

**AN ANALYSIS OF TOP OPERATORS OF PUBLIC CHARTER
SCHOOLS AND THEIR CONSIDERATION OF KENTUCKY AS A
POTENTIAL NEW SITE**

*Prepared by Katherine Klem for the C.E. and S. Foundation
and the James Graham Brown Foundation*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research reveals that public charter schools can provide students with an excellent education, often outperforming traditional public schools in the community while serving traditionally disadvantaged student populations, including those that live with low incomes. While some public charter schools do not share this track record of success, there are multiple nonprofit organizations running public charter schools in multiple states that *do* produce strong academic results relative to their traditional public school peers. Students at these public charter schools can gain the growth equivalent to as many as 205 days of additional learning in math and 143 days of additional learning in reading in a year compared to their peers at traditional public schools.¹ The characteristics of these operators are diverse in many ways: they have been running schools from three to 19 years, have student bodies as small as 2,610 and as large as 88,000, and operate throughout the continental U.S., on both coasts and many states in between. However, as varied as their profiles, no top charter network interviewed for this report plans to open schools in Kentucky.

To recruit these high-performing organizations to the Bluegrass, leaders in Kentucky will need to do much work – and move quickly. These top charter networks share that they would need a very different funding apparatus to ensure sufficient, equitable, and reliable per-pupil dollars; ready access to school buildings; identifying and potentially strengthening a pipeline of human capital; state regulations and authorizer policies that enable, not impede, the establishment of high-quality schools; and strong political support on the ground for these organizations without a current footprint in the Commonwealth. Further, the networks note that it takes several years to open schools from the time networks decide to expand to a new state, so leaders should move quickly if Kentucky wants one or more of these networks to open public charter schools here soon.

Specific recommendations for the consideration of the school district, philanthropy, Mayor’s office, and other education stakeholders include:

- Educating other decision-makers as well as stakeholders in Louisville and Frankfort about the findings of this report, with particular attention to the changes needed for per-pupil funding.
- Meanwhile commissioning (1) research into the local human capital pipeline for preK-12 education and options for strengthening, (2) a report card or other evaluation of Kentucky’s charter statutes and draft regulations through the lens of criteria articulated by top networks as important, and (3) a case statement that could be used to recruit top networks to Louisville.
- Advancing conversations with top networks to transition from primarily fact-finding to recruitment.

Note that the changes needed to more likely recruit a top network would also enable strong and sustainable local operators, many of whom may already be planning to apply for charters, the work ahead is relevant and timely across the public education sector. Stakeholders should thus act as quickly as thoughtful action will allow.

BACKGROUND

On March 21, 2017, Governor Matt Bevin signed into law HB 520, which allows public charter schools in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.² Kentucky thereby became the 44th state in addition to Washington, D.C., to allow public charter schools.³

Public charter schools are schools that are publicly regulated, receive public funding, but are managed by a non-public organization and granted greater flexibility than traditional public schools. The premise is that greater flexibility can enable the discovery of new and more effective ways of helping students learn

and grow – practices that can be incorporated into the model of traditional public schools, positioning all children to benefit. In exchange for that flexibility, the charter that governs a public charter school must be renewed at regular intervals and may be denied or, earlier in the process, revoked if the school is not performing adequately for students. Over three million children today attend public charter schools in the U.S. – three times as many as a decade ago.⁴ In some communities, a significant share of their children are educated by public charter schools; in Washington, D.C., for example, half of all children attended public charter schools in 2014-2015.⁵

On average, public charter schools and traditional public schools are no longer performing equivalently. Stanford University’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) published a landmark study in 2009 that revealed, on average nationwide, public charter schools performed on par with traditional public schools – not coming close to fulfilling the promise of the original premise behind chartering.⁶ However, its follow-up, peer-reviewed study published in 2013 showed that the ground had shifted and public charter schools were outperforming traditional public schools in reading.⁷ Students attending a public charter school received the equivalent of eight extra days of learning in reading compared to their peers in traditional public schools.⁸ English Language Learners, students in poverty, and Black students in public charter schools showed stronger academic growth in both math and reading than their counterparts in traditional public schools.⁹ In sum, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools reports that 16 academic studies on the impact of public charter schools have been published since 2010; all but one showed that public charter schools outperform traditional public schools, while the other study yielded mixed results.¹⁰

Some skeptics dismiss claims of greater performance at public charter schools by suggesting public charter schools serve a different population. However, some research has been able to control for parental motivation and engagement, among other potential rationales for differences in outcomes. One method is comparing outcomes of students who are “lotteried in” (i.e., accepted through a school’s admissions lottery on a random basis) versus those of students who are not “lotteried in” (i.e., not accepted through a school’s admissions lottery on a random basis), given that parents in both groups commonly had the resources and took the necessary actions to apply. Similarly, the 2013 CREDO study controlled for student demographics, including eligibility for Free and Reduced Price Lunch and need for special education, to create matched comparisons.¹¹ The results of these studies provide evidence of the real impact of the school itself as apart from other potentially confounding factors.

Something positive seems to be happening academically in public charter schools.

But national-level research masks wide variation in quality at any particular school, of course. There are some excellent public charter schools, some mediocre schools, and some low-performing schools. And some communities have seen better outcomes than others. In NYC, for example, public charter school students gain in a year the equivalent of 23 more days of learning in reading and 63 more days of learning in math than their peers in traditional public schools.¹²

It is incumbent, then, on leaders concerned with the educational well-being of Kentucky’s young people to ensure public charter schools in Kentucky represent the high-quality end of the spectrum.

