

THE CENTER FOR BETTER SCHOOLS

Project Update December, 2009

Fourth Quarter 2009 Activities and Accomplishments

The purpose of this short briefing is to bring selected friends of The Center for Better Schools up to date on recent activities, contacts and accomplishments.

The work of the Center moved into a very active stage in early October, once elements of funding were secured. As our investors know, we arranged administrative and 501(c)3 support from Tom Carroll and Chris Bender at the Brighter Choice Foundation (Albany NY), a group with a terrific track record in school reform, charter school formation, and innovations in school reform financing. They serve as our 501(c)3 [we hope to file our own application with the IRS in early January, 2010]. Tom and Chris and Bill Lake their CFO are also great resources in terms of understanding the landscape of teacher preparation, school costs and finance and other matters important to our work.

Above and beyond the ongoing dialog with existing contacts, listed in our Executive Summary and Concept Paper documents [see the RESEARCH page of our web site www.cbeterschools.org], we have made connections with the following, additional charter school leaders, association leaders, philanthropic organizations, teacher preparation organizations and other influential groups in the last 60 days (in chronological order: C = Call; V = visit):

CALLS

- Aric Dershem, National Heritage Academies, Grand Rapids, MI (C)
- Scott Hamilton, Seton Educational Partners, Wyoming (C)
- Bill Oberndorf, Founder SPO Partners, School Reform Supporter, San Francisco, CA (C)
- Josh Biber, Teach For America Regional Head, Boston, MA (C)
- Michael Goldstein, Founder and Head, Match Charter High School, Boston, MA (C)
- Linda Brown, Founder and Head, Building Excellent Schools, Boston, MA (C)
- William Lake, CFO, Brighter Choice Foundation, Albany, NY (C)
- Rick Holden, CEO, EPS School Specialty, Cambridge, MA (C)
- Tim Daly, President The New Teacher Project, Chicago, IL (C)
- Jon Snyder, Dean Graduate Studies, The Bank Street School, NYC NY (C)
- Lt. Col. Steven Hanson, Deputy Budget Director, USMA, West Point, NY (C)
- John Korn, Budget Director, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA (C)

VISITS

- Jamie Gass, Head of Educational Initiatives, Pioneer Institute, Boston, MA (V)
- Mike Magee, Head of Mayoral Academies, Providence, RI (V)
- Jeremy Chiappetta, Head of School, Democracy Prep, Cumberland, RI (V)
- Seth Andrew, Founder Democracy Prep, Harlem, NY, Cumberland, RI (V)
- Dan McGee, Mayor, Cumberland, RI (V)
- Jim Stergios, Executive Director, Pioneer Institute, Boston, MA (V)
- Sue Walsh, Fellowship Program Director, Building Excellent Schools, Boston, MA (V)
- Lindsay Hu, Fellow, Building Excellent Schools, Charter planned in NYC (V)

