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TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

Proposed 3-Year Business Plan

Prepared by The Center for Education Reform
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OBJECTIVE

Create an independent organization, an outgrowth of the existing Tennessee Charter School Resource Center, dedicated to the support and development of strong charter schools. Drawn from a needs assessment of charter schools and the insights of other supporters (see Appendix and Background information) the proposed 3-year business plan identifies key organizational activities (technical support programs and services, advocacy and communications, and business development), benchmarks, staffing, timelines, and budgets. The plan and related supporting documents are presented for internal review.

KEY GOALS RELATED TO ACTIVITIES

1. Strengthen technical support programs and services to existing charter schools as well as to groups interested in starting new schools.
2. Develop a strong advocacy and communications components that will focus on sharing the progress, needs, and merits of charter schools both locally and nationally.
3. Develop a strong and diverse funding base.

CORE RECOMMENDATIONS INTEGRATED INTO PLAN

1. Establish a program structure that ensures emphasis on legislative advocacy to improve the current charter school law. Create partnerships to deliver technical assistance until the current law is strengthened.

Rationale: Strengthening the law will remove technical dependency of charter schools on the Resource Center, it will allow more schools to acquire charters and open, and will enable charter schools to operate more efficiently.

There appears to be two major strands of thought concerning advancing Tennessee's charter law through the Resource Center. One strand argues that it is better to moderate any growth while the "movement" improves its existing schools. The other strand argues that more (and quality) schools are needed to promote the concept and make the public take notice. There are several possibilities that take into account both interests: one leading idea that appears to have much support across various constituencies is to create an advocacy strategy that corrects the enrollment restrictions in the law while also ensuring the development of a new authorizer that is given (limited) authority to open new schools. Regardless of which direction is taken, it is clear that the Resource Center must develop a solid, long-term strategy that aims to change the law.

2. Develop a board of directors that is diverse and represents the community that it serves.

Rationale: Perceptions of the current organization is that its leadership, while highly regarded, is limited and not representative. A diverse board can enhance programmatic activities, business connections, fundraising, and constituency support.

3. Expand financial support base.

Rationale: Strong organizations draw financial support from member dues, philanthropy, and other sources. Currently, the Resource Center mostly depends on Foundation gifts. However, by initiating a direct mail campaign, including grants, proposals, and other requests, the organization can increase revenues from foundation, corporate, and individual donors; in addition to seeking added income from fee-for-service activities. Initiating a systematic, diverse, year-round fundraising strategy is critical to future financial stability.

4. Invest in talent.

Rationale: Successful businesses need strong talent to survive and grow. The Resource Center is no different. It is a new business with a major but difficult product to deliver and sell. To attract and retain the best staff possible, two factors are necessary. First, the organization must offer a competitive salary. Second, staff must have the freedom to direct and guide the organization. The board of directors should provide guidance but not excessive oversight.

5. Re-brand the Tennessee Charter School Resource Center.

Rationale: The Tennessee Charter School Resource Center currently enjoys a positive image among most constituents, but when asked, many individuals cannot identify it by name. Those same individuals had a difficult time using the precise words to describe the organization. There is no easy abbreviation for the Resource Center, which makes communication about the organization and its purpose difficult. In addition, what the Resource Center's objectives are and what its constituents desire and need is not represented by the term "resource center." Instead, its direction and goals are more closely paralleled to an association, which is both a friendly representative and forceful for advocacy.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Center for Education Reform is a national non-profit education and research organization founded in 1993 to unite policy and practice in education reform in American communities. CER creates opportunities for and challenges obstacles to better education for all children.

One of the major initiatives CER administers is called the Target State initiative, in which selected states with potential for improvements in charter school structures, laws and advocacy are developed with partners, and implemented to fruition.

In 2002, CER was involved with Tennessee leaders in passing their charter school law, but has subsequently provided limited advice in the development of the charter school resource center. Over the past four years, CER's involvement with Tennessee waned, but because of renewed leadership, interest and demand in the state, the partnership has been formally re-established. CER has begun, and will continue to provide concrete analysis and recommendations on how to best construct and advance the interests of the charter school movement.

