure 9) and also provides Spanish classes for parents, in keeping with its focus on bilingualism.

Governing for Accountability


The freedom to innovate with governance models is a signal feature of charter schools. Each has a governing board of directors that is responsible for school policy-making

FIGURE 9. Gates Adult Education Program

Saddleback Valley Unified School District



Adult Education
(949) 837-8830



English as a Second Language (ESL)
Inglés Como Segundo Idioma

Computer Assisted Classes at
Clases asistidas de computación en la escuela

GATES ELEMENTARY

We Offer Two Classes:

1. Monday and Wednesday	9:00 am - 11:30 am	Room Lab 2
2. Tuesday and Thursday	9:00 am - 11:30 am	Room Lab 2

Hay Dos Clases:



1. Lunes y Miércoles	9:00 am - 11:30 am	Salón Lab 2
2. Martes y Jueves	9:00 am - 11:30 am	Salón Lab 2

TESTING AND ENROLLMENT
New students should come to Laguna Hills High School or Silverado High School on any of the dates indicated to take the English assessment test and to enroll. The assessment process is on a first come, first served basis. The testing takes approximately two (2) hours.

EXAMEN E INSCRIPCIÓN
Nuevos estudiantes deben venir a Laguna Hills High School or Silverado Continuations School en una de las fechas indicadas para hacer el examen de inglés e inscribirse. El proceso de este examen dura dos (2) horas aproximadamente.

English Assessment Sessions

DATE	LOCATION	TIME
Thursday September 18	LAGUNA HILLS HS	6-45 pm
Thursday September 25	LAGUNA HILLS HS	6-45 pm
Saturday September 27	SILVERADO HS	8-45 am

Please call Adult Education for more information (949)837-8830.
¡Mas Preguntas! Llame la oficina de Adult Education (949)837-8830.

and oversight. Those serving on governing boards are stakeholders in the truest sense of the word, people not only attuned to the school's mission, but also highly familiar with its daily operations. Parents are board members in each of the schools visited. At Oglethorpe, because Georgia charter law requires parents to be the majority on a charter school's board, the board is made up of six parents, two teachers, and four non-voting members, including three community members and

one school administrator. At other schools, community members might make up the board's majority.

Including teachers on school boards is one of the biggest departures from traditional public schooling. In states where charter schools are exempt from collective bargaining, teachers presumably face no conflict of interest in negotiating teacher contracts and can serve on the governing board alongside parents and

FIGURE 10. Roxbury Prep Annual Accountability Plan (Excerpts)

Academic Program (Note: Once the MCAS is expanded to include Math and English Language Arts exams for all middle school grades (6–8), RPC may no longer use the Stanford 9 for external accountability purposes.)

Goal # 1: Students at RPC will be able to effectively comprehend and analyze literature and non-fiction texts.

Measures:

- Over 90% of RPC students who have attended RPC from September of the 6th grade through May of the 7th grade will pass the 7th Grade MCAS English Language Arts exam.
- RPC students who have attended RPC from September of the 6th grade through May of the 8th grade will at the end of the 8th grade year improve their entering Stanford 9 Reading Comprehension scores by an average of 3 NCE points.

Organizational Viability

Goal # 6: RPC enrollment and attendance reflect parental demand and commitment.

Measures:

- Applications to enroll in grade 6 will exceed the number of available spaces by at least 25%.
- Annual school attendance rates will be 93% or higher.

Faithfulness to Charter

Goal #9: RPC students are prepared to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college.

Measures:

- Over 30% of graduating RPC 8th grade students will enroll in college preparatory high schools in which over 80% of graduates matriculate to college.

community members. The advantages of teacher membership on school boards include deepening teachers' ownership of the school's vision, giving them a greater stake in policy and organizational decisions, and helping to ensure that a board's solutions fit the identified problems.

Annually, charter schools are expected to evaluate their school program, quality of teaching, and student outcome measures in light of the mission and goals defined

in the charter document. All charter schools publish an annual report or a school improvement accountability plan outlining specific goals to be accomplished each year (see excerpt from Roxbury Prep's plan in figure 10). The governing board monitors a school's progress and helps to set new goals to keep it moving forward toward its mission.

Over a longer time frame, typically three to five years, a charter school must demonstrate that it is meeting the

terms contracted in its charter. The authorizer, whether district, state, or another entity, is responsible for monitoring whether the school has in fact lived up to the promise of its charter. If a school fails to meet ongoing criteria for success—ranging from financial management to student performance—its charter can be denied renewal or revoked.

Yet another dimension of charter school accountability has to do with family satisfaction. Charter school practices are open. Information is shared and available. All parents and community members can see how students are doing on a regular basis. Thus a school that is not delivering is likely to lose its customers: Parents will no longer choose to send their children there. It is this openness of the charter process, the high visibility of the quality of performance, which may be the strictest accountability measure of all. As one principal put it, "The conditions of chartering, if anything, lead us to be more self-analytical and critical, holding ourselves to a higher standard than most schools."

Again, the natal twin of charter accountability is freedom to act. Success "hinges on academic achievement and other performance indicators, not on regulatory compliance or standardized procedures."⁷ Charter school boards do not have to convince districtwide majorities or unwilling superintendents that their approaches are right. A Roxbury Prep board member remarked that as a charter school, "We have the flexibility to turn on a dime." If board members see a need, they can follow up. Freed from the constraints of bureaucracy, when a decision is made, implementation is immediate.

The charter schools in this guide measure success in a number of ways. All have made continuous aca-

demical gains and are proud to have done so. All have attendance rates at 95 percent or more. Waiting lists to get into these successful schools provide new meaning to "winning the lottery."

In other ways, what constitutes success at a given school varies with its mission. The Community of Peace Academy in St. Paul, Minn., can point to its designation as an exemplary character education school. KIPP Academy Houston can take satisfaction in the 85 percent of its students who enroll in college. Parents at the School of Arts and Sciences in Tallahassee, Fla., find that the school succeeds in welcoming all students, however unique or whatever color they may have dyed their hair. The school profiles in the next section provide additional measures of success at each school.

Implications

Taken as a group, successful charter schools clearly illustrate two things: (1) key elements that enable success, such as mission-driven programming, are shared by all of them, and (2) the forms those elements take vary widely from one school to another.

One theory of charter schooling is that freedom from regulation will stimulate innovation and experimentation. This is not to say that each charter school, even each successful charter school, is entirely original or ground-breaking. But as illustrated by the eight schools in this guide, each reflects the particular vision of its founding educators and community members—whether for classical education, schooling infused with character education, approaches aligned with research on learning and instruction, or programs that have been designed by educational management organizations, for example. What does make each of

these schools unique is the combination of ideas that have been brought together, made the centerpiece of each school's educational approach, and then assessed to make sure the approach works in practice to accomplish the intended goals.

Success comes not only from the ideas themselves but also from the focused and energized school culture that thrives in a mission-driven school. School communities become internally accountable—dedicated to working together to accomplish their shared goals, adjusting their approach based on results, and responding flexibly and quickly when needed.

» **Implications for charter school educators.**

Charter school educators may gain some confirmation and encouragement from these schools. Only eight schools could be included in this guide, but each represents a whole class of other, similar schools. Charter schools around the country are experimenting with new ideas, mobilizing communities, and meeting the learning needs of children and families. This guide may help support their cause.

» **Implications for other school leaders.**

Within this guide, school leaders will find ideas that can be applied in any public school. Many of the specific practices in these schools can be put in place anywhere. Perhaps more importantly, the core organizational features, such as vision and internal accountability, are also transferable. The concept of internal accountability, for example, was first identified in research on public schools that were restructuring.⁸ As a stimulus to all educators, the guide provides concrete visions of what is possible. Readers might ask themselves, "How can I replicate these conditions and practices in my setting?"

Schools looking to meet the accountability requirements of NCLB should especially take note.

These eight schools were selected in part because they have increased their scores on state assessments over a three-year period and made "Adequate Yearly Progress" this past year. They have improved over time. It's not that they found a magic solution so much as they became organizations mobilized to achieve their goals. Other schools can do that, too.

If local constraints set up what seem to be insurmountable barriers, educators and community members may want to consider chartering as a route to pursuing their vision more fully. The local district or another authorizing agency may provide support. (The resources section of this guide identifies additional sources of support.)

» **Implications for district or state administrators.**

For those charged with the task of creating the institutional supports schools need to succeed, the key question to ask is, "How can we get more schools like the ones in this guide?" District and state administrators may see here the opportunity to "reinvent public education" in meaningful ways.⁹ Districts, like some mentioned here, can see chartering as one way to encourage innovation and better meet the needs of children and families. States may reexamine chartering policies in light of their understanding of the school conditions that promote success.

The first part of this guide has laid out what appear to be the cross-cutting design elements of successful charter schools. Brief illustrations of how these elements take shape in the eight featured schools demonstrate that they can be accomplished in a variety of ways. In the following part of the guide, snapshots of each of the schools are intended to help readers envision full charter school programs—eight different ways, just for starters.



Part II: Charter School Profiles

The Arts and Technology Academy Public Charter School

BASIS School, Inc.

Community of Peace Academy

KIPP Academy Houston

Oglethorpe Charter School

Ralph A. Gates Elementary School

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School

The School of Arts and Sciences



The Arts and Technology Academy Public Charter School

Location	Year First Chartered and Authorizer	Grades	Enrollment	English Learners	Subsidized Meals	Special Needs	Per Pupil Spending
Washington, D.C.	1998 Special charter school board	Pre-K-6	615	0%	97%	7%	\$8,650

When low enrollment led the District of Columbia Public Schools to close Richardson Elementary, local parents and community members stepped in to create a new school in the empty building. The Arts and Technology Academy Public Charter School (ATA) was chartered in 1998—"A true, homegrown, grassroots effort," says a member of the chartering board. In a tough Washington neighborhood characterized by public housing and family incomes well below federal poverty levels, some of these parents had a different vision for their children.

For its 615 students—98 percent African American and 97 percent low-income—the pre-K-6 ATA has designed a program to meet their needs and their parents' dreams. According to the school's annual report, the curricular mixture of the basics and the arts seeks to "propel" students beyond their "economically depressed community." The arts are seen as the foundation for building children's academic prowess as well as a way to "connect them to the great artists and leaders who were nurtured within their community." By design, the school program reflects for children the strengths of their heritage and creates many ways for them to express themselves and to excel.

Program and Operations

To meet its high expectations, ATA runs an extended, seven-and-a-half-hour school day, and an extended school year of 200 days, about 20 days longer than at neighboring schools. The basics in reading and math are taught through the scripted approach of direct instruction. On the other hand, a multicultural social

studies curriculum invites students to explore the history of ideas. Everyone learns Spanish. Students and their teachers have easy access to current technology. After-school tutoring and homework assistance are provided for students who need it. Student clubs and extracurricular activities reinforce the focus on arts and academics. And student performances fill the auditorium with proud parents throughout the year. Teachers liken the school to "an oasis in the community."

To keep focused on the children's possibilities, the faculty and staff of ATA have created a list of belief statements that begins, "We can teach every student," and concludes, "Given knowledge and opportunity, students can shape their futures." To safeguard those futures, a culture of achievement has taken hold at ATA. While standardized test scores indicate that ATA students still have a lot of ground to make up, students are proud to have good grades. "I got 28 As and 8 Bs," a sixth-grader reports with satisfaction.

Principal Anthony Jackson is a large part of the ATA story. Jackson came to ATA in 2000, two years after it opened, at a time when the school was floundering, children were not succeeding, and complaints were high. After three years, all signs are positive. "This is an example of how a school can turn around," says a member of the District of Columbia Public School Charter Board. "When I get discouraged, I point to it."

The leadership that Jackson brings to the school begins with his attitude about the school's place in the community. On a tour of the school, he stops to point out a window in the rear of the building that looks onto

the neighboring public housing developments. There used to be a cage on this window, he reports, to keep out the vandals. On all the windows, in fact. "Cages," he says, "signify surrender," and against the advice of many, he took a chance and had them removed. At the same time, Jackson is not willing to take chances with

IN A TOUGH WASHINGTON NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERIZED BY PUBLIC HOUSING AND FAMILY INCOMES WELL BELOW FEDERAL POVERTY LEVELS, SOME OF THESE PARENTS HAD A DIFFERENT VISION FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

his students. Walking a boy home who was being suspended, Jackson experienced the open-air drug market outside the student's apartment, reversed course—boy in tow—to deal with him instead within the walls of the school. Otherwise, he says, "I was just turning him over to them."

