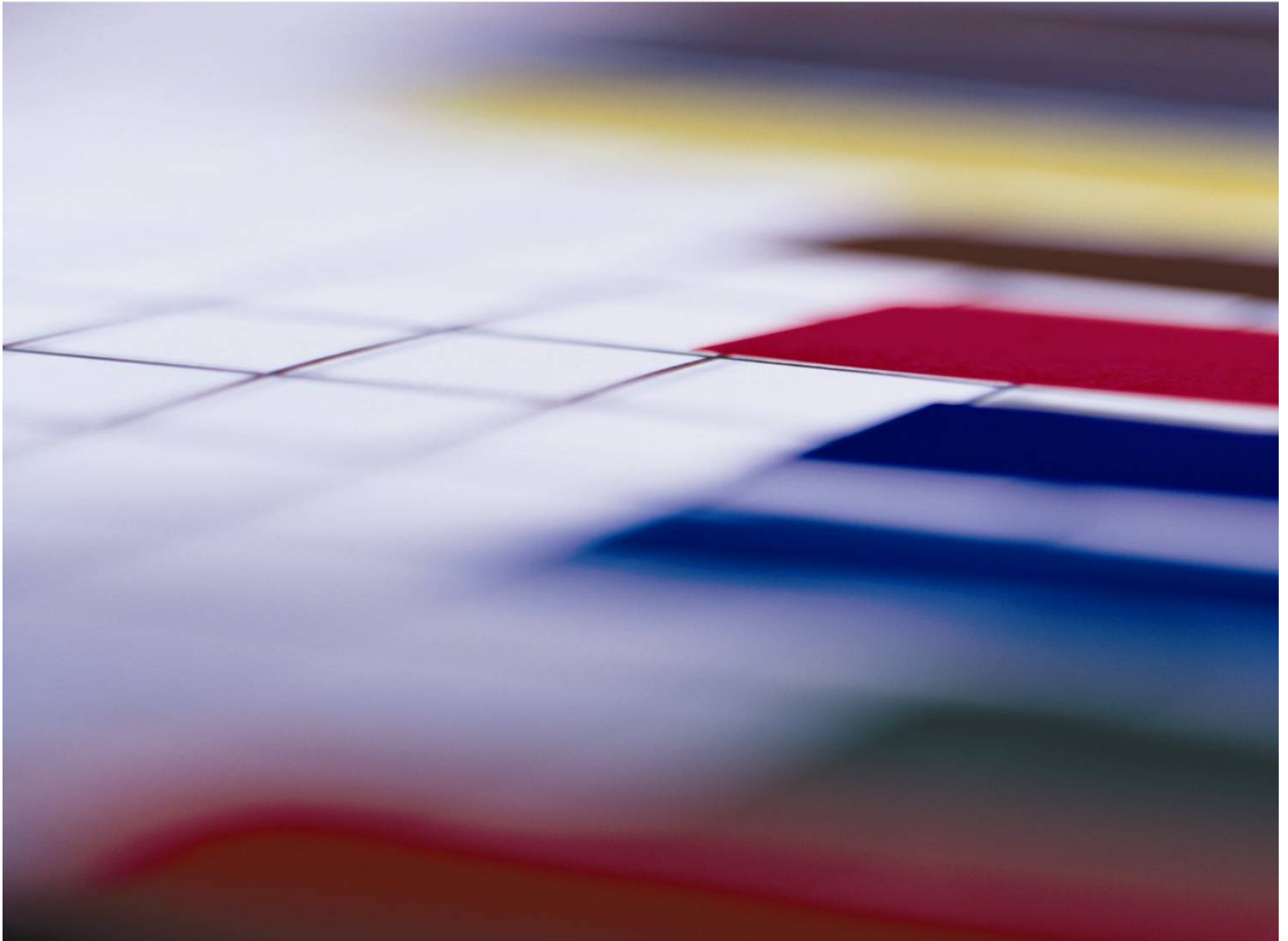




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# Third Year Evaluation of Tennessee Charter Schools 2005-2006





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## Preface

In 2002, Tennessee passed its first Public Charter School legislation. Four schools were successful in gaining approval to begin operating in the 2003-2004 academic year. The second cohort of three charter schools began operation during the 2004-2005 academic year, with the third cohort of five schools starting-up during the 2005-2006 academic year. According to the charter school law, these charter schools were granted “maximum flexibility” to achieve alternative ways for public schools to educate school children. Though the flexibility granted to these schools is considered an advantage, previous research on charter schools has demonstrated mixed results in their success.

The purpose of the present evaluation study was to examine the progress made in program implementation, school climate, and student achievement by the charter schools. A “mixed-methods” design, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative data, was employed. The questions upon which the evaluation methods are based relate to the progress of individual schools and the overall group in implementing desired strategies for curriculum, instruction, and organization, and in attaining the goals of No Child Left Behind by bringing every child to proficiency in reading and mathematics on the TCAP by 2014. It should be noted that student achievement will be more fully examined in a supplemental report when student-level data become available.

The work was conducted by the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP), a state of Tennessee Center of Excellence, located at The University of Memphis.

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## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of the present evaluation study was to examine the progress made in program implementation, school climate, and student achievement by the Tennessee charter schools. Six evaluation questions guided the methodology for this study. Student achievement results (Question 1) are addressed in a separate report. The following evaluation questions (2-6) are addressed in this report.

2. What is the frequency of usage of various traditional and alternative (student-centered) instructional strategies in the charter schools and compared to national norms?
3. What is the school climate at the charter schools and how does the climate compare to national norms?
4. To what degree and levels of quality are the goals and strategies of the charter school being implemented?
5. What are teacher reactions to and experiences in the charter school? What are the adequacy and quality of professional development and resources?
6. What are parent (caregiver) reactions to and experiences with the charter school?

## **Description of the Charter Schools**

### ***Circles of Success Learning Academy (COSLA)***

COSLA is an urban school located in Memphis, Tennessee. In its third year of operation, COSLA enrolled a total of 98 students in grades K-4. All were African American, and most (87%) were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. As a literacy-focused school using the Success for All reading program, COSLA emphasizes the integration of reading and writing activities across all curricular areas.

### ***Memphis Academy of Health Sciences (MAHS)***

MAHS is located in a high-poverty area north of downtown Memphis, Tennessee. The school served 300 6-8 grade students in its third year of operation. African American students represented 100% of the school's population; 75% of the students received free or reduced price lunches. The curriculum is a standards-based,

interdisciplinary program that incorporates interdisciplinary projects and experiential learning centered on a health science theme.

***Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering (MASE)***

MASE is housed in an office building in downtown Memphis. During the 2005-2006 school year, there were 376 seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students. The students were predominantly African American (98%), and 68% qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. The program includes longer days, Saturday school, high technology use, continuous monitoring of student progress, and an intense focus on core curricula integrated across subjects.

***Smithson-Craighead Academy (SCA)***

This urban charter school, located in the city of Nashville, Tennessee, is in its third year of operation. It served 188 students in kindergarten through fourth grade. The students were predominantly African American (99%), and nearly all (99%) were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The mission of the school is to meet the academic and social needs of at-risk children through mastery of basic academic skills, student self control, obedience, and diligence.

***City University School of Liberal Arts (CityU)***

CityU is located in a Baptist church in an urban area of Memphis, Tennessee. The school enrolled 147 ninth and tenth grade students in its second year of operation. Just over 91% of the students were African American, and 39% were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The curriculum developed and employed at CityU has a liberal arts core and is aligned with College Board standards to build a strong college-oriented focus.