To aid in that effort, this report analyzes data to identify nonprofit organizations that have operated public charter schools in multiple states and produced top academic results (“top networks”). These top networks are:

- Achievement First

- BASIS*
- Democracy Prep
- KIPP
- RePublic
- Uncommon

For each network, this report then presents a profile, select data from which are presented in Table 1 below. The profiles include research conducted by the author to understand the network’s approach to expansion, whether each top network is actively considering opening a public charter school in Kentucky, and the conditions under which it would more actively consider such an expansion.

Table 1: Select Characteristics of Top Networks[†]

Operator	Years Since Founding	States Where It Operates Schools	Schools Total	Students Enrolled Total	Students Eligible for FRPL	Students with Special Needs	English Language Learners	African Americans and Hispanics [‡]
Achievement First	14	3	34	11,600	82%	11%	7%	98%
BASIS	19	3	24	<17,000	Not available	~5%	Not available	~30%
Democracy Prep	12	5	21	5,040	85%	18%	Not available	99%
KIPP	22	21	209	88,000	88%	11%	17%	95%
RePublic	3	2	6	2,610	85%	9%	4%	90%
Uncommon	12	3	52	17,000	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available

METHODOLOGY FOR IDENTIFICATION OF TOP NETWORKS

The author began with rigorous analysis performed by CREDO, which has studied the impact of public charter schools for years. In its 2017 report on Charter Management Organizations (or CMOs, defined by CREDO as operators of at least three public charter schools), CREDO calculated effect sizes of student academic growth in math and reading at 240 CMOs across 24 states, New York City, and Washington, D.C., using data from several recent school years (exact years depending on the location, given that not all states have tested every school year).¹³

The author of this report identified all nonprofit CMOs that had a statistically significant effect size for student growth of 0.17 or higher in at least math or reading and no negative effect size in the other subject matter. An effect size of 0.17 for a public charter school in this study means that students' academic

* BASIS schools are affiliated with nonprofit organizations and a for-profit organization. As indicated by Stanford’s Center for Research on Educational Outcomes and confirmed by phone interview with CEO of BASIS.ed, BASIS Schools, Inc. is a nonprofit that is the holder of charters for BASIS schools in Arizona, the owner of the real estate for all BASIS charter schools, and the parent organization to the nonprofits that hold the charters for BASIS schools in other states. These nonprofit holders of charters have service contracts with BASIS.ed, a for-profit company that manages the schools. The author’s read of HB 520 suggests that this arrangement is permissible under Kentucky state law. The client confirmed on 10/18/17 that BASIS should be included in this report. Where “nonprofit” is applied in this report as a classification of organizations, it is meant to include this caveat.

[†] Sources are cited in endnotes associated with data in the network profiles of this report.

[‡] Please see individual network profiles for more precise classification provided by each network.

growth is equivalent to approximately 97 extra days of subject matter instruction relative to their traditional public school peers.¹⁴ Thirty eight nonprofit CMOs met this criterion as a high academic performer.

Then the author researched which top operators operated in multiple states, given the direction of the client and its prudent assumption that operators that have already adjusted to multiple regulatory environments are more likely to consider a new state than those who have only operated in one state. Thirteen top CMOs had schools in multiple states, yielding the list presented in Table 2. This seemingly low number is unsurprising, given that only 20% of public charter school operators run multiple schools,¹⁵ and many operators with multiple schools operate still within just one state.

Table 2: Student Academic Growth among Top CMOs¹⁶

Operator	Math			Reading			Average of Rankings
	Effect Size	Extra Days of Learning [§]	Rank	Effect Size	Extra Days of Learning	Rank	
Uncommon Schools Newark	0.35	200	2	0.25	143	1	1.5
Uncommon Schools Rochester	0.36	205	1	0.20	114	4	2.5
RePublic	0.26	148	4	0.22	125	3	3.5
KIPP Colorado	0.23	131	6	0.24	137	2	4
KIPP Bay Area	0.25	143	5	0.20	114	4	4.5
KIPP DC	0.29	165	3	0.13	74	7	5
KIPP Los Angeles	0.22	125	7	0.16	91	6	6.5
BASIS	0.18	103	9	0.17	97	5	7
Achievement First	0.22	125	7	0.10	57	8	7.5
KIPP NYC	0.18	103	9	0.10	57	8	8.5
KIPP Delta	0.21	120	8	0.00	0**	10	9
Uncommon Schools NYC	0.17	97	10	0.10	57	8	9
Democracy Prep	0.17	97	10	0.08	46	9	9.5

Finally, the author identified distinct charter networks among this list of 13 top CMOs (e.g., CREDO classified KIPP NYC and KIPP DC as distinct CMOs, but they both belong to the KIPP network). For the purpose of this research, a network is included even if not all of its operators were top performers. If a network had multiple operators in this top performer list, this analysis assumes its success in some regions warrants study. The 13 top CMOs belong to six charter networks, identified in Table 1 and referenced in this report as “top networks.”

As validation of this methodology, four of the six top networks are eligible to receive funding from the Charter School Growth Fund, a nonprofit organization that supports replication among “the nation’s best charter schools.”¹⁷ CREDO found significantly worse effect sizes for the other multi-state operators

[§] “Extra Days of Learning” indicates the number of additional days of learning in a year that a student at the CMO would receive relative to his traditional public school peer.

** The reading effect size for KIPP Delta was not statistically significant, which means there is no rigorous evidence for an impact for the population of students and should be interpreted as zero.

identified by the Charter School Growth Fund, so the author did not add them to the list of top networks here.

Note that this methodology is not meant to exhaustively account for all factors that constitute excellence at a public charter school operator but rather is meant to provide a meaningful proxy for academic achievement, given the scope of this analysis.