Academically, Jackson is equally protective. "I get kids to come read to me all the time. I see that child who struggled ... he's reading with confidence, with inflection, and he understands what the heck he's reading. I think we're doing a pretty good job," he allows. A self-described "data nut," who enjoys the challenge of disaggregating data to see what it can reveal, Jackson also recognizes the limitations of test scores. He never loses sight of his students' broad academic needs and the role of the arts in their education. "It's our responsibility," he says, "to make sure that schools remain—even in an age of accountability—kid friendly. If at the end of the day children have passed every SAT 9 test that's placed in front of them, but they have no sense of beauty, what have we created?"

Beyond the core curriculum of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies, students all learn basic communicative and performing arts, often demonstrating them through technology-based activities. The arts and technology program encompasses the disciplines of the visual arts; speech; drama; dance; music, including

singing, playing instruments, and composing; journalism, and video production. As a teacher points out, the school's mission and belief statements are "based on the fundamental understanding that kids learn in different ways. ATA gives them many ways to learn."

The director of special education notes that the arts program is also very effective for the 7 percent of the students who have special needs. The parent of a special needs student calls ATA "a blessing" for her son. "All of the teachers and staff, everybody makes him feel comfortable and loved. The kids are comfortable with him. He's excited about his homework and about the things he's asked to do. He gets lots of stimulation."

The school's strong emphasis on teaching values and respect is key to the treatment this child has received at ATA and to the school's overall discipline approach. Teachers may not yell at students or punish children by isolating them in any way. Jackson counsels teachers to get to know students instead of resorting to overly strict practices. "You can't discipline strangers," he cautions. "You have to build trust first."

The school also benefits from having a dean of students, who serves as a "behavior interventionist." In a school founded on the arts, it is only fitting that one kind of intervention is music therapy. Picture a small group of boys singing a song called "Cooperation" as the music therapist strums a guitar. No one notes the irony of the cooperation in evidence.

Finally, the condition of the school's physical plant is not incidental to the atmosphere of confidence and pride that permeates ATA. One of the board of directors' first actions was to repair the run-down building. When ATA opened, the new school was in ship shape, but it was sterile. Two years later the hallways were still barren and no student work was on the walls, lest students tear it down or deface it. When Jackson arrived, he encouraged wary teachers to paper the walls with colorful student work. To their delight, they found that

students respected each other's contributions. Says one proud teacher, "If children are going to be here for eight hours, they should have a stimulating, beautiful, safe environment—and our building is all of those things."

Continuous Learning

To improve instruction in all areas, faculty and administrative staff meet four times each year to review assessment outcomes and to develop responsive strategies. They use outcomes from curriculum-based assessments to identify students with low skill levels who are tracked for consideration of special education referral and/or learning enrichment, such as tutoring or homework assistance. SAT 9 outcomes are used to identify areas that are posing a challenge for students, and the curriculum is modified accordingly. Jackson also looks at data such as attendance, referrals to the office, and numbers in after-school tutorial programs, all with the purpose of planning improvements.

The school devotes at least 15 days each year to professional development in the areas of standards, best practices, test-taking strategies, and classroom management. Teachers meet with the assistant principal weekly to discuss classroom practices. In addition, the assistant principal completes weekly classroom observations and coaches teachers. Program coordinators for grades pre-K–2, grades 3–6, and arts and technology also regularly coach teachers. This structure and support are credited with teachers' high performance. Proud of what ATA teachers have accomplished, the school board president notes that they are not inherently "better" teachers than those in the rest of the District of Columbia but that they have responded to the environment in the school. The leadership team believes it has created a culture where it is "okay to ask questions." Likewise, teachers at ATA feel they are "allowed to grow."

The principal, one teacher says, "is a leader who demands the best. It makes all the difference because you want to do well for somebody like that."

Parents and Partners

Although ATA was first envisioned by parents and has two parents on the school board, parent involvement outside of a small core group is very limited. Most parents are single mothers and have themselves had few educa-

STUDENTS ARE PROUD TO HAVE GOOD GRADES. "I GOT 28 AS AND 8 BS," A SIXTH-GRADER REPORTS WITH SATISFACTION.

tional opportunities, which teachers report limits participation in their children's academic life. The school board and school staff are eager to increase parents' role in the school. GED classes, job training, and job placement that could be offered through the school's Parent Resource Center are seen as important services that could also strengthen parent participation in the school.

ATA has many relationships with community groups such as local churches and cultural organizations, including the Library of Congress, but no key partnerships.

Governance and Accountability

The Arts and Technology Academy Public Charter School was chartered by the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board in 1998 as a nonprofit corporation and local education agency (LEA). It has an annual budget of about \$5,320,000, receiving funding of about \$6,550 per student, plus some extra dollars for weighted categories, such as pre-school, and federal entitlements amounting to about \$475,000.

ATA has a business relationship with Mosaica Education, Inc., which operates 24 charter school programs nationally. The school pays Mosaica \$610,000 annually to provide a "central office" function. The company also provides the school's Direct Instruction reading and mathematics curricula and the Paragon social studies curriculum.

The school is governed by a nine-member board, which meets monthly. Recently the board used tax-exempt bonds to purchase the school building, which it had been renting. Monthly payments dropped from \$33,000 to \$13,000. These savings have contributed to the school's \$600,000 bank balance.

“THE PRINCIPAL IS A LEADER WHO DEMANDS THE BEST. IT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE BECAUSE YOU WANT TO DO WELL FOR SOMEBODY LIKE THAT.”

While the school cannot operate without sound fiscal management, success is measured by student test scores, the scope of the curriculum, attendance, disciplinary referrals, staff retention, and parent satisfaction:

- » Since 2000, when Jackson took over as principal, students' SAT 9 scores have moved steadily up. In reading performance, 59 percent of the students were reading at or above grade level in 2003, compared with 35 percent in 2000. In math performance, half of the students were at or above grade level, compared with 20 percent in 2000.

- » Many educators are baffled by ATA's ability to emphasize the arts as well as raise test scores. With the trend toward an increasingly narrow curriculum, Jackson is used to the question, “How do you guys do it?”
- » Daily average attendance is 95 percent.
- » Behavioral referrals dropped from 43 to 24 in three years.
- » After Jackson's first year in the school, faculty turnover was high. Staff not enthusiastic about the school's demands were encouraged to leave, and 21 of the 41 teachers and instructional assistants did. The following year staff turnover was low, with departures down to seven.
- » Parent satisfaction is measured by the school's waiting list, the overflow audiences for student performances, and parents' pleas that the school extend its program into middle school.

BASIS School, Inc.

Location	Year First Chartered and Authorizer	Grades	Enrollment	English Learners	Subsidized Meals	Special Needs	Per Pupil Spending
Tucson, Ariz.	1998 State	5-12	246	1%	Not applicable	1%	\$5,339

In the midst of a national focus on educational performance and accountability, BASIS School, Inc. achieves both through its priorities of hard work and academic achievement. The school's mission is to provide a rigorous academic background to prepare students for college, with an emphasis on a classical liberal arts education based on European education practices. Struggling students receive extra academic support until they can meet the school's performance standards, and teachers are hired not on the basis of certification but according to their level of expertise. Of the 19 faculty members, 10 have a master's degree, and two have doctorate degrees, all in the subjects they are teaching. BASIS parents, who maintain an active community dialogue, adhere strongly to the school's mission. Says one parent, "The workload is hard, but it brings a sense of satisfaction and prepares children for the real world." Students too appreciate their school culture, reporting that the school's small size and emphasis on enabling every student to succeed makes it feel like "an extended family."

Housed in a converted one-story structure in Tucson, Ariz., the BASIS School is open to children of any background or ability, including those who qualify for special education. The school serves a student population that is 74 percent white, 12 percent Hispanic, 10 percent Asian American, and 4 percent African American. The 246 students in grades 5-12 must take a placement exam before enrolling. Students who place below their desired grade level are offered such options as remedial work in summer school, a retake of the placement exam after home preparation, or enrollment in a lower grade. Consistent with the school's liberal arts focus, students in all grade levels take courses in

language, literature, history, art, philosophy, mathematics, and science, in a curriculum that is aligned with the Arizona State Standards and also exceeds those requirements in many areas. Sports and fine arts courses are offered to all students, and middle school students take physical education. After some pressure from parents, after-school sports, band, and other courses and activities were added.

The BASIS School is the brainchild of a husband and wife team, both economists, who founded the school to combine their idea of the best from European and American educational traditions. The European tradition, they feel, provides academic rigor, while the American tradition promotes creativity, problem solving, free expression, and a sense of community. Chartered in 1998, the BASIS School proved so successful that in 2001 its founders opened a second campus, BASIS Scottsdale, in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Program and Operations

The mission of the BASIS School drives every aspect of its daily operations. School leaders are guided by a self-described "bias toward traditional teaching." They strive "to avoid educational fads and empty slogans and to put substance above form." Faculty, parents, and students fully understand that the students are expected to work hard at courses that are more rigorous than most of those at similar grade levels in local schools. All students begin taking algebra in the seventh grade and move on to calculus in high school. Sixth-graders study Latin to prepare for learning scientific terms and romance languages, seventh-graders take public

speaking, and eighth-graders take economics. High school courses are based on the Advanced Placement (AP) curriculum, with 12 out of 30 courses qualifying as AP, and the course load is designed such that by the end of the 11th grade all students have enough credits to graduate. In their senior year, if they choose to stay, they may engage in higher-level coursework.

THE BASIS SCHOOL IS THE BRAINCHILD OF A HUSBAND AND WIFE TEAM WHO FOUNDED THE SCHOOL TO COMBINE THEIR IDEA OF THE BEST FROM EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL TRADITIONS.

An integral part of the school's program is its system of yearly comprehensive exams, which every student must pass in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science, and social studies in order to be promoted to the next grade. In January, students take a "preliminary exam" in each subject, which serves as an accountability measure for students, a test-development tool for faculty, and a formative evaluation for teachers, parents, and administrators to make decisions about tutoring and other support options for the students. If students do not score higher than 60 percent on an exam, they are not promoted unless they successfully retake the exam before the start of the next school year. All members of the school community express satisfaction that the school allows no exceptions to these promotion policies. The faculty feel that students learn to take responsibility for their education. When students occasionally leave the school because of the heavy workload, they often come back, reporting that they were "bored" in other schools or felt lost in the larger, less personalized school environments.

Along with its rigorous curriculum and high performance standards, the BASIS School offers a number of supports for students that are designed not only to enable them to reach high academic standards, but also to foster a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Fifth grade, called "6 prep," may include some students who

are sixth-graders but not yet ready to engage in the full sixth-grade program. Students in need of academic help have access to tutoring both during the school day and after school and can enroll in four weeks of summer school. Teachers are required to hold after-school office hours twice a week—one day for student help and one day for parent-teacher conferences. Because the school is small, students may keep the same teachers over several years, and the teachers as a result understand students' unique strengths and weaknesses and can target help as needed. In addition to this kind of support from teachers, students also report feeling supported by their peers. One student notes that BASIS students "feel like brothers and sisters." In a school culture where "It is 'cool' to be on the honor roll, and even cooler to be on the high honor roll," the array of student support networks is intended to help students "find enjoyment in academic achievement."

During the last two weeks of the school year, after the comprehensive exams, students engage in project-based learning. Examples include developing and putting on an opera as part of the Metropolitan Opera Project and traveling to Mexico for a marine biology project. These last two weeks serve as an opportunity to put into practice skills that students have developed over the course of the school year.

Continuous Learning

Implicit in the school's high performance standards is an emphasis on improving teaching and learning. Student progress is assessed regularly, with six grading periods over the course of the year and a final, cumulative grade. Student achievement and improvement are acknowledged via frequent honors assemblies. Students receive a gold or silver balloon for achieving "distinguished" or "regular" honor roll, and students who have improved their cumulative average by 2 percentage points or more are honored and also awarded a balloon. A limited number of non-academic awards are given out by teachers who wish to recognize students

who achieve highly in other areas. The balloons have proven to be an effective inspiration to work hard, and even high school boys report "loving" the balloons. Students carry them throughout the school day, and they are a visible symbol of improvement, pride, and accomplishment. By continually recognizing student achievement and improvement, the school aims to strike "an appropriate balance between students feeling challenged by rigorous academics and the self-satisfaction that flows from the school's recognition of excellence based on hard work."

