



Top Level Recommendations from the Training Needs and Strengths Assessment

Priority areas:

1. Academic Performance - strategies to accelerate progress
2. Formative Assessments and analyzing data to inform instruction
3. Promising practices for coaching/mentoring teachers
4. Literacy instruction or interventions
5. Math instruction or interventions
6. Special Education
7. ESOL
8. Racial equity efforts and Diversity and Inclusion
9. Approaches to discipline/restorative justice
10. Parent involvement (in school or to support students success)
11. Governance
12. Filling seats - A focus on enrollment
13. Tracking alumni
14. Resource Development
15. Attracting and Keeping Talent

Summary of Needs Improvement Areas

Among the lowest rated attributes in the survey is a near universal concern that the results on statewide assessments (MSA/PARCC) are not where charter school leaders want them to be. Most feel good about their overall progress in closing achievement gaps, but do not think the PARCC results are the best gauge of student abilities, and there is acknowledgement, too, that the PARCC will not be in use much longer.

The lack of financing for facilities is another major concern, which can have negative ripple effects on overall learning. As one respondent put it, “everything relates to funding in the end.” Acquiring, renovating or expanding facilities is especially difficult to make happen without any dedicated funding source. On average in the USA, public schools spend an estimated \$1,500 per pupil on a combination of capital outlays for facilities and interest on capital-related debt (National Center for Educational

Statistics, 2010-11). Facilities costs would be substantially higher than this average figure in most Maryland jurisdictions currently served by charter schools. Training on facilities finance options as well as on fundraising and resource development in general are key needs respondents identified.

The level of parent involvement seems to be a rising concern; one respondent explained that “parents believe the school is doing fine and needs no help, so they don’t get involved.” Selecting quality board members also received a relatively low rating.

Many of the areas where some survey respondents seem to be struggling can be supported by others who tagged the same attribute as strength. Special education, for example, presents challenges for some while others, like this respondent, offered to share practices “in all areas related to special education, from instruction to behavior to compliance.”

Teacher recruitment and retention is a growing concern (also nationwide), though some respondents boast of 90 percent or higher retention. Similarly, a few respondents are having challenges with student enrollment and attendance.

Coming in with the lowest rating is tracking student success after graduation, which prompted many comments for help from anyone who has a good handle on alumni tracking.

Summary of Strengths

The highest rated attributes in the survey indicate that charter school respondents have a strong confidence in the innovativeness of their curricular approaches, including efforts at personalized learning, using academic data to drive such student interventions and fostering a positive school culture and a safe learning environment for students.

Strong survey ratings and comments also indicate that the responding charter schools have settled into positive operator and principal collaborations, attained good teacher buy-in to their missions, mastered the board governance fundamentals (e.g., financial oversight, budgeting, conflicts of interest, open meeting and public records protocols) and enjoy solid community support and positive authorizer relations.

This matches up with some of the interview commentary from the school system “liaison” staff. Overall, such staff gave high marks for innovative instructional practices, teacher empowerment and positive school culture and climate. Most “liaison” staff cited board governance, however, as an area where more training is needed and that collaboration between the system, principal and charter school boards also needed strengthened. Part of the disconnect could be that the “liaison” staff have top of mind those charter schools that are closer to the novice stage or continue to receive troubling oversight reviews. Regardless, it would appear some school-to-school sharing might help raise the bar in some of the fundamental areas of charter school board governance and operator-principal collaborations.