PROFILES OF TOP PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL NETWORKS

ACHIEVEMENT FIRST (AF)

Fast Facts

Year Founded: 2003¹⁸

States / Territories of its Schools: Three – Connecticut (11 schools), New York (20), Rhode Island (3)¹⁹

Number of Schools Total: 34²⁰

Number of Students Enrolled: 11,600 as of 2016-2017 across grades K-12²¹

Percentage of Students Who Are Eligible for FRPL: 82%²²

Percentage of Students with Special Needs: 11%²³

Percentage of Students Who Are English Language Learners: 7%²⁴

Percentage of Students Who Are African American or Latino: 98%²⁵

Academic Performance

For the entire AF network, CREDO has calculated a statistically significant effect size for AF students' growth compared to their counterparts in local traditional public schools. For math, it is 0.22, meaning AF students' math growth is equivalent to 125 extra days of learning in a year relative to their traditional public school peers. For reading, the effect size is 0.10, meaning AF students' reading growth is equivalent to 57 extra days of learning in a year relative to their traditional public school peers.²⁶

Looking at performance (instead of growth) in one year by state, AF shines as well. AF students in every state outperformed their peers at the local traditional public schools on the 2015-2016 state exams. The most dramatic difference occurred between middle school students on the math exam in New York: three of every four AF students scored at or above proficient, whereas just 14% were deemed at or above proficient in the local traditional public schools – a 61 percentage point gap.

Table 3: Percentage of AF Students Scoring At or Above Proficient on 2015-2016 State Exams²⁷

		AF	Traditional Public Schools in Districts of AF Schools
Connecticut	Elementary – Math	61%	18%
	Elementary – English Language Arts	58%	24%
	Middle – Math	44%	14%
	Middle – English Language Arts	56%	30%
New York	Elementary – Math	67%	28%
	Elementary – English Language Arts	49%	31%
	Middle – Math	75%	14%
	Middle – English Language Arts	68%	28%
Rhode Island	Math	76%	33%
	English Language Arts	46%	31%

In other state-specific academic results, in New York, AF English Language Learners and students with special needs outperformed their peers at non-AF public schools.²⁸ In Connecticut, all AF schools were in the top five schools in the state for English Language Learners, low-income students, and students of color.²⁹ And an AF high school – Amistad – was ranked the #1 high school in the state by *U.S. News and World Report*.³⁰

Discipline Track Record

In 2016-2017, 8.6% of AF students had at least one out-of-school suspension, down from 9.6% in 2015-2016.³¹

Other Distinctions

- 80% of AF high school graduates would be the first in their families to graduate from college.³²
- AF receives an average of 10 applications for every seat it has open.³³

Reputation

Strengths: Academics and demand (see above).

Liabilities: Discipline. The statistics above are averages. Some AF schools in CT have high suspension / expulsion rates: in 2014-15, AF Hartford Academy was at 22% for elementary school, 49% for middle school, 21% for high school; AF Bridgeport at 20% for elementary school, 47% for middle school, 43% for high school.³⁴ Citing concerns with discipline and students with special needs, a lawyer representing some families who had sent children to AF filed a complaint^{††} with the federal Office of Civil Rights, and AF voluntarily entered into an agreement in 2013 to make changes to the way it disciplines students at AF Hartford Academy Middle School.³⁵ Dacia Toll, co-CEO of AF, explained in an interview: “We believe in high levels of expectations and high levels of support, but what has happened is there are high expectations and uneven levels of support. We admit suspension rates are too high. That’s the bottom line.”³⁶ The state renewed the charter for the middle school subject to the agreement (though issued a probation for one year)³⁷, and AF currently has a multi-year plan in place to reduce out-of-school suspensions.³⁸

Replication

Past Journey to Multiple States: AF expanded first into New York and then into Rhode Island. Much proactive recruitment occurred, even involving elected officials asking AF to replicate in their states. AF chose to expand into New York and then Rhode Island based on need, defined primarily in terms of poverty, and geographic proximity, given the importance of in-person training and visits to the model. AF has declined expansion requests from other states outside the New England region (e.g., Florida, Ohio).³⁹

However, a number of other “green-lighting factors need to be in place for AF to expand. These include:

- Growth in number of schools or students would not exceed 20% annually;
- A strong Principal in Residence (an existing AF principal who is willing to lead new school and move there if necessary has been identified one to two years in advance);
- A regional superintendent has been identified one year in advance;
- AF has achieved sufficient progress on key AF org-wide measures in existing schools;
- Teacher and school leader retention is at least 85% at existing schools;
- Per-pupil funding for the new AF school is equal to at least 90% of what traditional public schools receive;
- The new AF school would have free or strong funding of facilities with adequate space;
- AF would have control over key variables; and
- Political and regulatory environment in new location is supportive (e.g., (1) CMO would not be required to use only certified teachers if there is a teacher shortage; (2) default in law is that rules applying to traditional public schools do not apply to charter schools except where expressly noted; (3) authorizers are not antagonistic and have not been forced to authorize).⁴⁰

^{††} For Achievement First and the other networks profiled, this report does not intend to provide a comprehensive review of all legal complaints or litigation with which the charter networks have been involved. Rather, it provides examples of liabilities, some of which may include legal action.