CER launched the development of this business plan with a strategic planning exercise (see below and the Appendix for more detail), which followed on work performed in nine other states in the last three years. With this expertise and insight into what works in similar situations, CER has analyzed the environment and the needs of communities most effected by and most needing support from a strong organization. CER's goal has been to develop an integrated understanding of attitudes and perceptions across the state in often overlooked arenas and then make recommendations that represent best practices while incorporating unique state issues and attitudes.

A key part of the assessment process was interviewing charter school operators, stakeholders, and other interested parties to gain insight about preferred programs and services and suggested organizational strategies. CER found universal satisfaction with the quality of the Resource Center, but they needed more information or assistance regarding funding issues, staff development, recruitment, and improving legislation. Respondents also reported that there is a significant communications gap in understanding charter schools throughout the state.

The result of this exercise is the development of a comprehensive, three-year business plan that we are pleased to present to the Hyde Family Foundation.

STEPS TO CREATE THE TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION BUSINESS PLAN

STAGE 1: Assessment

Activity 1: Review of all Tennessee Charter School Resource Programs and Goals; Analysis of history, trends and challenges.

Activity 2: Survey of all Tennessee charter school operators.

Activity 3: Survey of selected community activists, educators, leaders from business and foundation, legislators, opponents, media.

(See Appendices for full report on surveys.)

STAGE 2: Development of Business Plan

Activity 1: Review and analysis of current Charter School Resource Center capabilities versus constituent demands.

Activity 2: Identification of “best practices” in charter school organizations (California, Louisiana, Michigan, New York).

Activity 3: Input by key supporters/participants in Tennessee about various best practices.

Activity 4: Plan development: programs, personnel, position descriptions, timelines, budget, development plan, board of director’s composition.

Activity 5: Expert Review

Activity 6: Final Draft

STAGE 3: Implementation

(Once the plan is formally adopted we will develop with the Resource Center a plan of implementation that addresses fundraising, recruitment, advocacy strategies.)

TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION (TCSA)

3-year Business Plan

BACKGROUND

To more accurately reflect the relationship the new independent organization aims to achieve with its constituency, CER recommends re-branding the Tennessee Charter School Resource Center to the Tennessee Charter School Association (TCSA).

TCSA will:

- Expand the number and variety of high-quality charter schools across Tennessee.
- Function as an effective, credible voice that publicizes and advocates for the charter school movement in Tennessee.
- Develop, maintain, and defend policy environments in which charter schools can succeed.
- Build and strengthen members and allies to advance these goals.

Each of these goals aligns with the desires/interests of most charter school operators currently working in Tennessee (see Appendix for survey details).

To reach the next level of development, TCSA must adopt a core business plan that refocuses its mission, articulates strong, measurable goals, and provides a reintroduction to schools, communities and government leaders. This business plan will demonstrate TCSA's focus and commitment to a long, substantial future.

KEY ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Technical Support Programs and Services

To accomplish its mission, TCSA must introduce and carryout the following programmatic and service goals. These goals will be accomplished over the next three years.

- Provide technical assistance to existing charter schools as well as provide training and support to groups interested in starting new schools. Rather than providing one-on-one consulting, TCSA must look for opportunities in increase efficiency by scaling up assistance through group workshops and developing a proven referral system of consultants.
 - Create a comprehensive start-up assistance program to provide frequent monitoring of progress to start-up goals, guidance on standard practices, and referrals for additional expert assistance.
 - Improve TCSA technical assistance capabilities to identify and remedy educational problems.
 - Create programming that accelerates and sustains school-wide improvement in areas associated with fundamental charter commitments.
 - Broker relationships with professional and financial service organizations to improve access to capital, operational funding, and facilities development.
 - Create a network among service providers to access better and more affordable special education services.
- Develop a system of accountability for charter schools to help assure the academic and financial accountability of the schools.
 - Maintain and report school accountability data on all charter schools in the state.
 - Maintain at least 90% retention of all existing charter schools that are open and new schools that open during this three-year period.