- Clifford Thomas, Fellow, Building Excellent Schools, Charter planned in NYC (V)
- Penny Lee Schwinn, Fellow, Building Excellent Schools, Charter planned in Sacramento, CA (V)
- David Singer, Fellow, Building Excellent Schools, Charter planned in Denver, CO (V)
- Jane Henzerling, Fellow, Building Excellent Schools, Charter planned in San Francisco, CA (V)
- Scott McCue, Founder Head, Boston Prep Charter School, Hyde Park, MA (V)
- Susan Engel, Head of Education program, Williams College, Williamstown, MA (V)
- Tom Carroll, President Brighter Choice Schools Albany NY (V)
- Chris Bender, Executive Director Brighter Choice Schools, Albany, NY (V)
- Doug Lemov, Founder and Head, True North Schools, Albany, NY (V)
- Jesse Solomon, Head Boston Teacher Residency, Boston, MA (V)
- Michael Goldstein, Founder & CEO Match Charter HS & Teacher Development Program, Boston, MA (V)
- Jeff Wetzler, Chief Learning Officer, Teach For America, NYC, NY (V)
- Lee Maxey, eLearning entrepreneur, Boston, MA (V)
- Dennis Littky, Founder Head, Big Picture Company, The MET Schools, College Unbound, Providence RI (V)
- Paulajo Gaines, Head Teacher Certification, RI Dept. of Ed, Providence, RI (V)
- Brian Green, Development Director, ACE Program Notre Dame, IN (V)
- Tom Doyle, Co-Director, ACE Program Notre Dame, IN (V)
- John Staud, Co-Director ACE Program, Notre Dame, IN (V)
- Fr. Tim Scully, Founder and Head Educational Initiatives, Notre Dame, IN (V)
- Mr. Chris Clemons, Director, Educational Leadership Program, Notre Dame, IN (V)
- Rob Birdsell, President, Cristo Rey Catholic School Network, Chicago, IL (V)
- Elizabeth Goettl, Chief Academic Officer, Cristo Rey Network, Chicago, IL (V)
- Kate Walsh, President, National Council on Teacher Quality, Washington, DC (V)
- Andy Rotherham, Executive Director, Education Sector, Washington DC (V)
- Checker Finn, President, TB Fordham Foundation, Washington DC (V)
- Rick Hess, Director Education Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute, Washington DC (V)
- Joe Williams, Head Democrats for Education Reform, NYC, NY (V)
- Jon Fullerton, Professor Harvard Graduate Education School, Cambridge, MA (V)
- Chris Barbic, Founder and Head, YES Prep Charter Schools, Houston, TX (V)
- Robert Lundin, VP University Partnerships, Teach For America, Houston, TX (V)
- Jeff Sandefer, Founder Acton School of Business, Austin, TX (V)
- Michael Marder, Co-Director UTEACH, U of Texas, Austin, TX (V)
- Dave Berkley, Head of Ethics Curriculum, Boston Prep Charter School, Hyde Park, MA (V)
- Mary Diez, Dean of Graduate Programs, Alverno College, Milwaukee, WI (V)
- Ryan Olson, Head Educational Programs, Kern Family Foundation, Waukesha, WI (V)
- Anissa Listak, Director, Urban Teacher Residencies United, Chicago, IL (V)
- Sonia Mathew, Network Manager, Urban Teacher Residencies United, Chicago, IL (V)
- Tim Daly, President, The New Teacher Project, Chicago, IL (V)

The rationale for this “intense” meeting schedule is to establish the appropriate connections to folks who can help answer the fundamental handful of questions about a viable financial model, an appropriately rigorous curriculum and the approach to selectivity in the coming 120 days or so. Two West Coast visits (north and south) are planned for Jan. and Feb 2010, as well as a visit to the U of Arkansas and back to Chicago, Boston and New York.

In parallel with this flurry of phone calling and visits, we have begun to develop some preliminary answers, which I highlight below:

On Structure:

Rather than think of this new school/program as a single monolithic location eventually training 1,000+ students annually in one city, the current thinking is to build the program in multiple cities. Basically think of the program as having 70 -100 teacher/students in each of ten cities, rather than one school with ten classrooms of 70 -100 students in one city. This has the potential for an easier ramp over time, matching regional talent pools and placement needs and more readily accessing student-teaching sites (every teacher/student will spend approximately 50% of their time teaching in a K – 12 classroom during this program).

So we probably start with one or two cities and ramp to as many as appropriate over time. All of this will be explored in depth in the coming months.

On Financing:

Three ongoing funding channels are currently being explored. Each of the three comes before any contemplation of one time philanthropic support or ongoing governmental financing options.

1. Our Program anticipates receiving funds from the charter schools (or enlightened public schools) in which our teacher/students teach for the practicum portion of their advanced training (e.g., partner K – 12 Schools will have four of our students “sharing” the teaching responsibilities in one classroom under the guidance of a “master teacher,” eliminating the need for a full time teacher in that classroom). Current estimate is that this is equal to \$10,000 per student/teacher, that the partner school would pay our Program.
 - a. Most folks suggest we simply build our own charter school adjacent to the Program and capture the per child fees, along the lines of existing, so called Professional Development Schools. This makes great sense.
2. If the quality of teacher/students that we attract and the training we provide achieves the status predicted, Charter Management Organizations and enlightened Public School District Administrators will pay a placement fee to receive graduates of our program (range already discussed here is \$8,000 to \$25,000, we are currently “guessing” \$15,000). While charters seem more ready and financially prepared to pay such fees, all schools have some cost associated with recruiting and training teachers today.
3. The program is intended to be “free” in return for years of service (maybe three years) in high poverty classrooms, but it may be prudent to expect students to pay \$5,000 per year in the form of reduced pay in years one, two and three after their graduation, for ongoing support, or perhaps it is paid as some sort of “tithing” of 10% of their salaries (this would at least have a favorable tax effect for them and foster their philanthropic habits (I suppose the opposite could be argued). Maybe this is an added \$15,000.