Actively Considering Applying to Operate in Kentucky: No. AF reports that it would be much more likely to expand to Massachusetts or Washington, D.C., than to Kentucky at this juncture.⁴¹

If So, Where in Process? N/A

If Not, What Would They Need in Order to Consider Kentucky? Key items to begin an active conversation and overcome the geographic distance, which is critically important to AF, are:

- Adequate per-pupil funding for instruction and other operations;
- Access to start-up facilities (i.e., unused school space that was affordable or free from district, or adequate state funding for facilities);
- Supportive political and regulatory environment;
- Principal at existing AF school who would be willing to move to Kentucky; and
- Pathway for growth in Kentucky to have a cluster of two elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school – and an ability to create multiple of those clusters.⁴²

BASIS

Fast Facts

Year Founded: 1998 (for its first school and founding of BASIS Schools, Inc. ⁴³)

States / Territories of its Schools: Three – Arizona (20 schools), Texas (3), Washington, D.C. (1) with a school to open in Louisiana in Fall 2018⁴⁴

Number of Schools Total: 24

Number of Students Enrolled: <17,000⁴⁵ across grades K-12⁴⁶

Percentage of Students Who Are Eligible for FRPL: No statistic available from BASIS.ed for whole network, but approximately 8% in its Texas schools, approximately 17% in its D.C. school, and approximately 60% in one Arizona school. (BASIS is not required to measure eligibility in all Arizona schools.)⁴⁷

Percentage of Students with Special Needs: Approximately 5%⁴⁸

Percentage of Students Who Are English Language Learners (ELLs): No statistic available from BASIS.ed for whole network, but approximately 4% were eligible for ELL services in its Arizona schools, with approximately 40% at one Arizona school.⁴⁹

Percentage of Students Who Are African American or Hispanic: Approximately 30%⁵⁰

Academic Performance

For the entire BASIS network, CREDO has calculated a statistically significant effect size for BASIS students' growth compared to their counterparts in local traditional public schools. For math, it is 0.18, meaning BASIS students' math growth is equivalent to 103 extra days of learning in a year relative to their traditional public school peers. For reading, the effect size is 0.17, meaning BASIS students' reading growth is equivalent to 97 extra days of learning in a year relative to their traditional public school peers.⁵¹

Additionally, BASIS students taking Advanced Placement (AP) exams passed 86% of the time vs. 58% national average.⁵² BASIS students at one Arizona high school were the highest scorers in the world on the international PISA exam.⁵³ Several BASIS schools have been named in the *Washington Post's* list of "America's top challenging high schools."⁵⁴

Discipline Track Record

BASIS.ed reports almost no suspensions or expulsions.⁵⁵

Other Distinctions

- BASIS.ed reports that they want to operate schools – whether public charter schools or independent schools – in every major metropolitan area of the U.S. (There are currently four BASIS independent schools in addition to 24 BASIS public charter schools in the U.S.)⁵⁶
- BASIS has an international reach. There are currently two BASIS schools in China, and more will open there, and BASIS also plans to open schools in Europe.⁵⁷

Reputation

Strengths: Academics and discipline track record (see above). Additionally, one can argue that its demographic profile strengthens the political viability of the charter movement, in way that one can argue the broad range of beneficiaries of Medicare makes for a stronger base of political support than that for Medicaid. BASIS sends the message that public charter schools are about finding better ways to educate all children, not just those in particular need.

Liabilities: BASIS students are come from less disadvantaged backgrounds than at some other charter networks or traditional public schools (see above). Some BASIS schools also have had high attrition

rates. Almost 60% of the students entering one BASIS high school in 2011-2012 left by the 12th grade. Further, BASIS has been criticized from issuing fees for items such as some books.⁵⁸

But most loudly, critics decry that BASIS is a for-profit charter. BASIS schools have charters held by nonprofit organizations, but those nonprofit organizations contract with BASIS.ed, a for-profit company, for school management. Some believe that no for-profit entity should be involved with public education. However, BASIS Schools, Inc. – the nonprofit entity that owns the buildings where BASIS schools operate, that is the parent organization for all the nonprofits holding charters for BASIS schools outside Arizona, and that is the charter holder in Arizona – brings in a third-party auditor to discern how reasonable BASIS.ed’s fees are to ensure BASIS.ed’s for-profit status is not taking undue advantage of public dollars.⁵⁹

Replication

Past Journey to Multiple States: BASIS decided in 2012 to grow outside of Arizona. The choice to open a school in Washington, D.C., was motivated by the desire to “put a flag in the ground” there; the network wanted visibility in the nation’s capital. BASIS.ed CEO Peter Bezanson noted that the network did not fully understand how difficult it would be to operate in that geography given the local authorizer and the “parent/student population” in Washington, D.C. The network chose Texas because of its favorable regulatory environment and chose San Antonio within the state because the network was offered significant seed capital from philanthropy to open schools there. Without that money, the network would have chosen north Texas or Houston given the larger population size in those areas. The decision to open a school in Louisiana was preceded by four to five years of recruitment from New Schools for Baton Rouge. BASIS gave leaders in Baton Rouge a “term sheet” of conditions BASIS needed met in order to be able to open a school there; most of those terms have been met, and BASIS has chosen to go. BASIS has turned down the opportunity to open schools in Indiana due to insufficient public funding and in Florida, North Carolina, and Georgia because the regulatory environment was problematic.⁶⁰

Actively Considering Applying to Operate in Kentucky: No.⁶¹

If So, Where in Process? N/A

If Not, What Would They Need in Order to Consider Kentucky? There are two factors most important to BASIS when it looks to expand to a potential site. First is the authorizer. Is it an independent authorizer (that is, not part of a school district), and how friendly to chartering is it? BASIS.ed reports that problematic authorizing has been a very significant concern for the network in the past. A second and equally important factor is the freedom to hire teachers as BASIS sees fit. BASIS hires subject matter experts as teachers, and they may or may not have official teacher certification. Statutory requirements that public charter schools use only certified teachers is usually a deal-breaker for BASIS, though BASIS.ed noted that there are potential work-arounds to comply with the law that one could explore. BASIS.ed also noted that funding is actually less important, given that it has been able to make do with a very low per-pupil funding for public charter school students in Arizona (around \$6,000). Kentucky’s per-pupil funding for public charter schools students would need to at least mirror Arizona’s. Other factors include availability of philanthropy (BASIS.ed reported that it can open schools without philanthropy but there would need to be a rather large student population from the outset to make it financially viable), low-performing public charter schools to indicate strong prospects for BASIS demand, and the opportunity to be one among multiple operators opening public charter schools in a community so that BASIS is not alone.⁶²