Advocacy and Communications

To accomplish an increased level of advocacy and communication the TCSA will implement the following programs over the next three years.

- Develop a strong public relations/advocacy component that will focus on sharing the progress, needs, and the merits of charter schools both locally and nationally. This public relations component will also be used to educate lawmakers and policy makers so that the needs of the charter school movement are evident and at the forefront in the public education discussion. Strong parent and grassroots advocacy will be part of this effort.
 - Increase ability of charter schools to influence decision-makers.
 - Initiate a series of legislative and administrative improvements to the charter schools act and administrative process.
 - Create a statewide coalition that gives allies of all types a vehicle through which to advocate for charter schools.
 - Develop parent and grassroots advocacy programs.
 - Develop an action alert feedback system.
 - Drive the discussion about charter schools by identifying and commenting on key issues.
 - Cultivate a relationship with the education reporters, editors for all newspapers, radio stations, and television stations.
 - Generate high-profile stories about charter schools.
 - Be a comprehensive conduit of charter school information.
 - Provide media relations training to school and community leaders.
 - Improve the general understanding of charter schools.
 - Regularly communicate activities with donors and potential donors.

Business Development

To accomplish its goals, TCSA must secure additional resources and employ creative strategies to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the organization. TCSA will meet these goals over the next three years.

- Increase TCSA's annual revenue and improve long-term stability by diversifying funding sources.
 - Increase the number of foundation donors.
 - Increase the number of corporate donors.
 - Increase the number of individual donors.
 - Identify opportunities for program fees.
 - Identify and pursue governmental funding opportunities that support specific programs of technical assistance.
- Increase the capacity of TCSA to fundraise.
 - Increase staffing resources available for fundraising.
 - Systematically fundraise throughout the year.
 - Look for new funding sources and methods.
- Increase the operational efficiency of TCSA by establishing a fee-for-service structure.
 - Develop stratified membership levels for charter schools incorporating fees for various service levels.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Staffing, Management, and Operations

To deliver quality programs and services, and to create the tools and resources for advocacy, communications, and business development, TCSA will establish the following staffing, management, and operations goals to be accomplished over the next three years.

- Implement programs and services in a systematic and focused manner.
 - Define the functional boundaries of new and existing staff.
- Expand personnel resources to better meet TCSA's goals and objectives.
 - Increase TCSA's efficiency and expertise by hiring new staff.
- Create an organizational culture that is driven by TCSA's core ideology.
 - Staff the organization with individuals who are in intellectual agreement with the basic philosophical premises behind charter schools and school choice.
 - Undertake activities in a manner that helps reflect the ethnic, racial, and economic characteristics of TCSA's schools and students.
 - Continuously adjust staffing in response to review of program and service implementation.

Governance and Board Development

To further its mission and accomplish its programs and service goals, the TCSA will create a strong governance structure, including a diversified board of directors.

- Improve the board of director's structure to better support the work of the TCSA.
 - Expand the size of the board to achieve greater geographic, demographic, economic, and professional diversity.
 - Solicit members with characteristics helpful to implement the strategic plan.
- Increase involvement, participation, and accountability of board members.
 - Ensure that all board members understand TCSA's goals and objectives.
 - Increase the board's involvement in fundraising.
- Establish operational self-sufficiency in the areas of financial management, personnel decisions, accounting, audits, and policy.

BENCHMARKS

Technical Support Programs and Services

To ensure programs and services are implemented in a timely manner, the TCSA will set the following deadlines.

- In consultation with association members, 3 months after its rollout, TCSA will identify core program and service offerings (see Appendix for numerous suggestions).
 - Identify vendors and other service providers as needed.
 - Define costs and produce appropriate marketing materials.
- After 6 months, survey members to assess satisfaction with TCSA programs and services.

Advocacy and Communications

To ensure strong advocacy and communication efforts, the following steps must be put into place in the outlined manner.