***Star Academy***

Star Academy is located in the outskirts of Memphis, Tennessee. In its second year of operation the school served 154 students in kindergarten through third grade. The student population was predominantly African American, with approximately 95% of the students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch. Reading, language arts, and mathematic were emphasized during the academic year.

### ***Yo! Academy***

Yo! Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts is located in southwest Memphis in an industrial warehouse site. During the second year of operation, the school served 163 students in the ninth through twelfth grades. All students were African American and approximately 80% were eligible for free or reduced price meals. The mission of the school is to provide at-risk students with a safe environment to pursue rigorous academic preparation while incorporating the visual and performing arts.

### **KIPP Academy Nashville**

KIPP Academy is located in a high-poverty section of east Nashville in a previously abandoned building owned by the Metropolitan Nashville Public School System. During its first year of operation, the school served 57 fifth grade students. Most (93%) of these students were African American and 88% were eligible for free or reduced price lunches. The Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) school is distinguished by several extensions to the typical school calendar: extended school hours; Saturday school held two weeks out of each month; and an extended school year with a four week summer program.

### ***Memphis Business Academy (MBA)***

MBA is located in the business district in the heart of downtown Memphis. In its first year of operation, the school served 62 sixth grade students. Almost all (99%) were African American and 72% were eligible for free or reduced price lunches. The school incorporates business education, entrepreneurship, and financial responsibilities into the core curriculum.

### ***Promise Academy***

Promise Academy is located in Memphis and currently housed in St. Paul's Episcopal Church. The 2005-2006 school year was the school's first in operation, during which only kindergarten classes were conducted. Of the 53 students served for during the first year, 98% were African American and 91% were eligible for free or reduced price lunches. The school's mission is as follows: "to prepare children to excel in the nation's most rigorous high schools. Our central and only work is to teach and inspire the mind, body and spirit of our children so that they can succeed in any academic or cultural setting."

### ***Soulsville Charter School***

The Soulsville Charter School is located in a lower socio-economic urban area in Memphis, on the same property as the historic Stax Museum of American Soul Music. In the school's first year of operation, 56 sixth grade students were served. All students were African American and 91% qualified for free or reduced price lunches. The school incorporates a concentration on orchestra and musical skills development into the core curriculum developed by Memphis City Schools. The school's plan includes extended school days and half-day Saturday classes.

### ***Southern Avenue Charter School for Academic Excellence***

Southern Avenue Charter School for Academic Excellence is located in Memphis and housed at Greenwood Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, near the University of Memphis campus. During its first year of operation, 65 kindergarten and first grade students were served. In addition to the basic curriculum, "kaleidoscope" activities such as art, music, ballet and tae kwon do are offered. The school calendar and school days are extended at Southern Avenue, with "kaleidoscope" classes beginning at 3:00 in the afternoon. The school supplements the students' education with reading and math tutorials during an after school program, which runs from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm.

## **Method**

A mixed methods design, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative data, was employed. The instruments used in the data collection were: (1) School Observation Measure (SOM<sup>®</sup>), (2) Rubric for Student Centered Activities (RSCA<sup>®</sup>), (3) School Climate Inventory (SCI<sup>®</sup>), (4) principal interview, (5) teacher focus group, (6) student focus group, (7) Charter School Teacher Questionnaire, (8) Charter School Parent Questionnaire, and (9) Program Implementation Benchmarking.

A "site researcher" from CREP was assigned major data collection responsibility for each charter school. This individual and support research staff visited the assigned school several times during the year to conduct the observation visits, administer the questionnaires, and conduct the interview and focus groups. In addition, the site researcher worked with the school leadership team to develop "implementation benchmarks" describing beginning, intermediate, and full implementation phases and associated evidence indicators. At the end of the year, the site researcher met again

with the leadership team to determine and identify the phase that had been achieved for each benchmark. Data from all instruments were then used to prepare individual school formative evaluation reports indicating status and progress during the year.

## **Results**

### ***Question 2<sup>1</sup>. What is the frequency of usage of various traditional and alternative (student-centered) instructional strategies in the charter schools and compared to national norms?***

Across schools and cohorts, teacher-centered instruction remained the dominant orientation. The rates of teacher-centered instruction were comparable to national norms in many cases, but still reflect limited success by the schools to implement the more innovative pedagogy described in benchmarks and instructional plans. The anticipated trend that charter schools might move from more traditional to more student-centered strategies was not completely realized because many schools were rated as moderate or weak in terms of utilizing student-centered strategies. The pattern of findings was similar for the category of higher-order instruction, but national norms also do not reflect extensive levels of higher-order instruction. Technology usage was the least prevalent category of instruction across charter schools. In some schools no technology use was observed, whereas in others technology was occasionally used to support learning. In many cases the levels of technology use did not compare favorably with the normative data.

### ***Question 3. What is the school climate at the charter schools and how does the climate compare to national norms?***

Overall, school climate remains a definite strength of these charter schools. In some schools, the findings showed increases from already high averages when compared to previous years. In 1<sup>st</sup> cohort schools, the decline in scores observed in the previous year appeared to rebound. On all dimensions, the SCI ratings obtained for the charter schools were higher than national norms. Still, as true in the national sample, scores on Order tended to be lower than those on other dimensions. Nevertheless, less favorable evaluation of school climate was the exception across charter schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Question 1 is addressed in a separate report.



***Question 4. To what degree and levels of quality are the goals and strategies of the charter school being implemented?***

Not surprisingly, the most advanced levels of implementation were observed among first cohort schools in their third year of operation. First cohort schools were either in intermediate or final phases of implementation across categories. Ratings for the implementation of goals and strategies tended to be moderate or intermediate for second cohort schools. Low to intermediate levels of implementation were apparent among third cohort schools in their initial year of operation. Across schools, the strongest levels of implementation tended to be for benchmarks targeting support and organization; whereas, lower levels of implementation were more apparent in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and evaluation.

***Question 5. What are teacher reactions to and experiences in the charter school? What are the adequacy and quality of professional development and resources?***

Overall, teachers' reactions to and experiences in the charter schools tended to be very positive. Responses related to support of the educational program, understanding of the mission, and the likelihood for student success were particularly favorable. All charter schools were considered to be strong in this category. Most charter schools were also rated as strong in the area of professional development. Teacher perceptions of the availability and adequacy of resources were more varied with most schools rated as moderate. Although there were differences by school in the type of resources that respondents endorsed as sufficient or adequate, having enough common planning time and/or faculty within the school more commonly emerged as areas in need of improvement. With regard to perceptions of support or assistance from educational agencies, teachers' ratings and comments were less favorable. They consistently reported a lack of effective assistance provided by state and local educational agencies. Regarding longitudinal trends, improvement in teacher responses were noted in several schools, and patterns related to cohorts were not detected.

**Question 6. What are parent (caregiver) reactions to and experiences with the charter school?**

All 12 charter schools were rated as strong with respect to parent satisfaction. These findings were similar to those obtained in previous years. Clearly, the parents had primarily favorable reactions to these schools. The levels of parental involvement were more varied across schools, with most considered to be strong or moderate in this category. There was a pattern of more moderate to low levels of involvement in third cohort schools, which seems reasonable for schools just launching their programs. A pattern of findings by school level was also detected. Three of the four schools judged to have high levels of parent involvement served early elementary grade levels. With one exception, the charter schools rated as low in terms of parent involvement were third cohort secondary schools.

**Recommendations**

Based on the overall findings, the following recommendations apply to the charter schools as a group and not necessarily to individual schools. The recommendations specific to each school can be found in the individual reports provided to each school. Due to a consistent pattern of findings across years, the recommendations are similar to those presented in previous reports.

