



CRACKING THE CODE ON STEM

A People Strategy
for Nevada's Economy

Establish a Charter School Incubator to Increase the Number of High-Quality Public Charter Schools in the State

Problem

Throughout the United States, high-quality public charter schools offer strong alternatives to traditional public schools. These independently run schools provide new educational options for students and parents and in some cases have been shown to improve the quality of nearby schools by introducing an element of competition into the P-12 public education system.

At present, Nevada has only a handful of charter schools and nationally recognized charter management organizations (CMOs) have proven reluctant to locate in the state. Fostering expansion of charter school options will require a strong leadership pipeline for public charter schools, which Nevada currently lacks.

Recommendation

To improve opportunities for the creation of high-quality charter schools in the state, Nevada stakeholders should establish a charter incubator capable of supporting charters through the critical first years. This incubator would help create the pipeline of leadership talent needed to launch and run high-quality charter schools by providing training, initial investments, and ongoing assistance in building strong connections to and partnerships with the surrounding community.

Implementation Specifics

Establishing a charter incubator would offer a way to strengthen and expand Nevada's charter school offerings. Charter incubators focus on developing the capacity for leadership, strong community connections, and regional partnerships needed to help a charter school succeed. By selecting participants using a highly competitive process and then providing intensive support throughout the planning and launch phases, incubators help improve the likelihood that high-quality charters will take hold.

Incubators can also help attract high-performing CMOs to a particular region. To take just one example, the charter school incubator operated by The Mind Trust in Indianapolis is supporting the launch and expansion of charter networks operated by Rocketship and KIPP, two CMOs nationally recognized as best-in-class. Because incubators can work with CMOs to establish a good rapport with stakeholders, tailor charter models to the particular realities of the region, and generally smooth the way for the opening of charter schools, they can help set a region apart in CMO decisions about where to locate.

Budget Implications

Based on the costs incurred by similar models elsewhere in the United States, a charter incubator would likely cost \$200,000 to \$500,000 per incubated charter school, which would cover salaries for charter school leadership, fellowship programs for incubator participants, and a broad array of support services and programming to help school leaders get their charter schools up and running. Although charter incubators are a relatively new approach, there are a few models that could inform Nevada's efforts on this front. One such example is the previously mentioned Charter School Incubator in Indianapolis. Created by the Mind Trust, a nonprofit organization focused on improving P-12 public education in the region, this incubator focuses on bringing strong charter school networks to Indianapolis. Funding for the incubator and The Mind Trust's other activities is provided by a broad array of donors, including individuals, corporations, and foundations.

References

Joel Abeldinger and Julie Kowal. 2011. "Better Choices: Charter Incubation as a Strategy for Improving the Charter School Sector." CEE-Trust and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2011. Available at http://cee-trust.org/upload/news/1206111233_Better%20Choices%20-%20Charter%20incubation%20as%20a%20strategy%20for%20improving%20the%20charter%20school%20sector.pdf.

The Mind Trust. "Our Growing Network of School Networks." Available at www.themindtrust.org/our-investments.

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