- Prepare for the start of the next legislative session (January 2007) by developing a series of new TCSA materials.

- Create the following simple fact sheets: What Are Charter Schools, The Demographics of Charter School Students, Limiting Factors to the Growth of Charter Schools, and What Needs to Be Done.
- Within 3 months, develop new collateral materials.
 - Create the following re-branded collateral: TCSA logo, stationary, business cards, simple marketing brochure.
- Launch a new website.
 - Start with a simple static brochure model within 3 months.
- Create larger networks and expand and share contacts.
 - Develop within 6 months an electronic network among members to share information, build resource referrals, and develop a knowledge base.
 - Immediately tap into member parent lists to share information and build a network of support.

Business Development

To accomplish this goal, the TCSA must create, develop, and implement additional funding sources and hire staff to ensure financial sustainability.

- Immediately initiate (and complete within 3 months) a hiring search for a Development and Business Director.
 - Hire a seasoned executive with operational oversight experience to manage business activities, including non-technical support services, fundraising, and accounting.
- Find, develop, and implement new funding sources.
 - Immediately initiate activities to identify funding sources.
 - Submit and win at least 5 new foundation grants within the first year.
 - Plan at least one major fundraising event within the first year.
 - Develop and disseminate a direct-mail fundraising vehicle within 6 months.
 - Increase revenue streams 5-fold within 3 years.

STAFFING AND POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

TCSA needs to add quality staff: (1) to strengthen and enhance staff to increase operational capacity, (2) to aggressively pursue a plan that brings charter schools to the forefront of discussions and policymaking surrounding educational choice; and (3) to appropriately fill gaps in programs and services provided to charter schools. CER recommends that in its first year TCSA plan for four full-time professional staff: an Executive Director, a Development and Business Director, and a Training and Technical Assistance Director. CER also recommends hiring an administrative assistant to handle routine clerical and office duties. Hire outside consultants to assist as needed with advocacy, communications, marketing, and fundraising activities.

Geographically, the TCSA will be headquartered in Nashville to ensure that a new team and new structure has ample time to cultivate programs and relationships under one roof, and to ensure proper planning and organization. However, being mindful of the presence of 10 schools in Memphis, it is recommended that the leadership of TCSA establish a well-communicated schedule in which at least one day per month is spent on site in Memphis, preferably at a charter school. After year one, TCSA should consider a regional office, assuming the structure and programs are fully operational.

The Executive Director is responsible for implementing TCSA's mission, goals, objectives, and policy agenda. The Executive Director will represent TCSA to external entities and serve as an advocate for public charter schools. This person will be TCSA's chief spokesperson. This person will negotiate partnerships and relationships to leverage technical support services and expand TCSA's program offerings to members. This person will represent TCSA when decisions are made about local and national policies and funding affecting charter schools in Tennessee. This person will work with staff and consultants on development activities and public relations matters. The Executive Director will report to the Board of the TCSA.

The Business Development Director will oversee all internal, non-technical business side operations, including accounting and fundraising activities. The Business Development Director will establish purchasing cooperatives, coordinate vendor relationships, and identify and manage business development/income generation opportunities. This person will identify and manage the submission of grant proposals and provide other support as needed to maintain the organizational infrastructure. The Business Development Director reports to the Executive Director. The Executive Director, prior to advertising the position, will develop a full job description. This position will be filled within 3 months of TCSA's rollout.

The Member Services Director will establish programs and facilitate partnerships focusing on board development, leadership development, school development, staff development, facility services, field requests for assistance, special education, grant writing, coaching and peer mentoring, school improvement, compliance and reporting, and charter renewal and accreditation. This person will assist with member recruitment and renewal, help coordinate events such as teacher and vendor fairs, and support the collection, compilation and dissemination of data on school and student performance. The Member Services Director will report to the Executive Director. The Executive Director, prior to advertising the position, will develop a full job description. This position will be filled within 3 months of TCSA's rollout.

The Administrative Assistant will handle general office duties and assist TCSA staff where necessary. The Administrative Assistant will report to the Executive Director. The Executive Director, prior to

advertising the position, will develop a full job description. This position will be filled within 3 months of TCSA's rollout.