First, charter schools might adopt a wider array of instructional orientations or strategies shown to promote student achievement. Many of the research-based practices and the schools' own benchmarks call for the implementation of more student-centered strategies that entail higher-order thinking and technology integration. Traditional direct instruction can be an effective orientation, but a better balance among a variety of effective pedagogical practices might be achieved.

Second, benchmark documents need to be modified to better align with objective indicators and available data. Planning, evaluation, and ultimately improvement can be facilitated by a sound, ambitious, and long-range benchmark document. An honest, accurate appraisal of the extent to which benchmarks have been successfully implemented will enhance school improvement efforts.

Third, efforts to continue developing supportive, collaborative relationship with the school district and external partners should continue. Strategies include having

more open channels of communication and holding meetings to clarify policies, procedures, and available resources. Furthermore, representatives of charter schools should continue to seek the support and assistance of various external partners. However, we recognize that the schools' potential progress in establishing and furthering such relationships is directly dependent on the degree of involvement desired and investment made by the respective external organizations.

A fourth recommendation is to continue efforts to increase active parent involvement or participation. The definition and types of parental involvement might be reconsidered. In some school improvement plans, involvement translates into support for and understanding of the mission and educational program or maintaining regular contact. In others, it specifies more active participation in parent organizations, school activities, and the provision of academic support for students. Formal contracts or agreements that specify activities and extent of participation might be implemented.

The final recommendation is to prioritize, coordinate, and secure more resources. The selection of targeted resources would be guided by the school improvement plan. Admittedly, this recommendation is the most difficult to achieve. Additional resources may be garnered by working toward achieving a collaborative, supportive relationship with the school district, state educational agency, and external partners.

## **Third-Year Evaluation of Tennessee Charter Schools (2005 – 2006)**

This report presents results from the evaluation by the Center for Research in Educational Policy of the charter schools operating in the State of Tennessee. The first cohort of four schools began operation in the 2003-2004 academic year and have completed their third full year of operation. The second cohort of three schools completed their second academic year, and the third cohort of five schools completed their initial year of operation during the 2005-2006 academic year. By way of historical background, the passage of the first charter school law and establishment of the first charter school occurred in Minnesota in 1991. As of September 2006, approximately 4,000 charter schools were operating in the United States (Center for Education Reform, 2006). Additionally, under the No Child Left Behind legislation, children who attend schools identified as needing improvement have the opportunity to enroll in charter schools located within their district (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

In 2002, the state of Tennessee passed its first public charter school legislation. According to this law, charter schools were intended to receive “maximum flexibility” to achieve alternative ways for public schools to educate school children. Though the flexibility granted to these schools is considered an advantage, previous research on charter schools has demonstrated mixed results in their success.

Although this legislation marks an important precedent in Tennessee policy, it is equally important to determine and document the effectiveness of charter schools relative to traditional schools in promoting effective educational practices and raising student achievement.

The purpose of the present evaluation study was to examine the progress made in program implementation, school climate, and student achievement by the Tennessee charter schools. A “mixed-methods” design, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative data, was employed, as will be described in the following sections. The questions upon which the evaluation methods are based relate to the progress of individual schools and the overall group in implementing desired strategies for curriculum, instruction, and organization, and in attaining the goals of No Child Left Behind by bringing every child to proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2014.

In the following section, evaluation questions and the assumptions from which they were derived are presented. Table 2 shows each question with associated data collection tools, which in turn will be described in more detail in the Methodology section.

#### *Charter School Assumptions and Associated Evaluation Questions*

1. *Assumption:* The major goal of school reform (i.e., specifically the creation of a charter school) is to raise student achievement and improve educational outcomes (attendance, socialization, etc.).
  - *Question:* What are the immediate and long-term impacts of the charter school implementation on student achievement, attendance, and attrition/dropout rates?<sup>2</sup>
2. *Assumption:* High student achievement is fostered by effective teaching.
  - *Questions:* (A) What is the frequency of usage of various traditional and alternative (student-centered) instructional strategies in the charter schools?; (B) What is the frequency of usage of selected instructional strategies associated with best practices?; (C) How do charter instructional practices compare to those reflected in national norms?

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<sup>2</sup> At the time this report is being prepared, student-level data from the Spring 2006 Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program/Achievement Test (TCAP/AT) are not yet available.

3. *Assumption:* Positive educational outcomes at schools are fostered by positive school climate.
  - *Questions:* (A) What is the level of school climate at each charter school?; (B) Does school climate improve over time?; (C) How do charter school climate outcomes compare to those reflected in national norms?
4. *Assumption:* To impact schools positively, educational reforms must be properly implemented.
  - *Question:* To what degree and levels of quality are the identified goals and strategies of each charter school being implemented?
5. *Assumption:* To be implemented effectively, educational reforms must have teacher support, sufficient professional development, and adequate resources.
  - *Questions:* (A) What are teacher reactions to and experiences in TN charter schools?; (B) What are the adequacy and quality of professional development and needed resources?
6. *Assumption:* The effectiveness and sustainability of educational reform and intervention programs are enhanced when students' families are supportive and involved.
  - *Questions:* (A) What are parent (caregiver) reactions to and experiences with TN charter schools?; (B) To what degree and in what ways are caregivers involved with each charter school?

## **Methodology**

### *Description of the Charter Schools*

As noted, four schools comprise the first cohort, three comprise the second cohort, and five schools were included in the third cohort. Table 1 presents an overview of the schools by cohort. A more detailed, narrative description of each school follows the table.

**Table 1**  
**Overview of Schools**

School	Cohort	Level	Grades (05-06)	Enrollment (05-06)	Location
Circles of Success Learning Academy (COSLA)	1	Elementary	K-4	98	Memphis
Memphis Academy of Health Sciences (MAHS)	1	Middle	6-8	300	Memphis
Memphis Academy of Science & Engineering (MASE)	1	Secondary	7-9	376	Memphis
Smithson-Craighead Academy (SCA)	1	Elementary	K-4	188	Nashville
City University of School of Liberal Arts (CityU)	2	Secondary	9-10	147	Memphis
Star Academy	2	Elementary	K-3	154	Memphis
Yo! Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts	2	Secondary	9-12	163	Memphis
KIPP Academy Nashville	3	Middle	5	57	Nashville
Memphis Business Academy (MBA)	3	Middle	6	62	Memphis
Promise Academy	3	Elementary	K	53	Memphis
Soulsville Charter School	3	Middle	6	56	Memphis
Southern Avenue Charter School for Academic Excellence	3	Elementary	K-1	65	Memphis

*Circles of Success Learning Academy (COSLA).* COSLA is an urban school located in Memphis, sharing space with a church and a day care facility. In its third year of operation, the 2005-2006 school year, COSLA enrolled a total of 98 students in kindergarten through fourth grade. All were African American, and most (87%) were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. COSLA's staff consisted of five full time teachers with a student to teacher ratio of 20:1. Other staff members included a new principal, a new administrative assistant, a part-time special education teacher and two teacher assistants. As a literacy-focused school using the Success for All reading program, COSLA emphasizes the integration of reading and writing activities across all curricular areas. Organizational structures are designed to facilitate high levels of learning and

therefore include the systematic monitoring of grade level planning, classroom teaching practices, and student progress. The school also has a fine arts program during the extended day.