DEMOCRACY PREP (DP)

Fast Facts

Year Founded: 2005⁶³

States / Territories of its Schools: Five – New York (12 schools), Nevada (3), Louisiana (2), New Jersey (2), Washington, D.C. (2)⁶⁴

Number of Schools Total: 21

Number of Students Enrolled: 5,040 across grades preK-12⁶⁵

Percentage of Students Who Are Eligible for FRPL: 85%⁶⁶

Percentage of Students with Special Needs: 18%⁶⁷

Percentage of Students Who Are English Language Learners: Not available^{‡‡}

Percentage of Students Who Are Students of Color: 99%⁶⁸

Academic Performance

For the entire DP network, CREDO has calculated a statistically significant effect size for DP students' growth compared to their counterparts in local traditional public schools. For math, it is 0.17, meaning DP students' math growth is equivalent to 97 extra days of learning in a year relative to their traditional public school peers. For reading, the effect size is 0.08, meaning DP students' reading growth is equivalent to 46 extra days of learning in a year relative to their traditional public school peers.⁶⁹

Discipline Track Record

DP has never expelled a student.⁷⁰ Other data not available on DP website or by phone via DP General Counsel Kent Anker.

Other Distinctions

- As echoed in the network's name, schools engage students – and families – to become active participants in their communities. Nine percent of DP parents were registered voters in 2006. After a decade of DP voter registration drives, 78% of DP parents were registered to vote as in 2016.⁷¹
- As of Spring 2017, 88% of DP's first graduates (who graduated from high school in 2013) were still enrolled in college. By comparison, across the U.S., 9% of the poorest 24 year olds have a Bachelor's degree, and even among the wealthiest, a lower percentage – 77% – have a Bachelor's degree.⁷²

Reputation

Strengths: Academics, civic engagement, and college persistence (see above).

Liabilities: Former teachers have been critical of harsh school culture and lack of work-life balance, noting requirement of teachers to tutor 40 hours a week.⁷³

Replication

Past Journey to Multiple States: DP's expansion to a new state has usually been the result of outreach and recruitment from that state, and DP says it often expands to places before other charter operators do; they are there first. DP has expanded where it believes authorizer presence is strong, the per-pupil funding is at least adequate (especially important because DP does not use philanthropic dollars for school operations), there is clear access to a building and strong leader, and the environment facilitates recruitment of high-quality teachers. "Direct flights from New York" were mentioned as a helpful factor as well, in addition to the need; Mr. Anker mentioned that there were a lot of good charter schools in New

^{‡‡} DP General Counsel Kent Anker said it varies widely by site, with high rates in Camden, and declined to provide site-specific or network-wide numbers.

York when asked about the decision-making process to expand beyond the state. Finally, DP has focused a lot on charter-to-charter “turnarounds” (taking over the management of an existing low-performing public charter school) in addition to opening and operating new schools.⁷⁴

Actively Considering Applying to Operate in Kentucky: Only as part of its national monitoring of opportunities to expand. Kentucky has not been singled out by DP to date as a site to seriously consider expansion above and beyond its nationwide consideration of opportunities. DP is committed to further expansion, fueled by a federal Charter Schools Program grant of \$12.7 million. It has not internally decided the full roster of locations where it will create new schools.⁷⁵

If So, Where in Process? N/A

If Not, What Would They Need in Order to Consider Kentucky? In order to more actively consider Kentucky, DP prioritizes human capital and per-pupil funding as the most important factors. When asked what it is looking for from a community for human capital, Mr. Anker provided the example of a quality teacher training program at a local university.⁷⁶

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER PROGRAM (KIPP)^{§§}

Fast Facts

Year Founded: First school founded in 1995, KIPP Foundation founded in 2000⁷⁷

States / Territories of its Schools: 21 – Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, D.C.⁷⁸

Number of Schools Total: 209 across grades preK-12⁷⁹

Number of Students Enrolled: 88,000⁸⁰

Percentage of Students Who Are Eligible for FRPL: 88%⁸¹

Percentage of Students with Special Needs: 11%⁸²

Percentage of Students Who Are English Language Learners: 17%⁸³

Percentage of Students Who Are African American or Latino: 95%⁸⁴

Academic Performance

CREDO calculated effect sizes for student growth, relative to traditional public school peers, for distinct KIPP regions.⁸⁵ Six KIPP regions ranked in the echelon of top performers for this report. Their statistically significant effect sizes are as follows:

Table 4: Effect Sizes of KIPP Student Growth in Math and Reading⁸⁶

	Math		Reading	
	Effect Size	Additional Days of Learning in a Year that a KIPP Student Receives, Relative to Traditional Public School Peers	Effect Size	Additional Days of Learning in a Year that a KIPP Student Receives, Relative to Traditional Public School Peers
KIPP Bay Area	0.25	143	0.20	114
KIPP Colorado	0.23	131	0.24	137
KIPP Delta	0.21	120	N/A ^{***}	N/A
KIPP DC	0.29	165	0.13	74
KIPP Los Angeles	0.22	125	0.16	91
KIPP NYC	0.18	103	0.10	57

Discipline Track Record

Not available, but the KIPP National Director of New Site Development Trisha Coad noted that “one of KIPP’s main six priorities we measure is how many of our students we keep each year, so we have a huge priority on continuing to educate every child, and a focus on restorative practices.” She also indicated that she may be able to share regional-level data if needed in the future.⁸⁷

Other Distinctions

- The KIPP model includes keen attention to character development.⁸⁸ A KIPP co-founder also co-founded The Character Lab, which worked in partnership with leading academics to research the most effective ways schools can help students grow in certain character traits like grit.⁸⁹

^{§§} There is no one organization named solely “KIPP.” There is a KIPP Foundation that provides support to 31 KIPP regions, each of which is structured as a nonprofit organization that operates KIPP schools. For the purpose of providing an organizational profile, this report looks at KIPP regions and the KIPP Foundation as a unified network.