The BASIS School also devotes significant time and resources to improving teacher practice. At least once a semester, and twice or more for new teachers, the school director makes unscheduled observations of each teacher in his or her classroom. Observations are also conducted by peers, and in each case an evaluation is discussed with the observed teacher. Any problems are reported in writing to both the teacher and school administrators. Parents may also provide feedback on their children's teachers. "Hard measures," such as test scores, and "soft measures," such as science fairs and math competitions, are also considered in teachers' evaluations.

Teachers meet one afternoon a week to share teaching strategies and information about struggling students. All teachers participate in professional development workshops and trainings, including the College Board's Advanced Placement training, which the middle school as well as the high school teachers attend. At the end of every school year, all faculty and staff attend a two-day retreat, where together they review the students' performance on the comprehensive exams. Consistent with the emphasis on continuous improvement, the next year's syllabi are developed based on their analysis of these results. In August, teachers spend two weeks before school starts finalizing the syllabi and preparing for the year.

The school's founders also structure creative financial incentives into teacher compensation to encourage teacher commitment and improvement. Faculty com-

penensation comprises a base salary and a "performance bonus," which can range from 6 to 14 percent of the base salary. Performance bonuses are based on quantifiable goals determined at the beginning of the school year. Teacher commitment is also rewarded through a "wellness bonus." Teachers start the year with five paid sick days and are compensated at the end of the year for any that remain.

Parents and Partners

The ethic of individual responsibility and clear communication about standards and goals is one to which BASIS parents adhere strongly. Parent buy-in to the school's mission is deliberately sought, as the school expects parents to participate actively in their chil-

HIGH SCHOOL COURSES ARE BASED ON THE ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) CURRICULUM.

dren's education. Before a student enrolls, at least one parent must come for a school visit and interview with the school director. Parents are informed of the school's strict, high expectations and are told that if a child is not ready to work hard, or if parents are not willing to support their child to work hard, then the parents should consider other educational options. At the beginning of the school year, every student receives a Communication Journal, which serves as the primary means of communication between teachers and parents. Teachers and parents use the journals to correspond, and students use them to record daily homework, other assignments, and important information. Parents also frequently contact teachers by e-mail, often sending group e-mails when the matter is of general concern.

In addition, parents engage in an active community dialogue about the needs and goals of the school. The parent-teacher organization, called BASIS Boosters, operates independently from the school

administration and so is not a typical parent-teacher organization. The Boosters run a parent-created and supported Web site addressing any and all aspects of the school. The Web site includes an online calendar, a message board for announcements and discussions, links to resources and photos, and a teacher informa-

**THE BASIS SCHOOL WAS SELECTED BY THE AALE
FOR A PILOT PROGRAM TO DEVELOP CRITERIA
FOR CHARTER SCHOOL ACCREDITATION.**

tion database. Recently, the Web site offered a poll to ascertain whether the school should stock healthier snacks in its vending machines. Says one school administrator, "The important thing is that it's run by the parents, not the administration."

Governance and Accountability

Both BASIS schools, in Tucson and in Scottsdale, are owned and operated by BASIS School, Inc., a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. BASIS School, Inc. serves as the contracting agent with the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools and also appoints the school boards at each school. At the BASIS School, Tucson, both school founders currently sit on the board, as does the school director. The remaining members are a local community college professor, who has been repeatedly recognized as a superior educator, an experienced University of California educator and philanthropist, a professor emeri-

tus at the University of Arizona, the school's drama and public speaking teacher, and a parent representative.

The BASIS School, Tucson, was selected by the American Academy for Liberal Education (AALE) for a pilot program to develop criteria for charter school accreditation. (AALE is an accrediting agency for liberal arts colleges and universities.) The academy's main criteria are high levels of academic achievement and commitment to a liberal arts curriculum. Charter applicants are also assessed on factors including mission, teacher quality, assessment, financial management, organization and governance, student services, special education, and facilities. Beginning this year, the BASIS School will undergo annual reviews with AALE to secure renewal of its accreditation. In addition, the school continues to be accountable to the state of Arizona, which requires all charter school students to take Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test and the Stanford 9 standardized achievement tests.

BASIS students consistently score well above the state average on the AIMS test, and the BASIS School, Tucson, was the only school in Arizona in 2003 whose students' median scores were above the 90th percentile on the Stanford 9 math test in all grades. While academics are important, school leaders continue to emphasize that "BASIS graduates should be not only well prepared for college admission, but more importantly they should be prepared to succeed in college and enter their adult lives without losing their appreciation of learning."

Community of Peace Academy

Location	Year First Chartered and Authorizer	Grades	Enrollment	English Learners	Subsidized Meals	Special Needs	Per Pupil Spending
St. Paul, Minn.	1995 Local district	K-12	546	75%	80%	10%	\$10,355

In a community where gangs actively recruit adolescents into their ranks and teenagers sometimes marry at age 14, according to Hmong custom, the Community of Peace Academy (CPA) has created a school program and family-style community that empower students to make thoughtful, non-violent life choices. The school's mission, to create a peaceful environment in which each person is treated with unconditional positive regard and acceptance, is heard in teachers' conversations about curriculum, seen in student-fashioned hallway murals, and experienced through the school's PeaceBuilder awards. "Community of Peace works," says one parent, "because the teachers create a peaceful environment where the children feel secure and comfortable to learn. The teachers really care about the children." Their focus on educating "the whole person, mind, body and will for peace, justice, freedom, compassion, wholeness and fullness of life," guides every aspect of the school, from hiring and mentoring new teachers to disciplining students for misbehavior, from maintaining small class size to relationship building.

Located on the east side of St. Paul, Minn., Community of Peace Academy serves a high proportion of low-income and English language learners. With 546 students in grades K-12, 70 percent are Hmong and 20 percent are African American. The remaining 10 percent include Hispanic, Eritrean, white, Vietnamese, and American Indian students. The majority do not speak English at home. The K-12 curriculum focuses on four core academic areas: reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. In addition, peace and ethics instruction are infused at every grade level.

Community of Peace Academy was founded in 1995. It began as an elementary school and added a grade a year. As it became clear that the large local high schools would not meet the individual needs of the school's students, the Community of Peace Academy decided to extend its K-8 program. The staff has grown from under 20 members when the school opened to over 80 in the fall of 2003. The still-developing high school now enables families to enroll all of their children at one school, where students will not fall through the cracks.

Program and Operations

The mission shapes the entire program structure. The most striking and innovative feature, represented in the school's name, is its focus on fostering a non-violent lifestyle. Peace building and character education are woven into every facet of the school. Each teacher receives a two-week Responsive Classroom training so that all are using the same system for guiding student behavior and modeling positive discipline. This consistency from one classroom to the next is remarkable. Students know exactly what is expected of their behavior and the result is a peaceful, intentional tone in the classroom, which allows every student to engage in learning. The K-8 PeaceBuilder Program, Project Wisdom for grades 7-12, and the Ethics and Advisory elective in the high school are all integral parts of the school's peace and ethics program. It becomes part of the way teachers take time to teach the whole child, not narrowly focusing on academics. In a sixth-grade classroom, for example, a teacher identified a need to help her students reflect on what it feels like to be teased and why they tease others. By the end of this

morning circle, students shared personal feelings and set goals for the week, including a commitment not to tease others. At this age, the focus is preventative, on teaching students how to develop the skills to create a safe classroom environment.

**“THE TEACHERS CREATE A PEACEFUL ENVIRONMENT
WHERE THE CHILDREN FEEL SECURE AND
COMFORTABLE TO LEARN.”**

To work with older students, the Hmong Gang Strike Force coaches the high school faculty on signs that indicate gang involvement. Through this partnership, the school is also trying to empower parents to take back children from the gangs, which have a strong presence in the community.

Real life issues are seized on as ways to build a non-violent perspective. Last year, for example, two high school students broke out into a fight in front of a group of first-graders at breakfast. These were two new students with violent backgrounds who had an unresolved conflict from the weekend. At Community of Peace, consequences are functional and constructive rather than punitive. So as a result of their fight, the high school students were asked to develop a presentation for the first-graders, explaining their personal reflections about the use of violence and what they could have done differently. They talked about learning how to solve problems without striking out. It proved to be a powerful learning lesson for the teenagers, and teachers reported that it had a huge impact on one of the boys in particular. Teachers consider the school as a family and help each other to work through issues that arise, teaching students to learn from their mistakes and supporting them in the process.

In a practice called “looping,” teachers work with the same students for two years in a row. In the elementary school, each teacher is supported by an ESL specialist, a classroom aide, and a shared special education

teacher. For grades seven and eight, teachers team by math and science and by language arts and social studies; each teacher teaches the two subjects to the same two groups of 24 students for a two-year cycle. This looping, whether at the elementary grades or in junior high school, provides continuity and allows teachers to develop strong connections with students and families. Additionally, teachers feel that when they identify a critical student need, there is support to make things happen quickly. As one teacher comments, “I see change happen here when we need it.”

Continuous Learning

Ongoing learning is evident on every level, from the classroom to professional development. At the outset, the school hired an outside evaluator to help them stay focused on their mission and to strategize ongoing needs. The whole evaluation and accountability process is used to steadily improve teaching and learning. The board members, teaching and support staff, and administrators use student performance evaluation measures to focus on continuous improvement. Data collected each spring are analyzed by the evaluator consultant, then presented to the staff of the school. Working groups then review the data and work during the school year and summer to develop strategies that will help students to meet the desired outcomes of the plan. For example, analysis of standardized testing data revealed the need to develop a stronger reading program. So the school adopted Accelerated Reading K-12, created a reading period every day for every student, and lowered K-1 class size to 16 students. Through an America Reads grant, they collaborated with the University of St. Thomas to provide an after-school Reading Buddies program for second- and third-graders, pairing these elementary students with university students for reading support. The school also hired a full-time instructional facilitator to provide ongoing professional development. The reading program is now considered very strong. “My daughter would never pick up a book,” reports one parent, “and now I can’t stop her from

reading and her grades have gone up." She attributes this to the motivating schoolwide focus on reading.

The evaluation process also helped teachers see the need for a more fully developed ESL program, a model that was more inclusive, embedded, and tightly monitored. It is now one of the school's most innovative elements. Based on the belief that every CPA teacher must be an ESL teacher, the school is partnering with Hamline University, which provides in-service workshops, teacher observations, and conferencing with teams to provide feedback on the ESL content and learning objectives. Every two grades are matched with an ESL teacher who provides support in the classroom inclusion model and plans regularly with the classroom teachers. In the high school, two ESL teachers provide classroom support as well as teaching two ESL electives, one a tutorial for students who need additional help with their academic classes and a second ESL class for students who continue to struggle with English language acquisition.

Now every ESL student has an Individual Learning Plan. Looking at a student's standardized testing data, grades, and school record, the ESL teacher creates two to three learning goals for each student, indicating the level of intervention needed and areas for teacher focus. Every Monday, classroom teachers and ESL teachers plan strategies for their English learners, such as using more realia, giving students more time to respond to a question, and allowing students who are shy about participating more time to share ideas in classroom discussions.

Parents and Partners

Embracing the belief that parents are the first educators of their children, the school works very hard to reach out to the families of their students and keep lines of communication open and clear. All families are asked to sign a Home/School Compact and a Mentor Contract, committing themselves to full participation in the education of their child's mind, body, and will

within an educational community fully committed to peace and non-violence. Teachers start off the year visiting students' homes, connecting with families and developing a deeper understanding of and empathy for each child. This paves the way for ongoing com-

THE SCHOOL HIRED AN OUTSIDE EVALUATOR TO HELP THEM STAY FOCUSED ON THEIR MISSION AND TO STRATEGIZE ONGOING NEEDS.

munication throughout the school year, sharing goals and expectations. A full-time parent liaison fluent in Hmong arranges interpreters for home visits, meetings, and conferences and translates all school information, such as the Family Handbook and the monthly parent newsletter, into the Hmong language. Transportation and child care are provided for parents so they may attend school meetings, conferences, and events.

In addition to regular parent-teacher conferences, parent nights are held every other month throughout the school year. Students in grades K-6 write a weekly letter home to update parents on their grades, homework, and school learning.

Each year parents are invited to evaluate the school and its programs through focus groups and surveys. It was the parents' idea to have the students wear simple uniforms—khaki pants and polo shirts—as a way to remove barriers among students. Over nine years, teachers and parents have worked closely together to develop the school program. On the school's board of directors, parents hold five of the 11 voting memberships and teachers hold the other six.

