



COLORADO
OCTOBER 19 - 22
2015





QUALITY OPENINGS

MAKING THE VISION COME TO LIFE



INTRODUCTIONS

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SESSION OBJECTIVES

Participants Will:

- Understand why continued focus on school development is critical for a high quality charter school sector.
- Be able to identify key indicators for determining whether a school is ready to open.
- Adjust their own pre-operational monitoring standards and practices based on examples from peers.

ONE REASON THIS MATTERS A LOT: FIRST YEAR CLOSURES

- **First Year Closures**
 - Highly disruptive and damaging to students and families
 - Waste of taxpayer dollars
 - Almost always avoidable
- **Happens Too Often and More Than We Would Think**

A 1st Year Closure is when a school closure happens at any point before the beginning of the 2nd academic year – after first few weeks, mid-year, summer before year two etc.

1ST YEAR CLOSURES: A NATIONAL LOOK



3.4% of new charters that opened in 2013-14 closed prior to the 14-15 school year;
7 states
14 authorizers

REASONS FOR 1ST YEAR CLOSURES

- **Low Enrollment & Failure to Pay Obligations**
 - 2/3 of all cases
- **Unapproved & Unsuitable Facility**
 - Facilities not approved by authorizer
 - Not meeting health and safety requirements
- **Ineffective Relationships with Management Organizations**
 - Financial dependence on mgmt company
 - Management company financial collapse
- **Improper Policy & Operation Decision-Making**
 - Not conducting criminal background checks
 - Not identifying ELL's

Handout provides more detailed circumstances for each of these four primary reasons



1ST YEAR CLOSURES ARE ALMOST ALWAYS PREVENTABLE

- **Low Enrollment & Failure to Pay Obligations**
 - Examine need and demand? Preliminary enrollment numbers before allowing to open?
- **Unapproved & Unsuitable Facility**
 - Require authorizer facility sign off? Policy on “temporary locations”?
- **Ineffective Relationships with Management Organizations**
 - Due diligence on management company? Examine and approve management company agreement?
- **Improper Policy & Operation Decision-Making**
 - Examine policies and procedures (e.g. background checks, special student population capacity, conflict of interest policies)?

THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

PORTFOLIO

Ten schools spread throughout the Twin Cities; one in development.

AUTHORIZER

Started in 2001 with two schools, the authorizing program is housed within the College of Education, Leadership, and Counseling.

CONTEXT

Minnesota Law provides that an authorizer may prevent an approved charter from opening if the school does not meet the RTO standards adopted by the authorizer.



MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

PORTFOLIO

Started with one charter school in 1996. Currently 126 schools countywide serving 58K+ students.

AUTHORIZER

Sole authorizer with a dedicated authorizing department within the school district to provide oversight, and technical support.

CONTEXT

Florida law does not speak directly to RTO standards.

The charter contract with the District articulates RTO standards and consequences.



PRE-OPERATIONAL LEVERS

HIGH STAKES
"READY TO
OPEN"
APPROVAL

APPLICATION

PRE-OPENING
MONITORING

CAPACITY
INTERVIEW



A RIGOROUS APPLICATION PROCESS IS THE KEY

Look for Indications of Capacity to *Implement* a Plan

- Relationships are clearly defined (roles of the board, leadership, and mgmt. company)
- Start up plan is well-constructed and logical

Assess Capacity During the Interview

- Scenarios can help the applicant demonstrate likelihood of success
- Who will be involved going forward and can they demonstrate capacity?
 - Management company
 - Board
 - Leadership

THE READY TO OPEN PROCESS

A High Quality Ready to Open Process:

- Is clearly communicated to all stakeholders.
- Is implemented over the course of the school development period, generally in conjunction with a checklist or other tools.
- Covers all areas critical to school operations, program implementation, and student safety.
- Results in a final determination of readiness to open *well before* students are on site, and ideally before any state funds are expended.

KEY AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

- Contract – completed with accountability plan in place
- Enrollment – sufficient to meet minimum budget projection
- Board – compliant with law, functioning well, has passed required policies and procedures
- Facility – Safe and suitable, lease signed, occupancy certificate secured
- Connections – to banks, state DOE, etc., are in place and functional, data and funds can flow freely

KEY AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

- Learning Program Elements – in place and true to application, materials purchased, prepared for EL and special education students
- Transportation – plan is viable, contracts are finalized
- Staffing – key personnel have been hired and possess appropriate licensures/qualifications for their roles

FINAL DETERMINATION OF READINESS TO OPEN

The process culminates with a determination of whether or not the school is ready to open. This final step often includes:

- A comprehensive file review
- Due diligence to ensure enrollment figures and other materials presented are accurate
- An in-person meeting complete with interviews of key staff/board members and a walk-through of the intended facility
- A crosswalk to see if pre-operational accountability requirements have been fulfilled

READY TO OPEN MEETING

Read the scenario to yourself.

You are the authorizer and are conducting the ready to open meeting at the school site a little over a month before the first day of school.

Prepare questions for the school leader, start-up coordinator, and representative board members.

What is the fate of this school?

Consider:

1. Purpose of mtg
2. Timing
3. Who attends
4. Post mtg communication



THANK YOU



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