^{***} The effect size was not statistically significant, meaning there was no evidence of student growth in reading higher than traditional public school peers for the population of students in this KIPP region.

- KIPP places a strong emphasis on sharing its work to benefit children at all types of schools. As Ms. Coad said, “We don’t believe in [intellectual property]. We give it away.” Leaders outside KIPP may attend KIPP training, for example.⁹⁰

Reputation

Strengths: Academics (see above) and willingness to partner with communities as evidenced by its relatively vast geographic region.

Liabilities: Perhaps the historically strongest KIPP criticism has been leveled at the college completion rates of its graduates. In 2009, the four-year college graduation rate for KIPP alumni was around only 20%,⁹¹ though by 2016 it had risen to 45% -- a level about the national average for economically similarly situated students.⁹² (KIPP has investigated roadblocks for college completion and found that 40% of its graduates have had to skip meals to pay for books or other supplies.⁹³) Additionally, like many other charter networks, KIPP has had a tense relationship with teachers’ unions. UFT filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board against KIPP in January 2017 alleging that KIPP threatened to fire teachers who did not vote to decertify the union at a New York KIPP conversion public charter school, and KIPP filed a federal lawsuit against UFT in March 2017 alleging that UFT took union dues but has never performed “representative functions.”⁹⁴

Replication

Past Journey to Multiple States: KIPP paused its growth in 2010 to focus on strengthening its regional infrastructure. In 2014, KIPP decided to grow again. It takes at least two years from deciding to open a school in a new state to actually opening the school.

Talent is perhaps the most critical factor enabling expansion for KIPP. As Ms. Coad put it, “We’re not going to say to a community, ‘We’ll come and then find the leader.’ We need to find the leader to say yes to the community.” Deep need emanating from low-performing traditional public schools, along with a community that desires a model like KIPP’s, are other criteria that have facilitated expansion. KIPP looks for an ecosystem focused on positive change to improve children’s lives, seeking neighborhood organizations and city leadership as two examples of where KIPP looks for evidence of a concerted effort to do innovative work to benefit children.

If those pieces are in place, KIPP then turns to “technical factors,” specifically the “three F’s” of finances, facilities, and freedoms. For finances, KIPP needs public funding that is high enough to limit KIPP’s fundraising needs per student to \$1,000 or less per year, though that figure can vary a little by market. Ms. Coad noted that \$10,000 per pupil is very comfortable for the network. She reported that facilities can be second biggest cost behind human capital for KIPP and thus easy access to buildings – whether provided unused district space at no charge or provided sufficient public funds to cover rent or buying a building or another route to facilities altogether – is critical. Finally, KIPP is looking for a regulatory environment that empowers charter operators with significant flexibility, including freedom to hire excellent teachers who may not have an official certification. A state that requires teacher certification at public charter schools is not necessarily ruled out, though.⁹⁵

Actively Considering Applying to Operate in Kentucky: No

If So, Where in Process? N/A

If Not, What Would They Need in Order to Consider Kentucky? In response to this question, Ms. Coad lifted up the importance of having an initial leader who can spearhead operations in Kentucky. KIPP requires that this person have worked for KIPP before. It could be someone in Kentucky who moves to take a KIPP job where he/she can be mentored for this Kentucky leadership role, or it could be someone working for KIPP elsewhere who is willing to move to Kentucky. KIPP had previously identified a KIPP staffer who the network had planned on tapping for this Kentucky role someday, but the staffer has since left KIPP. To come to Kentucky, KIPP would also need a local anchor like a supportive school district or local foundation who could provide KIPP with cultural and political guidance to navigate a new environment.

REPUBLIC

Fast Facts

Year Founded: 2014 as network, though first schools opened in 2011⁹⁶

States / Territories of its Schools: Two – Tennessee (4 schools), Mississippi (2) with another school to open in Mississippi in the 2018-2019 school year⁹⁷

Number of Schools Total: Six

Number of Students Enrolled: 2,610 across grades 5-12⁹⁸

Percentage of Students Who Are Eligible for FRPL: 85% as of 2016-2017⁹⁹

Percentage of Students with Special Needs: 9% as of 2016-2017¹⁰⁰

Percentage of Students Who Are English Language Learners: 4% as of 2016-2017¹⁰¹

Percentage of Students Who Are African American or Hispanic: 90%¹⁰²

Academic Performance

For the RePublic network, CREDO has calculated a statistically significant effect size for RePublic students' growth compared to their counterparts in local traditional public schools. For math, it is 0.26, meaning RePublic students' math growth is equivalent to 148 extra days of learning in a year relative to their traditional public school peers. For reading, the effect size is 0.22, meaning RePublic students' reading growth is equivalent to 125 extra days of learning in a year relative to their traditional public school peers.¹⁰³

Two of its Tennessee schools ranked in the top 5% of the state for student academic growth and performance on the state exams in 2014. One of its schools earned the distinction again in 2015.¹⁰⁴

Discipline Track Record

RePublic reports no expulsions at five of their six schools, with only 0.2% expelled at the sixth school. The average suspension rate across the network is 3%.¹⁰⁵