Governance and Accountability

In addition to the five parents and six teachers on the school's board of directors, four non-voting members attend the board's monthly meetings: the school's executive director and principal, the business accountant

and adviser, the high school assistant principal, and the elementary school assistant principal. The board is responsible for implementing and overseeing the school's mission, budget, and policy. Every other year the board engages in strategic planning.

TEACHERS START OFF THE YEAR VISITING STUDENTS' HOMES, CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES, AND DEVELOPING A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF AND EMPATHY FOR EACH CHILD.

Community of Peace Academy is chartered through the local public school district of St. Paul, Minn. Granted for three years at a time, the charter has been renewed three times, based on the school's successful focus on its mission and student academic growth. CPA is accountable not only to the charter authorizer but also to the parents and students it serves. Accountability is also directly tied to teacher evaluation. This high level of accountability, says founding principal Karen Rusthoven, is at the heart of the school's success.

Financially, the school is sound, although staff are paid about 10 percent less than their district counterparts. In 1998, through a nonprofit building company, the Community of Peace Academy bought the building it was renting and built an addition to better serve the K-8 program. In 2002, by raising a community bond, the school further renovated the building and constructed a new high school. In addition to per pupil funding from the St. Paul district, the school uses a combination of other funding sources to provide spe-

cial programs for students and teachers. For example, school improvement funds support the instructional facilitator, who provides ongoing professional development support for teachers. Title III funding supports an ESL partnership with Hamline University. First-grade-preparedness funds provide the kindergarten with a full-day program, and class-size-reduction funds allow a maximum of 16 students in kindergarten and grade 1 classes.

In 2003, the Character Education Partnership in Washington, D.C., presented Community of Peace Academy with the National School of Character Award, recognizing the school as one of 10 schools nationwide for "exemplary work to encourage the ethical, social, and academic development of its students through character education." The school is also recognized by World Citizens Incorporated as an international peace school.

Academically, the school is doing well by its low-income students. For example, 73 percent of the students in grade 8 passed the 2003 Minnesota Basic Skills test in math, compared with 72 percent statewide. Math improvement among students in grades 5-8 ranked the school among the top 20 in Minnesota. In reading, with a majority of students whose home language is not English, 65 percent passed the assessment.

Finally, as demonstrated by the school's waiting list, parents are actively choosing Community of Peace Academy, drawn to the small size, the K-12 program, the cultural acceptance, and the focus on peace and non-violence.

KIPP Academy Houston

Location	Year First Chartered and Authorizer	Grades	Enrollment	English Learners	Subsidized Meals	Special Needs	Per Pupil Spending
Houston, Texas	1994 State	5-8	346	8%	86%	5%	\$8,670

At KIPP Academy Houston, daily chants ring out through the school: *All of us will learn. Read, Baby, Read.* Hallway banners proclaim *The path to success is education. Work Hard. Be Nice.* Every teacher and school leader at KIPP, which stands for Knowledge Is Power Program, is on a mission to level the playing field for students who live in neighborhoods troubled by illiteracy, drug abuse, broken homes, gangs, and juvenile crime. KIPP's mission is to "help our students develop academic skills, intellectual habits and qualities of character necessary to succeed in high school, college and the competitive world beyond." Serving predominantly low-income, minority students in grades 5-8, KIPP has forged an academic culture of high expectations, charged with the conviction that every child will learn. The key to this top-performing school is its unrelenting focus on results: teachers and administrators will do whatever it takes to help students learn, which includes being on call via cell phone for homework help at all hours. Everyone in the school is expected to live by its credo: "There are no shortcuts. Success is built through desire, discipline and dedication. The path to success is education."

KIPP Academy Houston is the flagship among the 31 KIPP schools now operating in the United States. It was started in 1994 by two Teach For America teachers, Dave Levin and Michael Feinberg, who recognized that to bridge the academic achievement gap, students needed more time and lots of hard work. Their first agenda was to broaden the concept of a school day to one in which every student worked hard academically from 7:25 in the morning until 5:00 at night. Then, as current principal Elliott Witney explains, "We focus on the pieces students are missing and work to catch them up and

prepare them for college. We want disciplined thinkers, in a society where thinking doesn't always get rewarded. And a big key to success here is that we want our kids to believe they have choices in life—that their future is not determined by their past or their status in society or their economic reality or their skin color or for whatever reason—success is defined by the choices they make."

When KIPP Academy began, it was a contract school in the Houston district. The program was immediately successful and co-founder Levin left at the behest of the New York Public Schools to start a KIPP school there. Meanwhile, Feinberg continued to run the Houston campus. By 1998, the district had moved the school five times, so Feinberg applied for and received a charter from the state. In 2000, with a \$7 million capital campaign, KIPP Academy Houston moved to its present 37-acre campus and built a multipurpose space for the new middle school.

Of KIPP Academy Houston's 346 students, who are chosen by lottery, 77 percent are Hispanic, 21 percent are African American, and the remaining 2 percent are Asian American and white; 8 percent of KIPP students are English language learners; 5 percent receive special education services; and 86 percent qualify for subsidized meals.

Program and Operations

A standout feature at KIPP Houston is its academic work ethic and how its chartered freedom is used to extend student learning time. The school day is considerably longer than most workdays and the schedule includes

two mandatory Saturdays each month, plus summer sessions. The school year begins in June with a three-week kick-off and then school resumes six weeks later in August for the rest of the school year. The summer component for incoming fifth-graders focuses on creating the school culture—making sure students

EVERY TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADER IS ON A MISSION TO LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD FOR STUDENTS WHO LIVE IN NEIGHBORHOODS TROUBLED BY ILLITERACY, DRUG ABUSE, BROKEN HOMES, GANGS, AND JUVENILE CRIME.

understand the strict code of conduct and learn the chants, songs, and systems that will carry them through the school year. For the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders, the focus is strictly academic.

Students travel as a class from one subject to the next, working as a team in their 80-minute core classes: language arts, history, science, and math. They also take 45-minute classes, including physical education, art, music, and Spanish. Students eat lunch with their entire grade in the cafeteria, as teachers conduct informal meetings. With 90 students per grade, there are three sections of 30 students each. Teachers are able to handle such large classes because the students are on task and well behaved.

Consequences for misbehavior or not completing homework are serious. Discipline is summed up in the slogan, "If you can't run with the big dogs, stay on the Porch." Students who misbehave are "put on the Porch" and are prohibited from socially interacting with anyone except adults, are required to wear their uniform shirts inside out, and must work their way off the Porch through a combination of good behavior, community service, apologies, and goal-setting. Incomplete homework sends students to "Wall Street," the after-school homework center, where they stay until they finish, even if it takes until 8:30 at night. KIPP also uses a schoolwide incentive program, a weekly "paycheck"

that rewards good citizenship and good deeds with "KIPP dollars" to purchase items at the school store. Paychecks can also be docked for bad behavior.

The academic focus at KIPP is on making sure that students "know what they need to know," says founder Mike Feinberg. "It is not a race," he adds. This attention to mastery and academic engagement is evident in a visit to a fifth-grade English class. Students conduct themselves in an academic discussion the way college students might engage with a text. Not needing to raise hands, but instead politely waiting to comment on the contributions of the last person, students offer remarkably mature and thoughtful responses. They hold the classwide discussion among themselves rather than always addressing the teacher. Pointing to particular examples in the book *Night John* by Gary Paulsen, students support their ideas with evidence, whether to make a point or to respectfully disagree. The tone is supportive rather than competitive. After 20 minutes of student discussion, the teacher compliments his students and models the use of supporting detail: "Your ideas are beautiful. I liked the way you grabbed someone else's idea and then extended it." At other points in the lesson, the focus was on grammar, with students learning hand cues to figure out the predicate and the nominative cases in a sentence. In KIPP classrooms, whether students are learning grammar, discussing a novel, singing their math facts, or chanting state capitals, the pace is fast and full of engaging instruction and learning.

KIPP does not track students; everyone takes the accelerated high school preparatory curriculum. The extra hours devoted to instruction and academic learning make it possible for all students to handle more rigorous academics. However, when students are new to KIPP, there is often a steep learning curve as they fill in the gaps and holes in their knowledge.

Continuous Learning

KIPP's first priority in maintaining its demanding program has been to recruit and train outstanding teachers committed to raising achievement for underserved kids. Most KIPP teachers are young and all work long hours. "We hire stallions," says Principal Witney, "give them the race track, and let them run."

Teachers from different grade levels are grouped in teams of four by department. As a team they videotape each other conducting lessons, give feedback, and help to develop a plan of action after viewing the videotape. This is a powerful learning tool for teachers to develop their teaching. Once a month, students have a half-day schedule and teachers convene for a staff meeting and curriculum development. Learning inquiry groups are another form of professional development at KIPP, one that is new enough to be considered a work in progress. Extra support is available to beginning teachers. The school's lead mentor teacher observes new teachers two to three times each week, writes comments, meets with them during their prep periods to provide feedback, and helps with curriculum and lesson planning.

Student learning is assessed in multiple ways, including weekly progress reports to parents, six-week report cards, student writing portfolios, unit tests, projects, and standardized tests. KIPP also considers other measures as valuable indicators of student progress towards achieving their mission, such as number of books read, attendance, and high school and college placement.

Parents and Partners

Parent involvement starts from the first orientation presentations. Entering students, their parents, and their teachers all sign the KIPP Commitment to Excellence Form, their agreement emphasizing a culture of shared expectations. These include making a commitment to the extended school hours, Saturday school and summer school, the school dress code and con-

duct code, and homework. If parents need help managing their commitments, staff are ready to help. One mother whose son consistently skipped his homework explained to the principal that she could not control the boy's TV viewing. "Would it help for you to bring in the TV?" Witney offered. "And she nearly fell out of the chair. It's sitting here on my floor until her son earns it back."

"WE FOCUS ON THE PIECES STUDENTS ARE MISSING AND WORK TO CATCH THEM UP AND PREPARE THEM FOR COLLEGE."

Parents are involved at KIPP in a myriad of ways: chaperoning end-of-the-year school trips such as visits to boarding schools and high schools across the country, supervising Saturday school, coaching sports, working in the office, serving on the board of directors, supporting students to focus on getting their work done, and providing transportation after school. One parent works in the office and helps other parents to communicate with teachers and administrators in Spanish. Parents serve food in the cafeteria, supervise Wall Street after school, and run fundraisers for the school. Bus transportation is provided to and from school, but parents often pick students up from the extended-day homework center and activities. Surveys find that parents are enthusiastic about the KIPP program and confident that it is making a difference for their children.

Governance and Accountability

KIPP, Inc., holds the charter for KIPP Academy Houston as well as for three other schools in Texas. The 19-member board of directors of KIPP, Inc., oversees the principals of each Texas campus and makes sure each campus adheres to the charter goals and Texas Education Code guidelines. The board also supports each campus for additional fundraising and marketing and holds each principal accountable for his or her school's academic and fiscal performance. Board members in-

clude CEOs, accountants, lawyers, educators, a doctor, community volunteers, and one parent.

KIPP Academy Houston operates on an annual budget of about \$3 million. The school typically raises about \$500,000 a year beyond the \$7,400 per pupil provided by state and federal funding. Principal Witney points out that this is about \$2,200 per pupil less than in the Hous-

**EVERYONE IN THE SCHOOL IS EXPECTED TO LIVE
BY ITS CREDO: "THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS."**

ton district. "Even with our fundraising," he says, "we're streamlined. We don't waste money on administrative people. We have to pay for facilities, we have a program for alumni, we pay for out-of-state field trips. And the Saturday school teacher and I pick up the trash."

KIPP Academy Houston measures its success with a 99 percent attendance rate, a waiting list larger than its total enrollment, outstanding standardized test scores, and eighth-grade students who have accepted \$13.5 million in high school scholarships over the past five years. KIPP Academy Houston has been recognized as a Texas Exemplary School every year since 1996, and, in 2003, was recognized as a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education. *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, *Forbes*, and other media have lauded KIPP's remarkable results, and KIPP is widely considered one of the most promising initiatives in public education today. With the backing of the Pisces Foundation, the KIPP national office trains future school leaders to create KIPP schools across the country.

KIPP Academy Houston will soon embark on a \$15 million capital campaign for facilities and an endowment to expand their program so that a child can enter in preschool and continue through high school.