*Memphis Academy of Health Sciences (MAHS).* MAHS has been housed in the upper floor of Caldwell Elementary School, located in a high-poverty area north of downtown Memphis. The school served 300 sixth, seventh and eighth grade students during the 2005-2006 school year, its third year of operation. The curriculum is a standards-based, interdisciplinary program that incorporates interdisciplinary projects and experiential learning centered on a health science theme. MAHS has an active parent group called "MAHS 100 Parent Council" that meets twice a month. This group supports strong parental participation in the school. They have created a parent contract that encourages a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer work at school during the school year. All stakeholders in the school community are looking forward to moving to another facility for the 2006-2007 year at Heritage Baptist Church in Nutbush, within the Berclair community in northeast Memphis.

*Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering (MASE).* MASE is housed in a former medical office building within the heart of the mid-town Memphis medical community. During the 2005-2006 school year, the school's third year in operation, there were 376 seventh, eighth and ninth grade students. The students were predominantly African American (98%), and 67.8% qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. The school's staff consisted of twenty full-time teachers and three part-time teachers. The student to full-time teacher ratio was 18:1. The school's program includes longer days, Saturday school, high technology use, continuous monitoring of



student progress and an intense focus on core curricula integrated across subjects. Role modeling, labs/activity periods and project-based Saturday programs are also employed at the school. The school employs a number of strategies not found in the traditional school, such as flexible class times, student access to laptops during the school day for research and completing assignments, and textbooks on CD.

*Smithson-Craighead Academy (SCA).* Smithson-Craighead Academy is an urban Nashville school in its third year of operation. The school is housed in an older building which previously served as an elementary school within the Nashville Metro District School System. It served 188 students in kindergarten through fourth grade during the 2005-2006 school year. The students were predominantly African American (99%). 99% of students were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The school maintained a staff of eleven full-time teachers, and one part-time teacher. The student to full-time teacher ratio was 18:1. The mission of the school is to meet the academic and social needs of at-risk children through mastery of basic academic skills, student self control, obedience, and diligence. Smithson follows the same calendar as the district and continues to offer a summer school session. The school also offers several popular after-school programs and a variety of extra-curricular activities.

*City University School of Liberal Arts (CityU).* CityU is located in a Baptist church in an urban area of Memphis. The school enrolled 147 ninth and tenth grade students in its second year of operation, the 2005-2006 school year. Most (91%) of the students were African American, and 39% were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The school's faculty and staff consisted of six full-time teachers, ten part-time teachers, and one paraprofessional. The student to teacher ratio was 15:1. The curriculum developed

and employed at CityU has a liberal arts core and is aligned with College Board standards to build a strong college-oriented focus. This theme is continued throughout City University's operations, from teachers being referred to as "professors" and students as "scholars." The educators at City University indicate they want their students to be prepared for college and are providing them with an opportunity to learn in an atmosphere they would not experience in most high schools.

*Star Academy.* Star Academy is located in northeast Memphis. The school is housed in a former preschool building on the grounds of a Baptist church. In its second year of operation, the 2005-2006 school year, the school served 154 students in kindergarten through third grade. The student population was predominantly African American (99%), with approximately 95% qualifying for free or reduced price lunch. The school maintained a staff of seven full-time teachers, two part-time teachers, and three paraprofessionals. The student to full-time teacher ratio was 22:1. The primary focus of Star Academy is "back to basics," which is an emphasis on literacy and mathematical competencies. Additional programs include character education, exploratory lessons in visual and creative arts (varies according to grade level), music, technology (third grade), and physical education. STAR utilizes a unique blend of student/teacher interactions along with formal teaching strategies, with the goal of meeting the instructional needs of all student learners.

*Yo! Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts.* Yo! Academy of Visual and Performing Arts is located in southwest Memphis in an industrial warehouse site, a facility used as part of the Yo! Memphis youth opportunity program, originally funded by the U. S. Department of Labor. During its second year of operation, the 2005-2006

school year, the school served 163 students in the ninth through twelfth grades. All students were African American and 80% were eligible for free or reduced price meals. The school maintained a staff of eight full-time teachers, two part-time teachers, and two paraprofessionals. The student to full-time teacher ratio was 16:1. The mission of the school is to provide at-risk students with a safe environment to pursue rigorous academic preparation while incorporating the visual and performing arts. The school's program includes longer days with performing arts classes scheduled in the latter part of the day. They, and the performances that result, constitute an important part of the identity of Yo! Academy.

*KIPP Academy Nashville.* KIPP Academy is located in a high-poverty section of east Nashville in a previously abandoned building owned by the Metropolitan Nashville Public School System. During its first year of operation, the 2005-2006 school year, the school served 57 fifth grade students. Most (93%) of these students were African American and 88% were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The school maintained a staff of two full-time teachers, five part-time teachers and one paraprofessional. The principal also taught for part of the day. The student to teacher ratio as reported by KIPP Academy was 15:1. The school was chartered as a Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) and lists its characteristics and unique school features as "Work Hard," "Be Nice," and "Be Honest." The school is distinguished by several extensions to the typical school calendar: extended school hours; Saturday school held two weeks out of each month; and an extended school year with a four week summer program.

*Memphis Business Academy (MBA).* MBA is located in the in the business district in the heart of downtown Memphis. Housed in the basement of a church, this

charter school's facility is small and unconventional in comparison to a traditional school setting. In its first year of operation, the 2005-2006 school year, the school served 62 sixth grade students. Almost all (99%) were African American and 72% were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The school employed six full-time teachers, two part-time teachers, and one paraprofessional. The student to teacher ratio was 17:1. The school incorporates business education, entrepreneurship and financial responsibilities into the core curriculum.

*Promise Academy.* Promise Academy is located in Memphis and currently housed in St. Paul's Episcopal Church. The 2005-2006 school year was the school's first year in operation, during which only kindergarten classes were conducted. Of the 53 students served for during the first year, 98% were African American and 91% were eligible for free or reduced price lunches. Three full-time teachers, one part-time teacher and two paraprofessionals were employed by the school during its first year. The student to teacher ratio was 18:1. The school's mission is "to prepare children to excel in the nation's most rigorous high schools. Our central and only work is to teach and inspire the mind, body and spirit of our children so that they can succeed in any academic or cultural setting." The educators at Promise Academy want their students to learn and excel and want to provide that opportunity in a unique atmosphere that the students would not experience in most elementary schools.

*Soulsville Charter School.* The Soulsville Charter School is located in a lower socio-economic urban area in Memphis, on the same property as the historic Stax Museum of American Soul Music, known as *Soulsville, USA*. In the school's first year of operation, the 2005-2006 school year, 56 sixth grade students were served. All students

were African American and 91% qualified for free or reduced price lunch. Four full-time teachers were employed during the initial year. The school's stated mission is "to provide music education and exciting performance opportunities designed to enhance our students' musical abilities and their academic and leadership skills so they may become prosperous citizens and facilitators for community change." The school incorporates a concentration on orchestra and musical skills development into the core curriculum developed by Memphis City Schools. The school's plan includes extended school days and half-day Saturday classes.

*Southern Avenue Charter School for Academic Excellence.* Southern Avenue Charter School for Academic Excellence is located in Memphis and housed at Greenwood Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, near the University of Memphis campus. During its first year of operation, the 2005-2006 school year, 65 kindergarten and first grade students were served. The school plans to expand to include second grade for the 2006-2007 year. In addition to the basic curriculum, "kaleidoscope" activities such as art, music, ballet and tae kwon do are offered. The school also offers Spanish once a week. The school calendar and school days are extended at Southern Avenue, with "kaleidoscope" classes beginning at 3:00 in the afternoon. The school supplements the students' education with reading and math tutorials during an after school program, which runs from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm.