Consulting Advocacy activities may include promoting the legislative agenda, developing grassroots advocacy groups, setting up legislative meetings and strategy sessions around the state, or providing legal services as needed.

Consulting Marketing/Communications activities include developing initial collateral materials, maintaining the TCSA website, and supporting as needed the ongoing communications among schools, parents, community leaders, and other charter school stakeholders.

TIMELINES

Assuming rollout is July 1, 2006, the TCSA Executive Director will immediately:

- Launch a job search for key staff members identified above.
- Initiate plans to define and develop technical support programs and services.
- Initiate development of TCSA marketing and advocacy materials.

By August 1, TCSA will:

- Develop and execute a candidate survey for November election impact.
- Schedule and draft for September distribution public Voter Guide.

By October 1, TCSA will:

- Hire new staff.
- Complete initial programs and services descriptions.
- Complete re-branded TCSA logo, new stationary, business cards, and marketing brochure.
- Upload a static promotional website.

By January 1, 2007, TCSA will:

- Rollout technical support services via identified vendors.
- Complete advocacy materials.
- Develop an electronic knowledgebase network for members (via the website).
- Identify an advocacy strategy for the upcoming legislative session.
- Initiate plans for a major annual fundraising event.
- Initiate grant proposals to at least 5 new foundations.
- Initiate plans to rollout a direct mail fundraiser.

By March 1, 2007, TCSA will:

- Administer first of three direct mail efforts using highly visible state leaders.

By July 1, 2007, TCSA will:

- Survey members to assess their satisfaction with TCSA programs and services.
- Measure through media audit the success of communications activities.
- Significantly increase revenue and funding commitments.
- Initiate internal evaluation of first-year strategies.
- Complete plans for the annual fundraiser.

Annually, thereafter, between July and January, TCSA will:

- Assess and adjust activities based on internal evaluations.
- Prepare a legislative agenda for the beginning of each year.
- Plan fundraising activities.

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

As per CER's operating plan, interviews were conducted with selected individuals throughout Tennessee for the purpose of gauging the knowledge level, attitudes and perceptions of people about the Resource Center, those who may not normally be directly involved but should be aware and/or participating on some level with charter schools in Tennessee. In addition to drawing from people referred by the Resource Center, CER sought a broad representation of views from other interested parties to acquire an objective evaluation of what is needed to advance the organization and its work most effectively. Names of individuals surveyed are not included in this report as interviews were conducted on a confidential basis.

ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL SURVEY RESULTS OF CHARTER SCHOOL OPERATORS

Methodology

This segment of the project included a series of 16 questions asked of the 12 charter school operators in the state of Tennessee from April 10-24, 2006 by CER staff.

The questions asked respondents about their particular experience with charter school resource providers in the state, and to describe their experience with these providers, to qualitatively express their satisfaction level with these providers, discuss the issues with which these providers assisted, and which issues, if any, with which they would desire assistance.

Each survey lasted approximately 15-20 minutes.

Key Findings

Every one of the schools interviewed, or 100 percent of the charter schools in the state of Tennessee, was able to identify the Tennessee Charter School Resource Center as an organization that serves as a resource for, or provides assistance to charter schools in Tennessee. This question required the respondents to give the name of the Resource Center without prompting from the interviewer.

Of the 12 interviewees, 10 of them had utilized the Resource Center in the past and 8 of them were currently utilizing services of the Resource Center, with three using them Very Often, three using them often, one using them occasionally, and one seldom.

The services provided by the Resource Center varied, but most commonly noted were their efforts to create a collaboration among the schools by hosting a Charter School Leadership Roundtable at Vanderbilt University, assistance with interpreting laws, and assistance with meeting legislators. Additionally, the schools cited funding issues, professional development, networking, and special education assistance as the most frequent issues with which they received assistance.

Of the nine schools that had utilized the Resource Center, seven claimed they were very satisfied with the quality of service provided, and two said they were satisfied with the quality of service provided.