Oglethorpe Charter School

Location	Year First Chartered and Authorizer	Grades	Enrollment	English Learners	Subsidized Meals	Special Needs	Per Pupil Spending
Savannah, Ga.	1998 Local district	6-8	319	0%	20%	5%	\$6,000

In 1997, when Savannah parent Martha Nesbit first pictured an alternative to the public middle schools available to her children, it was as a member of the district task force charged with researching ways to improve the district's lagging middle schools. But when the district accepted almost none of the task force recommendations, Nesbit approached a group of five friends in her church and asked, "If I think about starting a school, would you be on board with that?"

From the beginning, the parents' vision was for a school that would provide character education as well as challenging academics. They wanted a school that had an active role for parents, and they wanted student diversity. Yet the five friends were all white. To ensure that the school's student population would be representative of the district, where 57 percent of the students are African American, they purposefully invited African American parents to join them in shaping the school.

Because Georgia had no legislation allowing for a charter school that was a start-up (rather than a district conversion of an existing school), parents faced an unusual first step in securing their charter. They became lobbyists, persuading state legislators to pass the needed legislation. In addition to their trips to the capital, "We did a letter writing campaign and we did telephone calls. We probably made hundreds of calls," one parent estimates. The next step, securing the charter, was its own challenge. Knowing that they would be encountering a skeptical district board, parents prepared carefully. The charter was narrowly approved, five to four. Parents began preparations to open the school eight months later.

"We had nothing," one parent explains. "Somebody let us use a back office room in their insurance business where we set up our fax machine and a phone. We advertised for teachers in the newspaper and interviewed them in that office. They had no school to look at, no equipment, facilities, nothing. We still had to hire our principal and we had to have students." The district came up with an abandoned school that was both smaller than parents had planned for and in terrible disrepair. They took it. They found a principal that March, someone who would commute from her home in South Carolina. And the same month, at the district's showcase of all its magnet programs, according to parents there was "a line out the door for people to apply to come to our school."

The building capacity allows Oglethorpe to enroll 330 students, and there is a waiting list for each grade. Next year's sixth-grade class has almost twice as many applicants as can be accommodated. Students are chosen by lottery, and the efforts of the school's founding parents to reflect the diversity of the community in the school population have been effective. About 38 percent of Oglethorpe students are African American, 51 percent are white, 4 percent are Asian American, 3 percent are Hispanic, and 4 percent are multiracial. About 20 percent of students qualify for subsidized meals. Five percent are designated special education and participate in the school's inclusion program.

Program and Operations

Oglethorpe Charter School is an official Core Knowledge school, which means that at least 80 percent of

the Core Knowledge curriculum is taught annually. The Core Knowledge curriculum, developed by scholar E.D. Hirsch, is designed to begin in the first grade, so Oglethorpe teachers frequently have to scramble to fill in their middle school students' missing Core Knowledge background. Nonetheless, teachers and parents

FROM THE BEGINNING, PARENTS' VISION WAS FOR A SCHOOL THAT WOULD PROVIDE CHARACTER EDUCATION AS WELL AS CHALLENGING ACADEMICS. THEY WANTED A SCHOOL THAT HAD AN ACTIVE ROLE FOR PARENTS, AND THEY WANTED STUDENT DIVERSITY.

like the sense that students are learning what it takes to be "a really educated person." As one parent puts it, "They are teaching things that everybody should know in life, to be a participating member of society." And even though Oglethorpe does not focus on test preparation, an eighth-grade student reports, "We have been hearing from students who have graduated that they seem to be a lot more prepared for high school than their friends who came from regular schools. Our school is a lot more challenging, and so by the time test time comes, we are very prepared and ready to take the test. We always do well."

All students at Oglethorpe are held to high academic standards, and participation in sports and special interest clubs, instead of attendance in study halls, depends on satisfactory grades. A Personal Education Plan (PEP) is created for each student, with clear learning goals related to a student's progress meeting subject area objectives. The PEP also includes standardized test data, results of a multiple intelligences survey, study skills monitoring, student reflections and self-evaluations, teacher comments, and portfolio work samples from each year.

Teachers at Oglethorpe work hard to meet students' individual needs and all provide regular tutorials for students during lunch and after school. Students who need help get it. One student explains what feels

different about Oglethorpe: "I've been in schools where they help you with some things, but teachers here stay after school and stay over their work time to help you. It is really small here, so all the teachers know all the kids. And you feel a lot more, I guess, comfortable with your teachers."

Students entering the sixth grade can test into the Advanced Instruction with Motivation (AIM) class. Students in the AIM class can earn five Carnegie units for high school credit by passing a test at the end of the course. The AIM class is self-contained and student diversity in the class is controlled to be proportional to that in the school. Oglethorpe also has a teacher who works with students identified for academic intervention in a special reading program and after school two or three days a week between 2:30 and 5:30. Every effort is made to help students succeed. Last year, for example, a small group of students who failed their grade-six standards were placed in an accelerated program and given support until December to catch up. Three of the five students were able to move into the seventh grade, while two continued in sixth grade.

The school operates on a block schedule with 90-minute classes and a special schedule on Fridays. Students say they like the block schedule. They note, "You get more done in class," and "Because it doesn't meet each day, you have more time to get your homework done, so it doesn't feel overwhelming." Classes average 22 students. The school day begins at 7:30 and ends at 2:30, with tutorials from 2:30 to 3:20. On Fridays, classes are shortened to allow for a one-hour block that rotates among assemblies, clubs, and TLC (Titans Love Character) advisory group.

TLC is the most explicit aspect of Oglethorpe's focus on character development and is organized into cross-grade groups of about 12 students each. Every month a different "virtue"—such as integrity or service—is emphasized and students discuss what it means to them. The school also has a tightly monitored dress code and

forbids students to bring personal electronics such as music players or video games to school. Rap music is excluded from the annual talent show. "It's strict here," students agree. Yet the results are positive. Last year only 44 detentions were given out for the entire year. When students are off campus, "People can tell who the Oglethorpe students are," one teacher says, "because of their good behavior."

Continuous Learning

Oglethorpe is accredited through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and in 2001 as part of the SAC accreditation, the school conducted a self-study focusing on student improvement. The study revealed that teachers needed more training in the Core Knowledge curriculum, which they now get. It also led the school to set goals for improving student learning outcomes. In 2002, Oglethorpe implemented SRA's Direct Instruction Corrective Reading program for their students who were reading below grade level—one-third of the student body. As part of this initiative, some students' parents agreed to become involved in the parent reading partners program, reading stories and completing vocabulary-building exercises together with their children at home.

As a Georgia charter school, Oglethorpe Charter School does not require teachers to be certified, but they must demonstrate competence in their subject areas. One teacher has a doctorate and one teacher came from university teaching. Most have many years of teaching experience. As a faculty they share common practices and have formed teacher research study groups for ongoing professional development. In addition to participating in weekly department meetings and monthly professional development sessions, each teacher compiles a professional portfolio. Self-reflection is part of teachers' annual evaluation process. Teachers describe feeling "respected as educators" and note that communication is very open at the school. Two teachers represent the faculty on the school's board of directors.

Parents and Partners

As stipulated by Georgia charter law, a parent-majority board governs Oglethorpe Charter School and monitors its operations. Parents have the ultimate decision-making responsibility for the school.

While membership on the board rotates and only a few parents serve at a time, *all* parents sign a contract to provide service to the school. Parents are obligated for 20 hours a year (or 10 hours if a single parent). The weekly school newsletter contains suggestions for ways that parents can earn their service hours and reminds them to do their part. For example, parents can chaperone field trips, prepare food for events, lead

A PERSONAL EDUCATION PLAN (PEP) IS CREATED FOR EACH STUDENT, WITH CLEAR LEARNING GOALS RELATED TO A STUDENT'S PROGRESS MEETING SUBJECT AREA OBJECTIVES.

clubs, help in the office, and serve on committees. They can do weekend maintenance chores at the school, and they can receive credit for attending school programs such as the Math/Science Night and sporting events. If parents do not fulfill the family contract (or request a hardship exemption), their students are not allowed to re-enroll the following year.

Communication with parents is frequent. Homework assignments are posted on the school Web site. Every Wednesday, folders are sent home with the school newsletter and classroom updates. Every quarter parents receive a mid-quarter report and a quarter-end report card for their children. "The school tends to attract families who want to be involved in their kids' education," one parent observes.

Beyond its relationship with parents, Oglethorpe has developed partnerships within the community. The school uses a local church facility for assemblies, special events, and gym classes; and the music program

is operated in conjunction with a local university. The after-school program is in partnership with a nearby YMCA. In addition, Oglethorpe students participate in community outreach, such as an annual beach cleanup, diabetes walk, or food drive for homeless shelters. In March, the whole school became reading partners for students at a local elementary school.

THE WEEKLY SCHOOL NEWSLETTER CONTAINS SUGGESTIONS FOR WAYS THAT PARENTS CAN EARN THEIR SERVICE HOURS AND REMINDS THEM TO DO THEIR PART.

Accountability and Governance

The 11-person board of directors includes a parent majority, community members, two teacher representatives, and, in a non-voting capacity, the school administrators. Board members serve one- or two-year terms. Facility needs are a constant headache. In addition to contending with the building's generally poor condition, the board has needed to add restrooms and a new drainage system. The roof must be replaced. And to accommodate an additional class at each grade, portable classrooms are the only possible solution. One has already been added and another has been ordered.

Resources are tight. The Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools provides the school facility and student transportation. Per pupil funding averages about \$6,000. Last year expenses were \$2,112,000, which included \$80,000 raised through grants to cover the costs of developing the reading program, paying a technology teacher, and buying laptops for the computer lab.

In June 2003, the school charter came up for renewal by the Savannah school board. This time, in contrast to the narrow vote in favor of the school's initial charter, the renewal passed unanimously. To even its toughest audience, Oglethorpe Charter School had proved its mettle.

Parents and the board are proud to have created a school that reflects the diversity of the Savannah community and that addresses student learning needs ranging from special education to advanced academics. For the 94 students reading below grade level, enrollment in the school's Corrective Reading program is beginning to make a difference. Sixty-nine percent of sixth-graders read at grade level; at seventh and eighth grades, this rises to 78 and 79 percent. In writing, 98 percent of students met or exceeded the state standards. Parent involvement, including the 44-hour average that families contribute each year, sets a model for the kind of character development that parents and faculty agree is woven throughout everything that happens at the school.

Ralph A. Gates Elementary School

Location	Year First Chartered and Authorizer	Grades	Enrollment	English Learners	Subsidized Meals	Special Needs	Per Pupil Spending
Lake Forest, Calif.	1999 Local district	K-6	850	44%	63%	5%	\$5,367

The most distinctive feature of Ralph A. Gates Elementary School is its two-way language immersion (Spanish/English) program. In 1998, a group of concerned parents spearheaded the conversion of Gates from a regular California elementary school to a charter school, in large part to protect this program. The recent passage of Proposition 227 had all but eliminated bilingual programs in the state, but parents, teachers, the community, and the school board in Saddleback Valley Unified School District were all committed to maintaining the program that had been developed over the years at Gates. A Gates parent, who later became school board president, took the lead along with a resource teacher in writing the charter application. They applied to become a district-dependent charter, a type of charter under California law that preserves the school district as the management organization to deal with contracts, personnel policies, and so forth, but allows the school site council control over instruction, staffing configurations, and budgeting.

The multicultural, multilingual mission at Gates goes beyond a particular program. The school's goal is to educate each student as fully as possible, advancing the life prospects of students who often come from families in which the parents did not complete high school. A few years ago the principal and staff reviewed and revised the school mission statement, taking a careful look at their student population, which had an increasing number of English language learners and low-income students. They established a set of seven key "tenets" that guide how they interact as a staff and school community. A sense of purpose and high expectations pervades the school culture. The principal holds teach-

ers to these standards, and she is currently counseling out one of the staff. Teachers agree with this approach. As one explains, "Either you are part of our staff or you need to find another staff that meets your vision and your mission."

The celebration of multicultural community is at the heart of the school. The principal describes how the large number of students from bi- and tri-racial families bolsters an attitude of acceptance for all students. Kermes, an annual multicultural fair hosted by the parents and community with assistance from the staff, is attended by 3,000 to 5,000 people—families from across the Orange County area—in a literal celebration of the multicultural community that Gates represents. Of the school's 850 students, 44 percent are English language learners and 63 percent qualify for subsidized meals. The students enrolled in the two-way immersion program represent 43 percent of the school population, while 57 percent of the students are in the regular program. In the school as a whole, providing the best possible education to these students and enhancing their lives and those of their families is the purpose that drives a caring and committed staff.