### *Instrumentation*

Instruments used for data collection were developed and validated by the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) as part of the Formative Evaluation for School Improvement Process (FEPSI) (see [www.memphis.edu/crep](http://www.memphis.edu/crep)). A description of

each instrument is provided below. A summary of the instrumentation employed to address each research question is provided in Table 2. The standard data collection schedule is shown in Table 3.

**Table 2**  
***Evaluation Questions by Instrument***

Evaluation Questions	Instruments
1. What are the immediate and long-term impacts of the charter school implementation on student achievement, attendance, and drop-out/attrition rates?	Analysis of achievement data and archival data (attendance, attrition)
2. What is the frequency of usage of various traditional and alternative instructional strategies?  What is the quality of usage of selected instructional strategies associated with best practices?  How do charter school outcomes compare to those reflected in national norms?	SOM RSCA
3. What is the school climate at the charter school?  Does school climate improve over time?  How do charter school climate outcomes compare to those reflected in national norms?	School Climate Inventory (SCI) Teacher Focus Group Student Focus Group Principal Interview
4. To what degree and levels of quality are the goals and strategies of the charter school being implemented?	Implementation Benchmarks Teacher Focus Group Principal Interview CSTQ SOM RSCA
5. What are teacher reactions to and experiences in the charter school?  What are the adequacy and quality of professional development and resources?	CSTQ Teacher Focus Group Principal Interview
6. What are parent (caregiver) reactions to and experiences with the charter school?  To what degree and in what ways are caregivers involved with the school?	Parent Survey Principal Interview Teacher Focus Group Student Focus Group

**Table 3**  
**Data Collection Outline**

Instrument	Timeline	Description
Benchmark training, development, revision	Fall 2005	Train school Principal and Staff; develop draft document; refine existing document
SOM	Fall 2005; Spring 2006	6 three-hour observations
Rubric for Student-Centered Activity (RSCA)	Fall 2005; Spring 2006	Same as SOM Data Collection
Principal Interview	Early Spring 2006	1 hour interview
Charter School Teacher Questionnaire (CSTQ)	Spring 2006 (Faculty Meeting)	Teachers complete the questionnaire (part-time faculty can also complete)
School Climate Inventory (SCI)	Spring 2006 (Faculty Meeting)	Professional staff complete inventory (part-time faculty/staff can also complete)
Parent Survey	Spring 2006	Parents/caregivers complete the survey
Teacher Focus Group	Spring 2006	1 hour group interview
Student Focus Group	Spring 2006	30-50 minute group interview
Benchmarking Review	May 2006	Principal/Staff review progress

*School Climate Inventory (SCI).* The School Climate Inventory (SCI) was developed by researchers at the Center for Research in Educational Policy, at The University of Memphis in 1989. Since that time, the instrument has been used for school-based improvement planning in schools and school districts in several states, and has proven to be especially valuable for the monitoring and management of change initiatives.

The SCI consists of seven dimensions logically and empirically linked with factors associated with effective school organizational climates. Each scale contains seven items, with 49 statements comprising the inventory. Responses are scored through the use of Likert-type ratings [strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (5)]. Each scale yields a mean ranging from 1 to 5 with higher scores being more positive. Additional items solicit demographic information.

Face validity of the school climate items and logical ordering of the items by scales were established by the research team during the development of the inventory (Butler and Alberg, 1991). Subsequent analysis of responses collected through administration of the inventory in a variety of school sites substantiates validity of the items. Scale descriptions and current internal reliability coefficients, obtained using Cronbach's alpha, appear in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
***School Climate Inventory Internal Reliability and Scale Descriptions***

Scale	Internal Reliability	Description
Order	$\alpha=.8394$	The extent to which the environment is ordered and appropriate student behaviors are present
Leadership	$\alpha=.8345$	The extent to which the administration provides instructional leadership
Environment	$\alpha=.8094$	The extent to which positive learning environments exist
Involvement	$\alpha=.7582$	The extent to which parents and the community are involved in the school
Instruction	$\alpha=.7453$	The extent to which the instructional program is well developed and implemented
Expectations	$\alpha=.7275$	The extent to which students are expected to learn and be responsible
Collaboration	$\alpha=.7417$	The extent to which the administration, faculty, and students cooperate and participate in problem solving

*School Observation Measure (SOM<sup>®</sup>)*. The SOM was developed to determine the extent to which different common and alternative teaching practices are used throughout an entire school (Ross, Smith, & Alberg, 1998). The standard, or whole-school, SOM procedure involves observers' visiting 10-12 randomly selected classrooms, for 15 minutes each, during a three-hour visitation period. The observer examines classroom events and activities descriptively, not judgmentally. Notes are taken relative to the use or nonuse of 24 target strategies. At the conclusion of the



three-hour visit, the observer summarizes the frequency with which each of the strategies was observed across all classes on a data summary form. The frequency is recorded via a 5-point rubric that ranges from (0) Not Observed to (4) Extensively. Two global items are used to rate, respectively, the level of academically-focused instructional time and the degree of student attention and interest.

The SOM strategies include traditional practices (e.g., direct instruction and independent seatwork) and alternative, predominately student-centered methods associated with educational reforms (e.g., cooperative learning, project-based learning, inquiry, discussion, technology use as a learning tool). The strategies were identified through surveys and discussions involving policy makers, researchers, administrators, and teachers, as those most useful in providing indicators of schools' instructional philosophies and implementations of commonly used reform designs (Ross, Smith, Alberg, & Lowther, 2004).

To ensure the reliability of data, observers receive training, a manual providing definitions of terms, examples and explanations of the strategies, and a description of procedures for completing the instrument. After receiving the manual and instruction in a group session, each observer participates in sufficient practice exercises to ensure that his/her data are comparable with those of experienced observers. In a reliability study (Lewis, Ross, & Alberg, 1999), pairs of trained observers selected the identical overall response on the five-category rubric on 67% of the items and were within one category on 95% of the items. Further results establishing the reliability and validity of SOM are provided in the Lewis et al. (1999) report. In a reliability study using Generalizability Theory, Sterbinsky & Ross (2003) found reliability at the .74 level for 5

SOMs conducted at a school. Reliability increased to .82 with 8 SOMs and to .85 with 10 SOMs conducted at a school.

*Rubric for Student-Centered Activities (RSCA).* The Rubric for Student-Centered Activities was developed by CREP (Lowther, Ross, & Plants, 2000) as an extension to SOM. The RSCA is used by observers to more closely evaluate the degree of learner engagement in seven selected areas considered fundamental to the goals of increasing student-centered learning activities (cooperative learning, project-based learning, higher-level questioning, experiential/hands-on learning, student independent inquiry/research, student discussion, and students as producers of knowledge using technology). These strategies reflect emphasis on higher-order learning and attainment of deep understanding of content, and whether or not technology was utilized as a component of the strategy. Such learning outcomes seem consistent with those likely to be engendered by well-designed, real-world linked exercises, projects, or problems utilizing technology as a learning tool.

Each item on the RSCA includes a two-part rating scale. The first is a four-point scale, with 1 indicating a very low level of application, and 5 representing a high level of application. The second is a Yes/No option to the question: "Was technology used?" with space provided to write a brief description of the technology use. The RSCA was completed as part of SOM observation periods.

To ensure the reliability of data, observers receive training consisting of terms, examples, and explanations of the target strategies, and a description of procedures for completing the instrument. After receiving the manual and instruction in a group

session, each observer participates in sufficient practice exercises to ensure that his/her data are comparable with those of experienced observers.