Eight of the nine who had used the Resource Center cited service as the quality with which they were most satisfied, with one saying responsive was the aspect with which they were most satisfied. The other choices available were expertise, quality, and cost. When asked the aspect of the service with which they were most DISSATISFIED, none of the respondents provided an answer.

Next, the respondents were asked whether the assistance they were receiving was sufficient or insufficient; all nine of the respondents who were currently receiving assistance said the assistance is INSUFFICIENT.

When asked what services were most needed, the schools again gave varied answers, but the most common responses included funding, staff development and recruitment, and improved legislation. Other answers were:

- Legislation to create more schools.
- Better development of existing schools before more schools are created.
- Better definition of "at risk children."
- Broader pools of eligible students.
- Facilities and contracting issues.
- Better public relations and marketing of the good done by charters.
- Best practices.
- Job fairs.
- Assistance with school district conflicts.

Next, the schools were asked to rank 9 different issues in importance, with 1 being very important and 10 being not important at all. The choices were special education assistance, accounting needs, management procedures, teacher recruitment, board issues, legal advice, start-up assistance, networking with legislators, and public relations.

Special Education Assistance

Eight of the 12 listed special education assistance as a number one priority, with only one school listing it as not important at all. The remaining two listed it as a two and a three.

Accounting Needs

Of the 12 respondents, five listed Accounting Needs as a one, or extremely important. Two listed it a three, and the rest rated its importance between five and ten.

Management Procedures

Of the 12 respondents, only one listed Management Procedures as extremely important, with three rating it between two and four. The rest placed it between five and ten.

Teacher Recruitment

Three of the 12 respondents listed teacher recruitment as a number one priority, one as a three, and the rest placing it between five and ten.

Board Issues

Board issues also received a low priority rating with only two schools listing it as a one. The rest placed its importance between four and ten.

Legal Advice

Six of the 12 responded that legal advice was either a one or a two in importance. The remaining half of the respondents placed it between four and ten.

Start-up Assistance

Eight of the 12 respondents rated start-up assistance as very unimportant, presumably because they are all ready operating, and no longer need such assistance. Four of the schools listed this issue as extremely important or very important, perhaps thinking back to their own start-up challenges.

Networking with Legislators

Nine of the 12 respondents said that networking with lawmakers was very important, with five of them rating it a one. The remaining three respondents listed it as very unimportant.

Public Relations

Half of those interviewed rated public relations as extremely important (1 or 2), while four more listed it as very important (3 or 4). Two respondents rated it as unimportant or very unimportant.

Outside Groups

Eleven of the 12 respondents have worked with organizations other than the Tennessee Charter School Resource Center during their time in operation. Four of those schools listed the Hyde Foundation as one of the organizations with which they have been working. Services provided varied from funding to volunteers.

Greatest Challenges

Challenges faced by the responding schools were varied and frequent. Answers included:

- Food service
- Transportation
- Facilities funding
- Student retention
- Budgeting
- Under-prepared new students
- Teacher recruitment
- General funding
- Student assessment
- Inability to recruit at-risk children regardless of whether their conventional school is failing

Demographics

The 12 schools serve a diverse population totaling 1,716 students covering all grades K-12.

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS OF OTHER CHARTER SCHOOL STAKEHOLDERS IN TENNESSEE

Methodology

This segment of the project included a series of 10 questions and natural conversation with identified charter school stakeholders in Tennessee. These surveys were conducted from April 10-26, 2006 by CER staff.

The questions asked respondents about their particular experience with charter school resource providers in the state, and to describe their experience with these providers, to express their level of knowledge of current charter school laws, discuss the issues with which they would seek assistance, and to share what they believe is the biggest issue facing education and charter schools in Tennessee today.

Each survey lasted approximately 15-20 minutes.