Program and Operations

Gates is a welcoming home for bilingual language development for both children and adults. Students are enrolled in either the two-way language immersion program or the regular program, which includes English language development strategies. After school, students—both English and Spanish speakers—can extend their fluency through programs funded by a

Gates School Tenets

We strive for high academic standards and expectations for all students in an environment that stimulates learning.

We promote students' self-esteem with positive reinforcement and build good character so each student can be successful.

We believe in programs that allow students to progress academically through appropriately leveled instruction.

We believe our parents should be equipped with information and resources in order to support their child's learning.

We respect diversity and individual differences in our students and staff.

We believe students should be provided with opportunities to learn a second language.

We use available technology to help our students, parents, and staff prepare for the future.

Title III grant. This after-school foreign language program includes Spanish as a second language classes for the native English speakers and a Spanish literacy program for Spanish speakers who are in the regular program but want to extend their academic literacy in their first language. French classes will be added to the after-school foreign language program as it expands.

Parents can build their language skills, too. When a survey revealed that almost half the parents had not completed high school and that they wanted to learn Eng-

lish and computer literacy skills, the school responded. Working with the district's adult education department, they combined Title I, Title III, and adult education funding to set up a parent education program. Now parents go to school with their children, heading for one of the school's two computer labs, where they take ESL classes that also build computer literacy. After school there are classes for English-speaking parents who want to learn Spanish and for Spanish-speaking parents who want to become literate in their native language.

This array of programs has attracted highly qualified staff members—all have specialized certification—who are excited about teaching English learners and committed to helping their students succeed. Gates enrolls more language learners and low-performing students than any other school in the district, and support for these students is high. Parents who share the staff's enthusiasm for language development have formed the Advocates for Language Learning group. Members of this group have become knowledgeable about the international track record of two-way immersion programs, attend conferences, and actively contribute to school planning.

While the carefully designed language programs at Gates provide a solid base, the staff attribute their students' recent large increases in test scores to an additional factor—the dynamic model of flexibly regrouping students homogeneously for directed reading, writing, and math instruction, which the school began four years ago. Suspending the assumption of “one teacher—one classroom,” they instituted a Joplin-plan grouping arrangement in which students are regrouped every four to five weeks into homogeneous skill groups. Students in grades 4–6 are grouped across grades; students in grades 2 and 3 are grouped within their grade. The regrouping has created an opportunity for teachers in grades 2–6 to work together and collaborate, sharing their knowledge of the children whose education they share. For the children, the regrouping is a way to break down stereotypes, meet individual needs, and give

everyone access to the same standards-based curriculum. Every group works on the same standards, but assignments vary in depth, and group sizes are smaller for students who need more help. Special education students are included in these groups, for example, and the resource special education teacher is part of the teaching team.

If a student needs extra assistance, the Gator Assistance Team steps in. This team of eight staff members is trained in the Masonic model to assess the student's social, emotional, and economic needs. Teachers make the referrals; the team sifts through them and makes recommendations that are implemented. The student is then monitored, and, if needed, the team can move the child to special education testing. The school's community liaison can also get involved as needed to facilitate access to community counseling or health resources.

Continuous Learning

Distinctive about the school culture is the "can-do" attitude. Teachers and staff will try whatever, provided it has worked for someone else or has evidence to show that it is a valid, promising program or approach. After trying and evaluating something new, staff decide whether to continue it or not. For example, when regrouping was instituted, in 2000-01, the whole first half of the year was dedicated just to getting the planning down pat. Teachers finally got started, halfway through the year, regrouping students for language arts. Initially, there were a lot of naysayers and doubters, people who were hesitant or even a little scared. What the principal suggested to them is indicative of the spirit that has served the school well: "We're all jumping off the fence and if we fall, I'll fall first and I will be your pillow." The principal, who had been at the school only a year, felt honored that the staff were willing to trust her, and after only two weeks, teachers realized that their experiment with regrouping was working. Even the loudest naysayer was pleased to have been wrong. At the end of the school year, teachers were eager to know wheth-

er regrouping would continue the following year. The principal left it up to them, and that's when regrouping was instituted for math as well as language arts.

GATES IS A WELCOMING HOME FOR BILINGUAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT FOR BOTH CHILDREN AND ADULTS.

The teachers have developed rubrics for developmental progress that are used for student assessment, by the students themselves to reflect on their progress, for instructional planning, and in the regular reporting to parents. Teachers also refer to monthly printouts from standardized assessments to help them link their instruction to identified student needs.

Parents and Partners

Parents are active contributors to the school, volunteering in classrooms and running supplementary activities. The annual Kermes multicultural celebration is a highlight of the year, and draws participation from businesses and families in the surrounding community as well as from the school's own population. The parent-run Multicultural Club, the Computer Club, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, and Homework Club supplement the after-school programs.

Parents and teachers work together to bring in new opportunities. In 2002, for example, the staff saw a need to help students increase in resiliency, respect for themselves and others, and responsibility for their work. A team of parents and staff attended a regional "Asset Building" workshop. They returned with training for the rest of the staff and began the integration of a character education program, focusing on teaching students how to build and practice the traits of positive character. This year, resiliency training is being extended to the assets classes the school provides for parents.

The staff reciprocate parents' involvement by going out of their way to be accessible to those who want

to talk about their children's progress. As the principal reports, "We are here whenever they can make it. Before school, our teachers will come in at 8:00 in the morning, 7:00 in the morning. They will stay until 6:00, 7:00 at night to meet with the parents whom they feel they need to meet with."

**THEY INSTITUTED A JOPLIN-PLAN GROUPING ARRANGEMENT
IN WHICH STUDENTS ARE REGROUPED EVERY FOUR TO
FIVE WEEKS INTO HOMOGENEOUS SKILL GROUPS.**

In addition, the school provides regular and frequent communication to parents in both Spanish and English. Specific information about student progress is provided to parents monthly.

Governance and Accountability

The school site council, made up of six parents and six staff members, sets and oversees the school program. While taking advantage of district management services and staff development offerings, Gates has autonomy to allocate the school's budget and determine staffing as well as instructional programs. They can combine funding from different sources and use these funds flexibly as they determine what best meets the school's needs. For example, while the district's normal staffing pattern would not include an assistant principal for a school of

this size, the council felt that additional oversight was needed and allocated a position for a teacher on special assignment. They also hired a number of part-time teachers who reduce group sizes during the regrouping for core academic subjects. While their annual plans and budgets are submitted to Saddleback Valley Unified School District as the authorizing agency, the district board is highly supportive of Gates and routinely accepts their proposals. The charter came up for renewal in 2003 and was quickly and unanimously approved.

Student scores provide positive evidence of the school's effectiveness. The 2000 Academic Performance Index (API) was 689 and was targeted to be raised 6 points for 2001. The reading regrouping empowered student subgroups to make significant gains above the target set by the state, raising the API by 32 points to 731. In 2002-03, Gates staff restructured the mathematics programs based on test data from 2001. This regrouping allowed them to create smaller classes for struggling students (as well as high achievers) so that they could provide the mathematics curriculum at each group's instructional level. Additionally, the program has increased the redesignation rate for students to be classified "fluent English," in both the two-way immersion and regular programs. In recognition of the school's continued student achievement, Gates received the California Distinguished Schools Award in 2002 and the California Title I Achieving Schools Award in 2003.

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School

Location	Year First Chartered and Authorizer	Grades	Enrollment	English Learners	Subsidized Meals	Special Needs	Per Pupil Spending
Boston, Mass.	1999 State	6-8	180	0%	56%	7%	\$12,910

This urban middle school was founded in order to prepare its African American and Hispanic students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college. Located in Boston's tough Roxbury neighborhood, this charter school is filling a gap in local students' education choices. Unlike any other middle school in this impoverished community, Roxbury Preparatory Charter School (RPC) features an academic program designed specifically to prepare students for college.

The philosophy driving Roxbury Prep is that when curriculum is engaging and rigorous, when student character and community responsibility are emphasized, and when the community network supports student academic, social, and physical well-being, all students can succeed in college preparatory programs, even the 66 percent of the school's incoming students who are reading one or more grade levels below the norm.

The key to Roxbury Prep's success in bridging the achievement gap is its relentless and systematic focus on academic achievement. There is an urgency in the school, an understanding that this is a life-changing opportunity for students.

The school was started in 1999 by a team of educators—John King; Evan Rudall; Roger Harris, then principal of the James P. Timilty School; and Keith Motley, the vice chancellor of student affairs at the University of Massachusetts, Boston—who recognized that Roxbury did not have any public schools dedicated to a college preparatory program. With a charter from the state of Massachusetts, they originally intended to create a school for grades 6–12. Amid the challenges of

start-up, however, they realized that managing such a comprehensive facility and providing all the options that come with a high school program, such as sports, was beyond their means. The board of trustees and administrators decided that, rather than launch the high school program, they preferred to focus on developing an outstanding college preparatory middle school for students in grades 6–8. As John King says, "It was better to focus on doing middle school well."

Roxbury Prep has 180 students: 72 sixth-graders, 58 seventh-graders and 50 eighth-graders this year. Eighty percent of the students are African American and 20 percent are Hispanic. Female students outnumber male students by 56 to 44 percent. Three-quarters of the students come from the Boston neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan.

Program and Operations

Roxbury Prep has developed many schoolwide structures to create a common culture and work ethic for students. The academic day runs from 7:45 to 3:15, followed by mandatory enrichment classes, after-school clubs, and a homework center. Each day begins with breakfast in advisory groups and 25 minutes of Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) time. Students take six academic classes of 50 minutes each plus physical education and computers twice a week. Each day students have two periods of mathematics and two periods of reading/language arts; the extra emphasis helps students make up ground as needed and get ahead in these basics.

Friday's are structured differently, to allow for 1:30 p.m. dismissal so that teachers can meet for professional

development. Saturdays find the school open and as many as half the school's 20 teachers and 20 to 30 students on hand.

Classroom practices promote continuity from one class to the next. For example, each day teachers outline on the blackboard a specific, measurable "Aim" for the day, a "Do Now" activity, and homework. When students enter any classroom at Roxbury Prep, they move quickly to their assigned seats and begin working silently on the "Do Now" activity, a five-minute warm-up that gets them settled and immediately focused on school work.

**EACH DAY STUDENTS HAVE TWO PERIODS
OF MATHEMATICS AND TWO PERIODS
OF READING/LANGUAGE ARTS.**

In a math procedures classroom, the "Mad Minute" routine is used to check basic math facts, helping students to develop speed and accuracy. The 24 sixth-graders are serious and focused on the work at hand. The teacher does not want students having side conversations with their neighbors, instructing them, "You have a question? You ask me." The class is fast paced, highly structured, and the tone disciplined.

Classes do not use textbooks, except for reference. The teachers draw from a curriculum prepared by staff during the previous summer and aligned both to state and Roxbury Prep standards. This curriculum, in turn, is refined using the plans developed in previous years.

In addition to a focus on basics, the school offers many enrichment classes, including Spanish, art, sports, choir, drama, computers, mock trial, and yearbook. Clubs include a history movie club, a science club, peer tutoring, music, and the student newspaper.

Character development is also an explicit part of the Roxbury Prep experience. It is woven into the daily interactions in the classrooms. As one teacher says, "Students are developing a sense of respect, how you speak

to someone, how to ask a question for help. It is part of the daily learning." Friday advisory meetings have a specific character development focus at each grade: the sixth grade focuses on responsibility and time management, the focus at seventh grade is community and non-violence, and eighth-graders address leadership and community. Additionally, every eighth-grader is paired with a sixth-grade buddy, usually a student who rides the same bus, to help create a supportive sense of community across grades. Schoolwide community meetings are another opportunity to reinforce school values. The entire school comes together to share what they are learning in their classes, see performances by enrichment classes or clubs, and celebrate student academic achievement.

To ensure a safe, structured, and focused learning environment, Roxbury enforces a strict code of conduct and discipline. All students wear blue shirts, navy pants or khakis, and brown or black shoes and belts. Boys wear ties. Students not in compliance are not allowed to attend class and parents are asked to pick them up or bring them appropriate clothing. Students are required to be in line and silent in the halls when passing from one class to the next. In class they are expected to be focused and on task. Students are polite when they ask questions, raising their hands and using a respectful tone.