*Charter School Teacher Questionnaire.* This questionnaire was designed to assess teacher perceptions about the school in the areas of professional development, support, pedagogical change, and outcomes. Included on the questionnaire are 20 closed-ended items using a five-point Likert-type scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree), and the following four open-ended questions: What do you see as positive or most successful aspects of your charter school?; What do you consider to be negative aspects or areas in need of improvement at your school?; In your opinion, what makes a charter school (like this one) different from a regular public school?; and, Any other comments you would like to make regarding your experiences as a charter school teacher?

*Charter School Parent Questionnaire.* This instrument was designed to obtain parent perceptions of the school in areas such as instruction, curriculum, communication, and opportunities for involvement. Included on the questionnaire are 17 closed-ended items using a five-point Likert-type scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree), and the following four open-ended questions: What are the strengths of this school?; What would you like to see improved at this school?; In your opinion, what makes a charter school (like this one) different from a regular public school?; and, Any other comments you would like to make about this school or charter schools in general?

*Focus groups and interviews.* To supplement the survey data, site researchers at each charter school conducted a principal interview, a teacher focus group, and a student focus group. The time period for each was approximately 30 – 60 minutes for

each interview. Teacher and student participants were randomly selected to participate. A semi-structured protocol, involving standard questions with flexibility for follow-up on selected responses, was used. In all three protocols the basic questions concerned experiences during the year, differences from regular (non-charter) schools, reactions to major school components (e.g., teaching methods, curriculum, parent involvement), perceived strengths and weaknesses, and recommendations for improvement.

### *Procedure*

A “site researcher” from CREP was assigned data collection responsibility for each charter school. This individual and support research staff visited the assigned school several times during the year to conduct the SOM visits, administer the questionnaires, and conduct the interview and focus groups. In addition, the site researcher worked with the school leadership team to develop “implementation benchmarks” describing beginning, intermediate, and full implementation phases and associated evidence indicators for major school components in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and organization. At the end of the year, the site researcher met again with the leadership team to determine and identify the phase that had been achieved for each benchmark. Data from all instruments were then used to prepare individual school formative evaluation reports indicating status and progress during the year, as well as the present evaluation report.

## Results

In this section, the findings from the various data sources are presented. First, the findings from the 12 charter schools by cohort are summarized separately for each question. The findings are then integrated across schools and cohorts to address each of the research questions.

*Question 2. What is the frequency of usage of various traditional and alternative (student-centered) instructional strategies in the charter schools and compared to national norms?*

Observational data collected via the School Observation Measure (SOM) and the Rubric for Student-Centered Activities (RSCA) were used to gauge the frequency with which various traditional and alternative instructional strategies were observed in the charter schools. More specifically, patterns in results were organized under four different categories of instructional orientation and strategies: teacher-centered, student-centered, technology usage, and higher-order instruction. Independent seatwork was considered a more traditional, teacher directed orientation because students are primarily doing work directly prescribed by teachers and often in combination with direct instruction. The findings from the observations conducted in the charter schools were compared to the national normative data available for the SOM. For reference purposes, these norms are provided in Appendix A. In addition to comparing the observational data to norms, we also noted trends in the results across years for those charter schools in their second and third year of operation.

## *Cohort 1*

*Circles of Success Learning Academy.* COSLA continued to rely on direct instruction as the primary means of instructional delivery. Across classroom observations, direct instruction was recorded as frequently or extensively used 100% of the time. The percentage of time devoted to direct instruction increased from the previous year and is higher than norms for elementary schools nationally. Compared to the previous year, current findings indicate more frequent use of independent seatwork. This strategy was used occasionally or frequently about 83% of the time, but this percentage is comparable to the national norms. Student-centered activities were rarely observed. There was a decline in the overall use of cooperative or collaborative learning. However, a small percentage of time, somewhat strong applications of cooperative learning, experiential hands-on learning, and student discussion were seen. Technology use was not observed. Higher order questions were occasionally used 50% of the time, but the frequency of use was lower than in previous years. There was a somewhat strong application of higher-level questioning observed in some cases. Higher-level instructional feedback was occasionally observed about one-third of the time, but the prevalence of this strategy was lower than in previous years or when compared to national norms.

*Memphis Academy of Health Sciences.* The rates of traditional, teacher-centered approaches to instruction have been consistently high across years. Increases in direct instruction and independent seatwork were observed in the most current year, with these strategies observed frequently or extensively 100% of the time. These rates exceeded levels observed in secondary schools nationally. In contrast,

declines in most student-centered and higher-order strategies were noted. For example, the incidence of cooperative learning decreased, as did the use of higher-level instructional feedback. It appears that the gains noted in more alternative or innovative strategies in the second year were reversed in the third year of operation. The incidence of student-centered and higher-order strategies tended to be lower than those reported for secondary school nationally. RSCA data confirmed this trend and indicated low intensity or weak application of these strategies. There was also a decline in the use of computers for instructional delivery, but the frequency of technology used as a learning tool was identical across years. Considering both categories of computer use, the rates observed at MAHS did not compare favorably to the national sample. Technology was not used to support the types of student-centered or higher-order instruction measured on the RSCA.

*Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering.* As with the two preceding Cohort 1 schools, the instructional strategies observed at MASE remained highly traditional and teacher-centered across the three years of operation. The percentage of time devoted to direct instruction remained high in the third year and was somewhat higher than the normative data for secondary schools. Direct instruction was observed frequently or occasionally more than 80% of the time. Student engagement in independent seatwork was used extensively (50%) or occasionally (50%), but the prevalence of this strategy is also high in secondary schools nationally. One exception to this trend was the marked increase in teacher acting as a coach or facilitator across years, which suggests more student-centered activities. There was also an increase in the use of student discussion compared to previous years, but the move was from rare

or no use to occasional use. The prevalence of student discussion was higher than national norms, but the relatively low frequency with which other student-centered strategies were observed was similar to those found in the normative sample. Furthermore, the application of student-centered strategies remained limited in intensity or quality, as evidenced by RSCA data. Technology use was occasionally observed in about one-third of the classroom observations, and in a few cases the application of students as producers of knowledge using technology was strong. MAHS has somewhat higher prevalence of technology use than secondary schools nationally even though usage is not frequent in an absolute sense. The frequency of higher-order feedback and questioning also surpassed national norms, yet the application of these strategies was mostly limited. Across years, the prevalence of higher-order instructional strategies was consistent.

*Smithson-Craighead Academy.* An increase in direct instruction at SCA was observed. Direct instruction was observed frequently or extensively 100% of the time and these rates are higher than national norms. However, use of independent seatwork was also frequently observed but less extensively than in previous years and at somewhat lower rates than national norms. A declining trend was also noted for the use of higher-order strategies, but the rates were similar to those observed in the normative sample. For instance, higher-level instructional feedback was used at least occasionally during all of the visits in the first year, but this percentage dropped to 33% of the time for the third year. There was a similar drop in the use of higher-level questioning, both relative to prior years and to national norms. There were gains in the use of some student-centered strategies, but such occurred in the rare or occasional



categories, not the frequent or extensive categories. Although the observed frequencies of some student-centered strategies showed increases, RSCA data reflect a decline in both frequency and quality of application. The prevalence of technology, although low, compares favorably to normative data and remained consistent across years.

### *Cohort 2*

*City University School of Liberal Arts.* There was a notable drop in the prevalence of direct instruction, the most common type of teacher-directed orientation. It was employed either frequently (50%) or occasionally (50%), but not extensively in any of the observed class sessions. These figures are comparable to national norms for secondary schools. One might expect that a reduction in teacher-centered orientation might signal a gain in student-centered orientations, but this was not the case. Student-centered strategies were typically rarely or not observed, as was also the case last year. The most frequent instructional strategy was independent seatwork, and its usage rates were comparable to national norms. Both the SOM and RSCA indicated little change in the prevalence or quality of student-centered or higher-order instructional strategies. In contrast to last year when no technology use was observed, rare, lower than normative use of technology was recorded this year.