Other Distinctions

- RePublic's model includes a heavy emphasis on coding.¹⁰⁶ Given its largely minority student population, this means that the network has the potential to graduate cohorts of students of color who are well-versed in computer science. Nationwide only 13% of students who took the Advanced Placement computer science exam were African American or Hispanic in 2013 (the most recent year for which the College Board reported this data),¹⁰⁷ but at RePublic High School in 2017, 75% (79 sophomores) of those taking that test (105 sophomores) identified as such.¹⁰⁸
- RePublic's mission is focused on the South.¹⁰⁹

Reputation

Strengths: Academics and focus on jobs of today and the future (see above). Additionally, RePublic has instituted some structural changes, including a \$5,000 child care subsidy and a shorter school day, that some say improve the environment.¹¹⁰

Liabilities: RePublic recently came under fire for sending four rounds of marketing text messages to parents, who had not opted in.¹¹¹ RePublic settled the lawsuit without admitting to fault.¹¹² Earlier in the school's history, a Nashville School Board member was outraged by the school's choice of a book to assign to students, believing its content was inappropriate for middle school students.¹¹³ Teacher turnover, reflecting what some say are unreasonable hours, has also been a criticism.¹¹⁴

Replication

Past Journey to Multiple States: RePublic leaders wanted to expand beyond Tennessee and reached out to Erika Berry, a colleague outside RePublic at the time who was in Mississippi and who knew RePublic's

founder, Ravi Gupta. Mr. Gupta traveled to Mississippi and was reportedly blown away by the need he observed. He met with people who had “economic and political pull” and were confident that replicating RePublic in Mississippi could work, according to Ms. Berry who was on the trip. The governor of Mississippi also became involved in recruitment. Their personal encouragement mattered a lot to Mr. Gupta, according to current RePublic leaders. On the ground during the process of expanding, the focus on coding turned out to be a big selling point for many in Mississippi, seeing a possibility for their children to get jobs beyond the options currently available, though some community members pushed back on the basis of common critiques of chartering and the like. The current CEO of RePublic noted that the sort of personal connections that previously drew the network to Mississippi was less relevant to him and that he was focused much more on the structural and financial aspects of expansion, using the term “iron fist” as a self-description.¹¹⁵

Actively Considering Applying to Operate in Kentucky: No.¹¹⁶

If So, Where in Process? N/A

If Not, What Would They Need in Order to Consider Kentucky? RePublic is looking to open a third region, though likely not in the next few years. RePublic’s CEO noted that Kentucky is probably not going to be in the top tier of options, though he (mistakenly) believed the per-pupil funding was already set. Among the factors he and the Director of External Affairs mentioned as key to convincing them to more favorably consider Kentucky are:

- Evidence that RePublic schools in Kentucky could not only be self-sustaining financially but could also help make the central network office for RePublic stronger;
- A per-pupil funding ratio that is top tier in the South. “We can’t do another Mississippi,” RePublic’s CEO said;
- The ability to scale enough that expansion is financially feasible, though RePublic does not seek so much scale in a region that it is the sole public charter school operator there;
- Sufficient philanthropy on the front end before schools open. RePublic would seek to hire various staff specific to Kentucky up to two years in advance of a school opening;
- The ability from authorizers to submit one application for multiple charters to open multiple schools; and
- A base of community allies to provide political support, given that RePublic is not homegrown in Kentucky and given that RePublic believes operators always falter in the first years.¹¹⁷

RePublic’s CEO mentioned the importance of moving beyond averages to look at, for example, the percentage of schools in a market where over 90% of students are African American and matching that profile with successful networks that have a similar percentage.¹¹⁸

He also suggested that Kentucky bring in top operators together to promote soft competition among them and to lift up more explicitly the key conditions that they commonly seek in order to more actively consider expanding to Kentucky. He said RePublic would attend.¹¹⁹

UNCOMMON

Fast Facts

Year Founded: 2005¹²⁰

States / Territories of its Schools: Three – New York (32 schools), New Jersey (16), Massachusetts (4)¹²¹

Number of Schools Total: 52

Number of Students Enrolled: 17,000¹²² across grades K-12¹²³

Percentage of Students Who Are Eligible for FRPL: Not available^{†††}

Percentage of Students with Special Needs: Not available

Percentage of Students Who Are English Language Learners: Not available

Percentage of Students Who Are African American or Hispanic: Not available

Academic Performance

CREDO calculated effect sizes for student growth, relative to traditional public school peers, for Uncommon by city (studying three of the six cities in which Uncommon currently operates schools).¹²⁴

All three Uncommon groups that were studied ranked in the echelon of top performers for this report.

Their statistically significant effect sizes are as follows:

*Table 5: Effect Sizes of Student Growth in Math and Reading*¹²⁵

Operator	Math		Reading	
	Effect Size	Additional Days of Learning in a Year that an Uncommon Student Receives, Relative to Traditional Public School Peers	Effect Size	Additional Days of Learning in a Year that an Uncommon Student Receives, Relative to Traditional Public School Peers
Uncommon Newark	0.35	200	0.25	143
Uncommon NYC	0.17	97	0.10	57
Uncommon Rochester	0.36	205	0.20	114

Uncommon Rochester and Newark have the two highest effects on math student growth of all multi-state nonprofit CMOs studied by CREDO. Uncommon Newark has the single highest effect on reading of this group studied.

Discipline Track Record

Not available

Other Distinctions

- Uncommon alumni are five times as likely to earn a Bachelor's degree as students on average from low-income backgrounds.¹²⁶
- Uncommon has a strong focus on improving public education writ large. Its website includes a robust section on ways that leaders outside the Uncommon network can learn from Uncommon's work, including mini-trainings, workshops, and eight books on best practices and other topics.¹²⁷

^{†††} As with other information labeled "Not available" for Uncommon, the author could not find this information on Uncommon's website, and the author has been unable to successfully reach Uncommon through an interview. While the author was e-introduced to Uncommon's Chief Advancement Officer, who has responded with interest in connecting, the author has not been able yet to interview her.