Key Findings

The survey of charter school stakeholders in Tennessee revealed a complex, but not contradictory, set of opinions held among respondents. While four of the 13 respondents had not heard of the Tennessee Charter School Resource Center, the nine who had reported mostly sufficient levels of overall satisfaction with the assistance being provided. This response was accompanied by the

sentiment that additional and more effective support is required. It is important to point out that only seven of the nine respondents who know of the Resource Center could give the name without prompting from the interviewer.

While eight survey respondents reported that they were very or somewhat familiar with the Resource Center, five reported that they were vaguely familiar or completely unfamiliar with the Resource Center. Those eight respondents in the very or somewhat familiar categories expressed positive interaction with the Resource Center. Three of those eight had contact with the Resource Center either very often or often, four had contact on an occasional basis, and one seldom had contact.

The services that the Resources Center provided to respondents varied. The services of note include providing guidance in interpreting Tennessee's charter school law, assistance to charter schools applying for charters, the hosting of the Charter School Leadership Roundtable at Vanderbilt University, and assistance with meeting and lobbying legislators.

Of the 13 stakeholders interviewed, six said that the Resource Center provided them with sufficient information to determine their position on educational issues. Three said they felt the information was insufficient, one said that it was too early to say and three either did not or could not answer.

Six of the 13 respondents said that they felt they were very familiar with Tennessee's charter school law, one respondent was somewhat familiar, two were vaguely familiar and two did not answer. One respondent further stated that it would be a relief if he knew that he could contact the Resource Center when he had a question about the law. He stated that he currently did not believe he could do so.

When asked what assistance the respondents would seek on educational issues, the respondents gave varied answers including the following:

- Identifying personal income by school district to help set equalization rates. (This information is currently available by county but not by school district.)
- How many students are failing but not eligible to attend charter schools because they are not in failing schools.
- The negative impact of teacher unions and how they are ruining public schools.
- Test scores for every child in Tennessee.

When asked more specifically what assistance the respondents would seek on charter school issues the most common response was a way to create greater community awareness about charter schools and their success. Other responses included:

- More information about conversion schools.
- More opportunities to lobby and meet with lawmakers.
- More educational/networking forums with other charter school operators/teachers/principals.
- More information on legislation affecting charter schools.
- Information about other states that have successfully passed strong charter school laws.

Respondents were asked what they believed is the greatest issue facing education in Tennessee. The three top answers were: (1) unions and their stronghold on schools and the legislature, (2) failing schools, and (3) the education crisis not being recognized. More answers included:

- An inability to remain globally competitive.
- Uninspired teachers.
- Not meeting the needs of students.
- Failure of vision.
- Lack of money.

- A lack of value being placed on education.
- Low graduation rates.
- Lack of accountability, parental support, and leadership.
- NCLB Act standards being set too low that then give an unreal perception of student achievement.
- Lack of high standards and accountability of students.

Finally, the respondents were asked what they believe is the greatest issue facing charter schools in Tennessee. A majority of respondents identified (1) the union stronghold on the schools, school boards, and the legislature, (2) the lack of public knowledge about charter schools, and (3) the current, very restrictive law. Additional answers included:

- The public view that charter schools are harmful to public schools.
- Maintaining accountability of charter schools to ensure success and academic excellence.
- An unresponsive governor who is unlikely to push or assist with charter school legislation.
- Facilities funding.

CONCLUSION

Unions, negative public attitudes, and a narrow and limited law appear to be the greatest challenges to charter schools in Tennessee. These issues are intertwined with one another and therefore cannot be combated individually. Charter school advocates must create a strong, positive message challenging the distortions disseminated by the unions. That message will allow the perception of charter schools to change and allow the public to see that charter schools are the future of our education system.

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDED WITH DIRECT SERVICES BY CER

Capacity Building and Association Development

Michigan Association of Public School Academies
District of Columbia Public Charter School Association
Texas Charter School Coalition
California Charter School Association
Louisiana Charter School Association
Missouri Charter School Association
New Mexico Coalition of Charter Schools/Albuquerque Alliance
Educational Excellence for Everyone (E3)
Wyoming Charter School Resource Center

Data Assessment and Analysis

Building Hope of Washington, DC
American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence
M-Space