*Star Academy.* Although there was an increase in the percentage of time in direct instruction compared to last year (from 50% to 83% in the extensively observed category), the prevalence of many student-centered strategies also increased. Specifically, there were notable increases in use of cooperative or collaborative learning as well as teachers acting as coach or facilitator and work centers. The percentage of

time spent in direct instruction and in many types of student-centered instruction was higher than the national norms obtained for elementary schools. There was a slight decrease in the use of independent seatwork, but the prevalence was still higher than national norms. Higher-order strategies were more frequent when compared to the previous year and surpassed those reported in the normative sample. Furthermore, when these strategies were employed, RSCA findings indicate somewhat strong or strong application. However, the use of technology remained elusive during the second year of operation.

*Yo! Academy.* Observational findings were characterized by a decrease in teacher-centered instruction that corresponded with an increase in higher-order instructional strategies. Although direct instruction and independent seatwork were still frequently observed, the rate declined when compared to last year and was more comparable to secondary level norms. The rate of higher order instruction, most notably the use of higher level questioning strategies and feedback, increased to levels that surpassed those reported for the national sample. RSCA evidence reflected somewhat strong or strong application of higher-level questioning about 30% of the time. The findings for student-centered instruction were somewhat mixed. Compared to last year, there were increases in experiential learning, sustained writing, project-based learning, and cooperative learning, but the changes were largely represented among the not observed, rarely or occasionally observed categories. The incidence of technology use was nearly identical to the previous year's findings and was lower than those reported nationally.

### *Cohort 3*

*KIPP Academy Nashville.* In their first year of operation, instruction at KIPP academy was primarily teacher-centered in the form of direct instruction. This orientation was observed frequently or extensively in over 80% of the classroom visits, and this percentage is higher than the national elementary school norms. However, independent seatwork, another traditional instructional strategy, was less frequent compared to the normative sample. Instruction reflected occasional to frequent use of higher-order strategies that exceeded national norms. Notably, higher-level questioning and feedback were frequently or occasionally observed the majority of time and the level of application was judged to be somewhat strong or strong in over 40% of the cases. Student-centered strategies were less frequently or occasionally observed, but the frequencies tended to be higher than levels reported nationally. For example, sustained writing and student discussion were occasionally observed during half of the schools visits and project-based learning was occasionally observed one third of the time. The implementation of student-centered strategies was considered strong or somewhat strong in several cases. There was no technology use observed.

*Memphis Business Academy.* The frequencies across categories tended to be lower than national norms in most categories. Direct instruction, the most commonly observed orientation at MBA, was frequently observed about half of the time. Independent seatwork occurred frequently or extensively in about one third of the observed sessions. Student-centered strategies and technology use were either not observed or rarely observed. The only exception was the teacher acting as a coach or facilitator, which occurred occasionally or frequently one third of the time. Higher level

questioning and feedback occurred occasionally or rarely with rates comparable to the national norms. The RSCA findings suggested limited to strong application of these higher-level strategies in some cases.

*Promise Academy.* Traditional orientations that included direct instruction and independent seatwork were predominantly observed at Promise Academy. Direct instruction was frequently or extensively observed 100% of the time, and independent seatwork was frequently observed over 80% of the time. Both levels were higher national elementary school norms. Teacher acting as coach or facilitator was the most commonly seen student-centered strategy, with a frequency exceeding national norms. However, cooperative and experiential learning were occasionally observed at normative levels. Higher-order strategies were occasionally observed over half the time, which is also similar to the norms. In about 10% of the cases, there was at least somewhat strong application of higher-level questioning and experiential learning. Technology use was observed only rarely or occasionally at levels lower than observed in the national sample.

*Southern Avenue Charter School of Academic Excellence.* A mix of both teacher and student-centered orientations was observed at this charter school. Although direct instruction was most frequently observed more than 80% of the time, experiential learning, work centers, and teacher acting as coach/facilitator were frequently to extensively observed at least half the time. The percentages reported in these categories were higher than the national norms. In terms of quality or strength of application, strong or somewhat strong application was noted for cooperative and experiential learning in at least 10% of the cases. It is notable that the incidence of

independent seatwork was lower than observed nationally. There was some evidence of technology use in the classrooms. Technology used as a learning tool or resource was occasionally to frequently observed 50% of the time, a level that surpassed national norms. There was less indication of the use of higher order strategies when considering absolute frequencies or in reference to the normative data.

*Soulsville Charter School.* When compared to national elementary school norms, Soulsville Charter School had somewhat higher levels of direct instruction and independent seatwork. Observers rated the usage of direct instruction as frequent or extensive in nearly 85% of the cases. Independent seatwork was rated as occasionally present 100% of the time. In contrast, student-centered strategies were observed less frequently. Only teacher acting as coach or facilitator was frequently observed. Other student-centered strategies occurred at lower levels in both an absolute sense and compared to national norms. Encouragingly, frequent use of higher-order questioning and feedback was more apparent and at levels that surpassed the normative sample, particularly for feedback. RSCA findings indicated somewhat strong application of higher-level questioning strategies. Technology use was more common, with technology utilized as a learning tool occasionally observed 50% of the time, a rate more frequent than national norms. However, computers used for instructional delivery was less common.

#### *Summary findings across schools*

Table 5 presents the summary findings by school in four major categories associated with instructional orientation and strategies. Across schools and cohorts, teacher-centered instruction was the dominant orientation. It should also be noted that

the percentage of time spent in direct instruction is high in both the elementary and secondary school classrooms nationally. There were two schools, CityU and MBA, rated as moderate because the findings suggested less extensive or frequent use of both direct instruction and independent seatwork at levels lower than those reported nationally. It was somewhat surprising that somewhat less traditional instruction was observed for MBA in its first year of implementation. It was also interesting that less teacher-centered orientations did not correspond to more student-centered instruction in these two schools.

Although a wide array of student-centered strategies was observed across charter schools, most schools were not considered to be strong in this category. The two exceptions were Star and Southern, both of which are elementary schools. At Star, cooperative learning was combined with teacher acting as coach and facilitator, whereas at Southern, experiential learning and work centers were coupled with the teacher acting as coach or facilitator. In both cases, the teacher role was apparently less directive in the midst of more student-centered activities. One might expect that more student-centered activities would be prevalent among first cohort charter schools that were in their third year of implementation, but this was not the case. The anticipated trend that charter schools might move from more traditional to more student-centered strategies was not completely realized because many schools were rated as moderate or weak in this category. However, the charter schools, much like traditional schools, are under heavy pressure to perform well on the state achievement assessments. The schools, therefore, may have good intentions of using student-

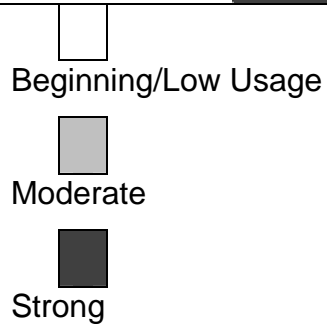
centered approaches but rely increasingly on teacher-directed approaches to ensure coverage of the broad curriculum tested.

The pattern of findings was similar for the category of higher-order instruction. That is, most schools were rated as either weak or moderate in this category and more extensive implementation of these strategies did not occur in early cohort schools. As is the case with other orientations or instructional strategies, national norms do not reflect extensive levels of higher-order instruction. Only two schools rated as strong in this category (Yo! and KIPP), which were second and third cohort schools respectively. In addition, findings at these schools reflect stronger or higher quality of application in some instances.