Reputation

Strengths: Academics (see above). Uncommon schools in two regions produce the highest gains in student growth at public charter schools, compared to their local traditional public school counterparts, in the country.

Liabilities: As with many charter schools, Uncommon has been criticized for its long hours for teachers and leaders as well as an environment that has been described as militant.¹²⁸ Additionally, a group of parents sued the New Jersey Department of Education in 2014, alleging that Uncommon was provided temporary space contrary to state law and claiming that Uncommon's charter application was not appropriately shared with the community.¹²⁹

Replication

Past Journey to Multiple States: Not available

Actively Considering Applying to Operate in Kentucky: Not available

If So, Where in Process?

If Not, What Would They Need in Order to Consider Kentucky?

CONCLUSION

To sum, none of the six top nonprofit networks of public charter schools interviewed for this report has singled out Kentucky as a place to actively consider expansion.

Much more work needs to transpire before these networks would do so, according to network leaders. The legislature would need to write into law a per-pupil funding amount that is sufficient, equitable, and reliable – meaning it is high enough, it is equal or close to what traditional public schools receive per pupil from public sources, and it is not applicable for a limited number of school years so that operators can rely on a steady stream of adequate revenue. (Note that Kentucky has not created such a funding stream. For example, the funding parameters for public charter schools in HB 471 applies only for the 2017-2018 school year.¹³⁰) Similarly, networks would need affordable access to school buildings. But the preconditions do not end with dollars. Finding strong leaders the network can tap for both schools and a regional office repeatedly surfaced as a top requirement. Critical, too, would be political support from the community that manifests in reasonable authorizer practices and local champions who can help the network successfully assimilate and contribute to the community.

These findings are consistent with the results of a 2015 survey conducted by the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools and Excellence in Education to understand what high-performing CMOs (defined in this report as a nonprofit organization managing at least two public charter schools) need to expand into a new area, tapping the insights of senior leaders of 19 CMOs, ten of which were operating in multiple states. Adequate per-pupil funding and access to facilities – and predictability of those revenue streams – were cited as necessities. On average, these CMOs say they need at least \$10,200 per pupil to serve students successfully. All surveyed CMOs reported that start-up funding, though not always absolutely necessary, is important given the deficits that can accrue before a school reaches full enrollment. (Many new schools add a grade each year.) Note that these CMOs reported looking for local philanthropic dollars for start-up costs; for these and other needs, 61% of surveyed CMOs say that “adequate regional donor support” is a “must-have.” Beyond these financial aspects, the availability of high-quality teachers and leaders is so important to these CMOs that these human capital needs were dubbed “perhaps the key constraint for CMOs looking to expand into new regions.” A majority – 56% – of surveyed CMOs also reported that a dearth of quality traditional public school options for families in a potential site was a “must-have.” Many CMOs also noted the importance of having multiple authorizers or a non-district authorizer available.¹³¹

Recommendations

Given what top leaders are sharing, what next steps make sense? While this research suggests myriad actions that could increase the likelihood of an existing top operator applying to open public charter schools in Kentucky, a few rise to the top as potentially most natural next steps. These include:

- Educate the Kentucky Department of Education, lawmakers of relevant committees, their staffs, the Mayor’s office in Louisville, and external stakeholders about the findings of this report, stressing the critical importance of (1) the law providing a sufficient, equitable, and reliable funding stream and (2) the law providing free access to unused school district buildings or adequate funding for buildings. These are likely necessary but insufficient conditions to convince a top operator to apply to open schools in Kentucky. Additionally, provisions for start-up funding for top networks (and authorizers) would ease the path for top networks to come to Kentucky.
- Commission research into the available local pipeline of human capital that could be tapped for public charter schools and identify options for strengthening the pipeline. This research could easily translate to a written resource that could be shared with networks desired for Louisville in

order to demonstrate the resources they would have to source high-quality teachers and school leaders for new public charter schools.

- Commission a report card or other evaluation of the two charter statutes and the four draft regulations to assess in detail their provisions in light of the needs of a top network that could potentially expand to Kentucky. For example, what does the authorizing statute require of public charter school teachers? CMO Board of Directors?
- More comprehensively, commission a case statement that could be used to recruit top networks to Louisville. This document would make “the case” for expansion to Louisville, using as a base the insights from the interviews conducted for this report as well as the questions articulated by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools and Excellence in Education for communities seeking to recruit top operators, reflecting the needs surfaced by the 19 CMOs they surveyed in 2015.
- Advance conversations with top networks to transition from primarily fact-finding to recruitment. Past expansion of top performers is typically predicated by aggressive recruitment by the new state and/or community, and operators will need to know who they can count on as allies (even just politically, not necessarily financially) in order for conversations to progress, for their consideration of Kentucky to become active, and for trust to develop further. In the course of this recruitment, Louisville may wish to focus its efforts on the highest performing “entrepreneurial CMOs” (e.g., RePublic) or “niche CMOs” (e.g., BASIS), which the National Alliance for Public Charter School and Excellence in Education suggest are best suited for an emerging market like Kentucky, based on the needs and flexibility expressed by different types of CMOs in their research.¹³²

Whatever action stakeholders may take, time is of the essence. Recruiting a top network to an emerging market like Kentucky takes three to five years, according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools and Excellence in Education.¹³³ Given that the conditions that would facilitate such recruitment would help foster quality among locally grown operators, many of whom may already be formulating plans to apply for charters, the work ahead is relevant and timely for multiple players in the sector working to improve public education. Stakeholders should thus act as quickly as thoughtful action will allow.

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⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ <http://www.basised.com/who-we-are/our-schools/>; <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/86-0908854>

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