

Deals with charters would help Austin kids

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As Central Texas philanthropic foundations focused on improving student achievement and college readiness across Texas, we are excited about the prospect of the Austin Independent School District establishing "win-win" partnerships with high-performing public charter schools like KIPP Academy, IDEA Public Schools and Responsive Solutions.

Central Texas students and parents would benefit from collaborations like in-district charters, joint efforts to improve training and recruitment of teachers and principals, and sharing best practices on increasing college enrollment. As background, our two foundations — the Texas High School Project and Sooch Foundation — are proud investors in both traditional public school districts and high-performing public charter schools.

We believe there are three good reasons for Austin school district leaders to establish partnerships with high-performing charter schools.

1. It's an opportunity for experts to work with experts. The high-performing public charter schools in which we have invested (like KIPP Austin, IDEA Public Schools and Harmony Math & Science) are led by educators with proven track records of student achievement, increased graduation rates and greater college enrollment. Within the Austin school district, Superintendent Meria Carstarphen has built a diverse and experienced team of leaders open to innovation and new ideas to improve all our schools. Charters bring new ideas in teaching and learning, college-going culture and principal recruitment/training. Our community would benefit from having "experts working with experts" to create stronger ideas and help make Austin a city of innovation in preparing students for college and careers.

2. There is already an established track record of successful innovative partnerships in our city. Several of Austin's noteworthy schools were created with external partners. Successful examples include the Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders (which is a partnership with the Dallas-based Foundation for the Education of Young Women); Akins High School (which has worked with the Atlanta-based Southern Regional Education Board/High Schools That Work); and the Academy for Global Studies at Austin High School (which is associated with the New York-based Asia Society).

3. There is national and state context for this type of successful education partnership. Across the country, major urban districts in Denver, Nashville, Hartford (Conn.), Baltimore, Boston and Los Angeles are working in partnership with high-performing charter schools. Mayors like Dallas' Mike Rawlings and Chicago's Rahm Emanuel are working with school boards, superintendents and charter leaders to improve options for parents and students in their cities.

National models such as the Harlem Children's Zone in New York City include major partnerships with charter schools. Nationally, President Barack Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan are supporting expansion of charter schools in federal initiatives like Race to the Top, and the Investing in Innovation Fund. Texas school districts are already working closely with charter schools — and achieving positive results.

Our foundations have years of direct experience working with Austin district educators and with high-performing charters. We are excited about the opportunity for greater collaboration and the sharing of ideas between successful public school leaders, while incorporating the voices of parent and

neighborhood leaders. We are confident the result will create more high quality public school campuses for students and parents in Austin.

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