Students may be given demerits for conduct violations such as tardiness, school bus misbehavior, chewing gum, talking in the hallways, disrupting class, arriving unprepared, not completing homework on time, or disrespectful behavior. Three demerits lead to after-school detentions, and multiple demerits result in extended detentions on Friday afternoon or Saturday morning. Any student who is struggling academically may be pulled out of enrichment or physical education classes for tutoring. Students may also be required to attend after-school tutoring, homework center, Saturday school, and summer school to improve their academic performance.

Continuous Learning

Multiple assessments guide Roxbury's curriculum and instruction. Comprehensive exams based on the school curriculum guide ongoing adjustments to meet student learning needs. Students all take a benchmark comprehensive exam at the beginning of the year. Comprehensive exams at the end of each trimester indicate fine-grained academic progress aligned with the RPC standards, state standards, and Stanford 9 standards, when relevant. Teachers create extensive spreadsheets to show each standard and knowledge area tested and how each student performed on each question. Analyzing these results helps teachers see which students need additional support in specific areas. Students receive progress reports monthly and report cards each trimester. Students take the Stanford 9 at the midyear and at the end of the school year to monitor academic progress.

Each Friday, teachers engage in an afternoon of professional development. They devote one hour to grade-level team meetings, one hour to inquiry groups, and a half hour for a staff meeting. By collaborating to address challenges that arise, teachers solidify their teams and delve deeply into pedagogy, problem solving, and teaching issues. During inquiry group meetings, teachers share their efforts and analyze student work in order to focus their instruction. For example, one team of teachers saw the need to focus on the use of evidence in writing. They developed a shared vocabulary, rubrics, and a teaching system across classes so that when students were writing paragraphs in one class, they would know to draw on strategies they were learning in their other classes.

During the summer, staff are paid an additional stipend to devote three weeks to planning and preparing curriculum for the school year. They develop Curriculum Alignment Templates (CATs) that align with Roxbury Prep standards, the Massachusetts standards, clear and measurable benchmarks, learning activities, and assessment for each unit. A school curriculum file is maintained in binders and electronically, and teachers

are required to save all CATs, syllabi, assessments, and course materials in hard copy and on the server. The process is valuable for developing shared knowledge among the staff and passing it on to new teachers, who can review the CATs for the courses they are teaching and build on those lesson plans and curriculum units.

**PARENTS CAN EXPECT TO HEAR FROM THEIR CHILD'S
TEACHER ADVISER AT LEAST ONCE EVERY TWO WEEKS.**

Parents and Partners

The school brings families into the school culture with an orientation that presents the ways that Roxbury Prep is different from traditional public schools. Families and students sign the Family and School Contract at the beginning of the year, agreeing to make the school a safe and orderly environment and to ensure that students arrive at school and class on time, with homework completed. Parents also agree to participate in school activities, to communicate regularly with the teachers, and to follow the guidelines of the school.

When the school first started, the codirectors believed that all families needed to carry the responsibility for making sure that students completed their homework, but as it became clear that some students did not have a quiet place to study or needed additional support while working on homework, the school added more support systems. With students having two or three hours of homework every night, there is now a homework center, where teachers can provide academic help and students have a quiet space to complete their assignments. The homework center can be mandatory for students who are not completing their work or are falling behind and receiving poor grades.

Teachers work hard to keep communication lines open with families. Classroom teachers send home weekly syllabi for parents' information and signature, and parents are asked to check homework assignments nightly. Regular parent-teacher conferences keep par-

ents informed about their child's academic progress. In addition, parents can expect to hear from their child's teacher adviser at least once every two weeks. Teachers each serve as advisers for 12 students. They know these students well, spending breakfast and lunch with them,

ALL ROXBURY PREP GRADUATES HAVE GONE ON TO HIGH SCHOOLS WITH COLLEGE PREPARATORY MISSIONS.

the morning DEAR time, and the Friday character development advisories. Parents appreciate the Roxbury teachers' commitment. "They come early and stay late," says one. Another parent reports what a pleasure it is that when teachers call, it is not always bad news. She also notes that her daughter can call her teachers until 8:00 at night if she has a question.

The Family Involvement Committee organizes potluck dinners and ongoing ways for families to be involved with the school program. Two parent representatives are on the school's board of trustees and serve on board committees.

In addition to several small community partnerships, Roxbury Prep benefits from donors who provide the school with about \$350,000 annually in grant funding.

Governance and Accountability

Roxbury Prep operates on an annual budget of about \$2,350,000. The school receives state-funded tuition of about \$9,500 per student and other state and federal

monies for programs such as Title I and special education, but the average cost to educate a student is estimated at \$13,000 per year. The difference represents a healthy amount, and members of the board of trustees are valued in part for their ability to help the school raise funds. Of the 12 board members, 10 are Boston-area community members and two are parents.

The school has two codirectors. John King oversees curriculum and development and teacher observation and evaluation, and Josh Phillips is in charge of facilities, operations, and fundraising. But as they explain in unison, "We make the major decisions together."

Roxbury's charter was renewed in February 2004. Among the state's predominantly African American schools, Roxbury Prep students in 2002–03 had the highest average scores on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests in sixth-grade math, eighth-grade math, and eighth-grade science, and the second-highest average score on the seventh-grade English test. Students averaged over 2.5 grade levels of progress on the Stanford 9. Of course, the most important measure of success to the school's families and staff is students' ability to continue on a path toward college. All Roxbury Prep graduates have gone on to high schools with college preparatory missions, and the school's recent graduating class earned over \$400,000 in scholarships and financial aid toward tuition in private high schools.

The School of Arts and Sciences

Location	Year First Chartered and Authorizer	Grades	Enrollment	English Learners	Subsidized Meals	Special Needs	Per Pupil Spending
Tallahassee, Fla.	1999 Local district	K-8	226	2%	19%	22%	\$5,750

A visitor to this school sees little that is typical of a traditional classroom. Students in multi-age classrooms range across three grades—K-2, 3-5, or 6-8. They are seated collegially at round tables rather than in rows of desks. They may be working on independent seatwork, cooperative learning with a partner or small group, or an interdisciplinary project. The goal sheets and checklists in students' folders let them manage their learning activities. The artifacts students select for their portfolios are an important measure of their achievement. Peer mediation and a student court help maintain school discipline, and all teachers and students are trained in conflict resolution and mediation.

According to Principal Debo Powers, the vision for the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) emerged from a group of educators and parents. The result is a school that centers around beliefs that learning is natural—since human beings are inherently curious—and that academics are only one component of education, best learned through hands-on activities that tap into real interest and through interdisciplinary approaches framed by large themes. High among the qualities valued at SAS are self-motivation, critical thinking, and creative expression. The school's unique curriculum design and program structures dovetail to support its mission "to facilitate individual educational ownership and responsible lifelong learners through interdisciplinary approaches to arts and sciences in a safe and nurturing environment."

SAS greeted its inaugural students in 1999, three years after first seeking a charter from the Leon County School District. Delays getting charter approval were followed with a series of frustrations in finding a suit-

able facility. In what might have been the last straw, just six weeks before the school was to open in August 1998, the school year had to be cancelled. Another facility had fallen through. The principal and teachers scrambled to find other positions for the year, a year that they turned into an opportunity to think and plan for yet another August. The continuing commitment to open the school was remarkable. "When you think about it," Powers says, "it's just amazing."

The students who are drawn to SAS, teachers estimate, include about one-third who have been home-schooled, one-third who select SAS specifically for its alternative pedagogy, and one-third who choose the school because previous schools did not meet their needs. Currently, SAS has a waiting list of 400 students for the school's 226 places. The student population is 62 percent white, 22 percent African American, and 9 percent Hispanic and Asian American; 22 percent qualify for special education services.

Program and Operations

SAS has three classrooms for each multi-age cluster—primary, intermediate, and middle school. Primary and intermediate classes have a maximum of 25 students and each class has a credentialed teacher and an associate teacher working as a team to facilitate instruction in all academic subject areas. In the middle school, classes rotate to different subject area teachers. Students in all grades take music, drama, art, Spanish, and physical education. Daily hands-on science is also a feature at every level.

Learning is driven by students' curiosity and is focused through a project-based interdisciplinary approach. Arts, science, foreign language, reading, writing, and mathematics are all integrated. For example, older students learning about Asia spent six weeks preparing projects whose topics ranged from sushi to

STUDENTS STAY WITH THE SAME TEACHER FOR A THREE-YEAR PERIOD, SO TEACHERS REALLY GET TO KNOW THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS.

Genghis Khan to modern-day sweat shops in China. Regardless of the topic, their teacher points out, "You get speaking skills, you get writing skills, and you get research skills."

Instruction at all levels is highly individualized. In a K-2 classroom, where students are working in small groups with math manipulatives, some are learning subtraction using beads, others are learning about number place, while yet another group uses plastic coins to learn addition. Every student has an individual folder, indicating which activities he or she is ready to work on. The two teachers and a parent volunteer circulate around the room, working first with one child and then on to the next, asking questions, assisting, and providing direct instruction and support when necessary. Next door, students in another K-2 classroom work on literacy projects. A small group sits reading a story with one teacher, while another group works at a table with a teacher creating books. A few students work independently on a word game, and it is not easy to tell age or grade distinctions among students within the class.

Teachers find the multi-age classroom a powerful factor for cooperative learning, with older students naturally helping younger ones. Students are taught to work together, support is provided as needed, and no one is restricted from learning more by his or her particular age or grade. The principal explains that the

younger students try to emulate the older students, and it raises the standard of work for everyone. SAS students are expected to work toward their personal best and to respect everyone. "No put downs" is an operating principle of the school and contributes to the self-confidence exhibited by students. "It's very, like, peaceful," a middle school student reports. "I've never seen a bully here."

Students stay with the same teacher for a three-year period, so teachers really get to know the individual needs and learning styles of their students. In addition to the continuity this provides, it contributes to the secure learning environment the school strives for. As one student says, "It's really a priority to have respect between the teachers and students. You don't have to be afraid of being embarrassed in front of the class or having them get mad at you. You feel free to talk to them." Students appreciate the freedom they are given to express themselves. For some this manifests in capes and plumes, one enjoys a spot of blue hair.

Teachers describe the natural transition of students who are new to the school and new to taking personal responsibility for their learning. "I don't want to tell them every move to make at every moment," one teacher explains, "so we do a lot of modeling. And we're constantly explaining our way of work. You just watch them flounder for a little while, you know. Their first projects aren't like everybody else's, but when they see what everybody else has done, their next projects are. You can just watch their growth."

Continuous Learning

Each year the staff analyze students' progress and use what they find to develop the schoolwide improvement plan and to set annual goals, which are published in the annual School Public Accountability Report. This process helps to keep teachers, administrators, and parents focused on the mission of the school, in both planning and implementation

throughout the school year. Data from standardized tests are part of the mix, even though teachers uniformly say, "We don't teach to the tests."

Teachers do, however, use Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) scores to inform their practice. In reading, teachers use Scholastic's STAR reading inventory to get a baseline and then measure progress using FCAT scores. In 2002, when FCAT math scores were below the district average in grades 3–5, teachers developed school improvement objectives to focus on math instruction. With a \$10,000 grant, they engaged in professional development around multi-age math methods. They adopted a hands-on approach to math instruction for grades K-5. After the training, when the new curriculum was implemented, third-grade FCAT math scores rose from 299 in 2002 to 335 in 2003, exceeding the state and the district averages, and showing an increase of 32 percent. Seventh- and eighth- grade FCAT math scores in 2003 were the highest in the district, and eighth-grade FCAT scores were second in the state, behind a school that admits only gifted students. This year FCAT math and reading scores exceeded the district average at every grade.

In a school with no grades and no report cards, students are very involved in evaluating their own learning. Students select all the work in their portfolios, choosing the work that best demonstrates progress towards academic goals and mastery of the appropriate Sunshine State Standards, as well as the work of which they are most proud. Students organize their portfolios on the basis of the multiple intelligences identified by scholar Howard Gardner.

Parents and Partners

At least twice a year parents meet with their child and the child's teachers to go over the child's portfolio. Typically, a student and his or her parents come in before the scheduled meeting with the teachers so that the child has a chance to orient parents to the portfo-

lio. Then the teachers join them and the teachers talk with the child and ask questions about various pieces of work, with the parents observing. According to one teacher, the process is very affirming: "The child is able to tell, 'This is me. It's all about me.' And it really is."

IN A SCHOOL WITH NO GRADES AND NO REPORT CARDS, STUDENTS ARE VERY INVOLVED IN EVALUATING THEIR OWN LEARNING.