So you can begin to see some (if they prove out) predictable, long term financing streams that address maybe 60% to 75% of the total cost per student. (Current estimate hovers around \$60,000 to educate each teacher/student, although this is not yet determined). West Point, Harvard Business School and Olin College have helped our thinking here. Their figures range from \$60,000 to over \$80,000 per year per student.

Efforts to determine the economic value of a Good Teacher have not yet proven fruitful, although good exchanges have occurred with Michael Podgursky (U Missouri), J Wyckoff (UVA), Kate Walsh (NCTQ) and Tim Daly (TNTP).

We need to build a charter school and Program budget from the ground up. That is on the to do list.

On Curriculum:

The plan here has been to introduce our thinking to a variety of players already in the teacher preparation arena and then to study their approaches and what seems best. The next step in this process is to accept the invitations of the folks we have connected with to begin to compare and contrast the many facets of their curricula. I am looking for some researcher help here at one of the local (and not so local) universities, but have yet to identify such a resource (i.e., a doctoral candidate or post doctoral student with a little bit of time and willingness to make some money to help pull this together with me).

A partial list of the teacher training organizations and programs we intend to study includes:

Boston Teacher Residency, Teach for America, National Council on Teacher Quality, Bank Street School, Alverno College, Harvard Graduate School of Education, UVA Curry School, UTRU, Urban Teaching Center (Baltimore), Match Charter Teacher Training Program (Boston), Teacher U CUNY (NYC), KIPP, UTEACH (U Texas), UTEP (U Chicago).

Other activities within the Curriculum Effort

- Attend a Doug Lemov training session in late January. He is a master teacher of teachers leading a portion of the Uncommon Schools network and he is publishing a book in this area of classroom learning and management.
- Teach for America will publish their: Teaching as Classroom Leadership methods book in January as well. We will study it and its potential role.
- eLearning is an area that needs examination at the Teacher Prep and K-12 curricular levels.
- Other areas we are exploring are
 - The Life of Meaning course designed and deployed at the Acton School of Business in Austin, TX
 - The availability of case materials for teaching
 - The value of the Socratic method for teaching our teacher/students
 - The differences in curriculum required for
 - high poverty vs. not

- elementary, middle school and high school
 - humanities and STEM topics
 - remedial programs
 - special education
- The application of video recording and feedback in teacher preparation

On Teacher/Student Selectivity (who will get into the program):

A recurring question we encounter is, “How are you different from existing teacher residency programs?” The Answer: Teacher residency programs, like so many other teacher prep and alternative teacher certification efforts underway around the country, are focused on recruiting **new members** to the teaching profession. This is much needed work. We, on the other hand, are very intentionally focused on identifying the most promising **existing early career teachers** in high poverty classrooms, offering them an extraordinary advanced educational experience for the purpose of keeping them in the classroom teaching for a career.

We have begun to craft a survey instrument with a three-fold objective: learn more about the wishes, hopes and dreams of high performing early career K – 12 classroom teachers; understand better their alternative career choices and monetary expectations; test their interest in a program of the sort we are trying to build. At this stage, we do not have commitments from anyone to allow us access to their networks of young teachers, nor do we have a finished survey and approach, but it is in the works. We have been in discussions with Teach for America (TFA) about help on the survey front, as well as Notre Dame’s ACE Program and other sources of young, early career, high poverty school teachers.

We will explore the use of a mini-version of the Acton School of Business “Life of Meaning” course work in the admissions process to help discern whether candidates have a real vocation for classroom teaching or not. We will also try to determine the role of video footage in admissions (and in the curriculum for that matter).

On Accreditation:

No really detailed items to report here. We know that a conventional relationship with an existing School of Education may not be optimal (as reported by others already on that path (the Teacher Residencies, Teacher U), so it is not an avenue we are exploring with any haste, but ultimately accreditation through one source or another will be required to garner any formal recognition by the federal government (given the current systems in place). We will explore a variety of options here when the time comes.

On Market Positioning:

Lots of ideas about market positioning, branding, co-branding, partnering, none of which are worth discussing in too much detail until we have a clearer sense of the financial viability, content and profile of candidate teacher/students. More on this in 2010.

Finance & Administrative Update:

We are incorporated in the state of RI and as mentioned, we will file with the IRS by early January. Additionally, we reserved domain names, designed and launched a simple website, posted our documents there and sent a communiqué to 500 people. We also have assembled charter school profiles for the top 30 states and are now profiling the top education schools with respect to costs, requirements, number of teachers produced and other assorted statistics.

That is all for now. More in 2010. Thank you again for your interest and support.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Klemmer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'T' and 'K'.

Founder & President