Parents like the fact that the school's developmental approach is grounded in the principles of how children learn and that they can be highly involved in their children's education. For the many parents who home-schooled their children, enrolling them in SAS was the first time they were willing to entrust their children to a public school. Parents also express satisfaction that there is not a lot of homework at SAS, so children have time to develop artistic, theatrical, and musical interests. Almost half of SAS students participate in an after-school program that features specialty classes such as yoga, puppetry, African dance, nature craft, chess, track, moviemaking, and the like.

Six parents serve on the 13-member school board. Other ways SAS parents are involved include personnel hiring, fundraising, acquiring furniture and supplies, providing transportation, maintaining the school building, volunteering in classrooms, supervising on the playground and on field trips, and organizing teacher appreciation events.

Maintaining its early support from educators at nearby Florida State University (FSU), SAS has relationships with a number of programs there: the fine arts museum, the science education department, the family and child services department, the National High Magnetic Field Laboratory, the music school, and the physics department all contribute to the school. Science mentorships—at FSU and local wildlife centers—have involved students in scientific inquiry and the work of real scientists.

Governance and Accountability

Governance of the school is at several levels. The school advisory council consists of three students, three teachers, three parents, and one board member. Their role is to write the school improvement plan and to recommend individuals for the school board. The 13 board members make a three-year commitment, with a third of the members changing each year. Their role is to set policy,

**PARENTS LIKE THE FACT THAT THE SCHOOL'S
DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH IS GROUNDED
IN THE PRINCIPLES OF HOW CHILDREN LEARN.**

oversee finances, and evaluate the principal. Each spring the board engages in strategic planning. The school also has a teacher leadership council, student government, and PTSSO. A management team includes the principal, assistant principal/CFO, and the office staff.

SAS has a supportive, positive relationship with its charter authorizer, the local Leon County School District. SAS is electronically connected to the district database system and has access to district e-mail. The principal attends district principals' meetings, and SAS staff are welcome to participate in district professional development opportunities. The district provides physical plant consultation and inspections, and SAS pays the district for food, transportation, and insurance services. The school also pays the district 5 percent of its state and federal funding.

The school operates on an annual budget of about \$1.3 million, which includes funding of about \$5,000 per pupil. Finances are tight, and board members look

enviously at the half-cent sales tax revenue that other Leon County public schools receive. Yet when the school's state funding was cut by \$60,000, instead of economizing by leaving a position vacant when the music teacher took maternity leave, parents raised the money necessary to continue the music program.

Success is measured many ways at the School of Arts and Sciences. Recent FCAT math and reading scores exceeded the district average at every grade. Seventh- and eighth-grade math scores were the highest in the district, with the eighth-grade scores ranking second in the state. Last year only one teacher left the school. Not a single student was on a behavior contract. A teacher laughingly recalls the complaints from members of the Student Court. "They think everybody is too good. They never have enough court time." Another teacher reflects on the compassion engendered in the students. "When extremely low, low, low kids get up to do their presentations, the audience is rapt. I mean these kids cannot give them enough attention and support."

For Principal Powers, the performance of SAS middle school students at last year's Model United Nations Conference at FSU is emblematic. Two middle schools were invited and all the other teams were from high schools. "Well, they gave six awards, and our students took three of them. Afterward, we were saying, 'How did our kids win against those high school students? They're obviously younger, they haven't had as much experience, they're not any smarter. What is it?' I think it's that they get to speak and perform in an environment where you're not laughed at, ridiculed, put down, made fun of, so they develop this kind of confidence. They can get up there and they can put together their ideas and communicate. That's success to me."

Acknowledgments

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WestEd is a nonprofit research, development, and service agency committed to improving learning at all stages of life, both in school and out. WestEd has offices across the United States and also serves as one of the nation's 10 regional educational laboratories.

Edvance, a nonprofit organization created by the American Productivity and Quality Center, is a resource for process and performance improvement with a focus on benchmarking, knowledge management, performance measurement, and quality improvement initiatives in education.

The eight schools cooperating in the development of this guide and the report from which it is drawn were generous with both their time and attention to this project. We would like to thank the staff who were instrumental in coordinating and participating in the site visits that inform the report and this guide.

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Appendix A: Research Methodology

This guide is based on a descriptive study of eight charter schools selected for their exemplary achievement and for geographic and programmatic variety. While the schools are successful, the descriptive methodology does not support causal claims about which factors, or combinations of factors, led to their success. Nor does this guide constitute an endorsement of any specific commercial program or instructional practice. It does provide a portrait of what several successful schools look like and an analysis of common elements across schools. A brief description of this project's methodology follows.

Nomination Process

An informal, nationwide recommendation process resulted in over 250 schools from 31 states being suggested for consideration. Nominations came from the advisory panel (see the acknowledgments section), state departments of education staff, charter school associations, authorizers, charter school administrators, and parents. Requests for nominations went out through key contacts to these networks, as well as through the U.S. Charter Schools Web site. Many schools nominated themselves.

Site Selection Criteria

The first and major criterion for site selection was exemplary achievement. Following the advice of the advisory panel, the emphasis was on improvement in achievement, rather than absolute achievement level, and on improvement trends across several years, so as to identify schools that were reliably becoming stronger and more effective over time. More specifically, the school had to have been established as a charter school no later than fall 1999, and it had to have achievement

data for three consecutive years on the same measure, in order to show gains from one year to the next in two consecutive years. A final achievement criterion was that the school had met its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) target in the most recent year for which AYP had been announced to schools, as of December 19, 2003.

To check achievement scores, the research staff looked at published data on state Web sites, at the database of achievement scores compiled by the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution, and at information supplied by schools. For some states, it was impossible to find interpretable data. In other states, all schools were too new to have enough achievement data available. Unfortunately, very small schools were generally eliminated, because the scores for small sample sizes are not reliable and therefore are not reported.

Twenty-nine schools had acceptable achievement data and moved to the next phase of screening. Following the advice of the advisory panel, information was collected through public data and brief interviews about the grade levels served by the school, demographics

of the population served, location, authorizer, and educational program. The goal was to find a diverse set of schools, encompassing both elementary and secondary levels, serving mostly low socioeconomic status students but some serving the general population, having a range of authorizers, representing different ethnic configurations, and having locations around the country. Final factors in screening, based on interview data, were stable leadership, evidence of parent involvement and parent satisfaction, and a positive relationship with the authorizer.

Study Framework and Data Collection

A conceptual framework to guide the study was developed from an analysis of research on charter schools and organizational effectiveness. Charter school experts, recruited to serve on the advisory panel, provided feedback to refine this framework and prioritize issues to investigate. The resulting study scope guided all aspects of the study (see figure 2 on page 4).

Collecting detailed descriptive information from project participants was key to understanding each school's vision and practices, the outcomes or impact achieved, and lessons learned that others could benefit from. Each school hosted a two-day site visit that included interviews with site leaders, teachers, board members, parents, and students as well as observations of classes and school events. In addition, artifacts from the sites, such as letters to parents, schedules, and training agendas, were collected to provide concrete examples of school practices. Site visitors reviewed the information from each site and developed a case report.

From the case reports, artifacts, and transcripts of interviews, the project team identified common elements that contributed to success across the sites. This analysis

built on the research literature and study scope but also reflected patterns in the data and significant features that emerged in this study's cross-case analysis.

This descriptive research process suggests promising practices—ways to do things that others have found helpful, lessons they have learned about what not to do, and practical, “how-to” guidance. This is not the kind of experimental research that can yield valid causal claims about what works. Readers should judge for themselves the merits of these practices, based on their understanding of why they should work, how they fit the local context, and what happens when they actually try them. Also, readers should understand that these descriptions do not constitute an endorsement of specific practices or products.

Reports and Dissemination

Two products resulted from this research: a report of the findings and this practitioner's guide. The report provides the detailed description of each site, sample artifacts, an analysis of key findings across sites, and key project documents. The practitioner's guide is a summary of the report intended for broad distribution through conference presentations, as well as through national associations and networks. The guide and report are also accessible online at <http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charter/>.

Ultimately, readers of this guide will need to select, adapt, and implement practices that meet their individual needs and contexts. Schools coming together in learning communities may continue the study, using the ideas and practices from these sites as a springboard for their own action research. In this way, a pool of promising practices will grow, and schools can support each other in implementation and learning.



Appendix B: Resources

The **U.S. Charter Schools Web site** provides a wide range of information and links to resources to guide charter schools in every phase of their development—from start-up, to expansion, to renewal. The site includes a national calendar of events and a community-exchange feature.

<http://www.uscharterschools.org>

The **Center for Education Reform** provides up-to-date reports on charter schools and choice activity around the country. The Web site links to "fast facts" and resources designed with parents in mind. A searchable database identifies resources and schools in each state.

<http://www.edreform.com>

The **Education Commission of the States** includes both charter schools and charter districts as issue topics on its Web site. An interesting recent development in the charter movement is charter districts—in which all or most of the schools are charter or contract schools. *The Nuts and Bolts of Charter Districts* is a four-part ECS series that looks at policy options for state leaders, design issues faced by district leaders, funding issues, and the new central office for charter districts.

<http://www.ecs.org>

Education|Evolving is a Minnesota organization working to help create and sustain an "Open Sector" in public education—a "space" in public education for new schools that are started from scratch by teachers, parents, community organizations, and multi-school networks. A January 2004 report discusses how district leaders can support the new-schools strategy.

<http://educationevolving.org>

The **Thomas B. Fordham Foundation** provides links to major studies and to over 50 other organizations' Web sites in the areas of charter schools and choice.

<http://www.edexcellence.net>

The **Charter School Leadership Council** is a coalition of seven national organizations committed to advancing the charter school movement. In addition to serving as a link to these organizations and to charter policy information, the council's Web site lists state-level contacts for charter school information.

<http://cslc.us/ncsw/teaching>

The Charter School Experience is a good introductory resource for people wanting to understand chartering. Several national charter-supporting organizations joined forces to produce this brochure, published in 2002 by America's Charter School Finance Corporation. The brochure is available online in English and Spanish.

http://www.charterfriends.org/Charter_School_Experience.pdf

Charter Starters, a set of leadership training materials published by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, consists of five workbooks, a training guide, and a profile of charter school leadership needs. Specific topics include start-up logistics, regulatory issues, assessment and accountability, governance and management, and community relations.

http://www.nwrel.org/charter/publicat/charter_workbook.html

The **Office of Innovation and Improvement** in the U.S. Department of Education operates the Public Charter Schools Program, which supports the planning, development, and initial implementation of charter schools. Other grants target support for charter school facilities.

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/charter/index.html>





Notes

¹ Finn, C., Manno, B., and Vanourek, G. (2000). *Charter schools in action*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p. 266.

² See the *National Charter School Directory, 9th Edition*, as reported on the Web site of the Center for Education Reform. Retrieved April 2004 from <http://www.edreform.com>.

³ Some states have stronger charter school laws than others, creating more supportive conditions for charter schools to launch and develop programs. See the Center for Education Reform Web site at <http://www.edreform.com>, "Charter School Laws Across the States: Ranking and Scorecard, 8th Edition." For discussion of how chartering has developed in different states, see especially

Hassel, B. (1999). *The charter school challenge: Avoiding the pitfalls, fulfilling the promise*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

Vergari, S. (Ed.) (2002). *The charter school landscape*. Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press.

⁴ Wallis, C. (1994). "A class of their own," *Time*, October 31, p. 53.

⁵ The concept of internal accountability is explored by Paul Hill and colleagues. See chapter 3 in Hill, P., Lake, R., and Celio, M. (2002). *Charter schools and accountability in public education*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

⁶ Discussions of building civic community and social capital can be found in Finn et al., op. cit., chapter 10, and by David Campbell in chapter 13 in Peterson, P. and Campbell, D. (Eds). (2001). *Charters, vouchers & public education*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

⁷ Finn et al., op. cit., p. 267.

⁸ Newmann, F., King, B., and Rigdon, M. (1997). "Accountability and school performance: Implications from restructuring schools," *Harvard Education Review*, vol. 67, no. 1, pp. 41-74.

⁹ Finn et al., op. cit., chapter 9 discusses four stages of district response to charters and provides several examples of stages 3 and 4, competing to outdo charters and accepting charters as a district asset and opportunity. According to the chapter by Finn et al. in Peterson and Campbell, op. cit., charter districts—those in which all schools are chartered—existed in California, Florida, and Georgia as of 2001. The Education Commission of the States now supports an initiative focused on charter districts. See appendix B for links to the Education Commission of the States and materials targeted to charter districts.