Technology usage was the least prevalent category of instruction across charter schools. In some schools no technology use was observed, whereas in others technology was rarely used to support learning. No charter schools were considered to be strong in this area, and only four were rated as moderate (MAHS, MASE, Southern, and Soulsville). Again, there was no apparent trend by year of implementation. In many cases the levels of technology use did not compare favorably with the normative data.

**Table 5**  
**Summary Ratings for Schools on Teaching Orientations**

School	Teacher-centered	Student-centered	Higher-order strategies	Technology usage
<u>1<sup>st</sup> Cohort</u>				
COSLA	Strong	Beginning/Low Usage	Moderate	Beginning/Low Usage
MAHS	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
MASE	Strong	Beginning/Low Usage	Beginning/Low Usage	Beginning/Low Usage
SCA	Strong	Moderate	Beginning/Low Usage	Moderate
<u>2<sup>nd</sup> Cohort</u>				
CityU	Moderate	Beginning/Low Usage	Beginning/Low Usage	Beginning/Low Usage
Star	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Beginning/Low Usage
Yo!	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Beginning/Low Usage
<u>3<sup>rd</sup> Cohort</u>				
KIPP	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Beginning/Low Usage
MBA	Moderate	Beginning/Low Usage	Moderate	Beginning/Low Usage
Promise	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Beginning/Low Usage
Southern	Strong	Strong	Beginning/Low Usage	Moderate
Soulsville	Strong	Beginning/Low Usage	Moderate	Moderate





*Question 3. What is the school climate at the charter schools and how does the climate compare to national norms?*

To address this research question, we primarily relied on the rating scale data obtained from the School Climate Inventory (SCI). Because we compared the SCI results for the charter schools with national norms, the national averages for elementary and secondary schools (middle and high schools) are presented in Table 6. The interpretation of SCI data was augmented by the qualitative responses obtained from focus group interviews, principal interviews, and open-ended items on the SCI. Any themes related to the dimensions of school climate were identified and used to illuminate the quantitative findings.

**Table 6**  
***School Climate Inventory (SCI-R) Dimension Averages and Standard Deviations for Elementary and Secondary Schools***

Dimension	COSLA	SCA	Star	KIPP	Promise	Southern	Elementary Norm
Collaboration	4.50 (.71)	4.54 (.63)	4.49 (.85)	4.60 (.55)	4.29 (.85)	4.29 (.60)	3.88 (.61)
Environment	4.31 (.93)	4.42 (.77)	4.54 (.69)	4.51 (.78)	4.68 (.55)	4.43 (.63)	3.96 (.67)
Expectations	4.66 (.54)	4.76 (.43)	4.82 (.39)	4.89 (.32)	4.82 (.39)	4.50 (.51)	4.04 (.60)
Instruction	4.51 (.78)	4.61 (.59)	4.71 (.58)	4.54 (.61)	4.71 (.71)	4.54 (.58)	4.17 (.50)
Involvement	4.60 (.65)	4.36 (.85)	4.51 (.82)	3.79 (.74)	4.39 (.92)	4.54 (.58)	3.91 (.58)
Leadership	4.23 (.88)	4.82 (.45)	4.86 (.35)	4.40 (.74)	4.43 (.84)	4.50 (.51)	4.08 (.70)
Order	4.23 (.94)	3.70 (1.31)	4.48 (.74)	4.43 (.61)	4.04 (1.20)	3.96 (.64)	3.50 (.80)
OVERALL	4.43 (.79)	4.46 (.83)	4.63 (.67)	4.45 (.69)	4.48 (.84)	4.39 (.60)	3.93 (.55)

**Table 6 (continued)**

Dimension	CityU	MAHS	MASE	Yo!	MBA	Soulsville	Secondary Norm
Collaboration	4.45 (.74)	3.89 (.78)	4.25 (.84)	4.46 (.66)	4.18 (.67)	3.43 (1.26)	3.71 (.66)
Environment	4.43 (.70)	3.69 (.78)	4.41 (.65)	4.44 (.65)	3.86 (.57)	3.43 (1.20)	3.73 (.71)
Expectations	4.57 (.70)	4.11 (.92)	4.65 (.59)	4.49 (.78)	3.93 (.90)	4.43 (.51)	3.82 (.64)
Instruction	4.57 (.74)	4.25 (.72)	4.40 (.73)	4.32 (.68)	3.95 (.86)	4.00 (.77)	4.06 (.51)
Involvement	4.34 (.76)	3.90 (.88)	4.32 (.74)	4.27 (.78)	4.21 (.83)	3.39 (1.13)	3.63 (.61)
Leadership	4.86 (.36)	4.15 (.87)	4.41 (.76)	4.44 (.67)	3.75 (.75)	3.86 (.65)	3.94 (.72)
Order	4.21 (.74)	3.50 (1.06)	4.29 (.89)	4.18 (.77)	2.46 (.79)	4.00 (.95)	3.26 (.87)
OVERALL	4.49 (.70)	3.93 (.90)	4.39 (.76)	4.37 (.72)	3.76 (.96)	3.79 (1.04)	3.73 (.59)

*Cohort 1*

*Circles of Success Learning Academy.* School climate remained a definite strength at COSLA. The mean ratings ranged from 4.23 to 4.66 and well exceeded the elementary school norms on each dimension. The means obtained this year were slightly lower than last year's means but may be attributable to the difference in a reduction in the sample size (from 10 to 6). The gain in mean score on the order dimension was maintained when compared to year one (3.86 to 4.23).

Qualitative interview data supports the quantitative findings indicative of a positive school climate. Comments from the teachers, students, and principal were overwhelmingly favorable with respect to climate. For example, teachers characterized

the climate as being “warm, safe, nurturing, close-knit, and homey.” With respect to leadership, there was mention of the difficulty of adjusting to a new principal, yet teachers described her as supportive and open-minded. Another concern related to leadership was the lack of mentoring for teachers and not having a curriculum coordinator. Other somewhat negative comments were related to school environment due to space limitations and concerns. However, there are plans to move to a new building next year, which promises to alleviate these concerns.

*Memphis Academy of Health Sciences.* School climate scores continued to decline across years on the first four dimensions (Collaboration, Environment, Expectations, and Instruction). The means on these dimensions ranged from 3.69 to 4.25 and were similar to or higher than the norms obtained for secondary schools. In contrast, there were slight gains in mean scores on the remaining 3 dimensions (Involvement, Leadership, and Order) when compared to last year, yet these scores were still lower than those obtained in the initial year of operation. As was true in previous years, the highest mean rating was obtained for the Instruction dimension (4.25), and the lowest was for the Order dimension (3.50). An examination of responses to individual items comprising the Order dimension showed that the lowest levels of agreement were obtained for items related to student misbehavior and tardiness.

The qualitative data mostly suggest a positive school climate. Students expressed appreciation for the small school environment that affords more individual attention from teachers. Although students said the long hours were hard, they recognized that it provided them more time to learn. The principal described students

as “excited to be here and enjoy school more even though we press them on their work.” Teachers commented that the climate was very supportive and that they were “invested in each others’ success.” Their portrayal of the principal was also very positive. “The principal is the most supportive and knowledgeable we have worked with.” The decline in mean ratings on some dimensions across years may be due to the high demands placed on teachers and the fact that new teachers were still adjusting the program and school.

*Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering.* Quantitative data indicate an increasingly positive school climate at MASE. The mean ratings across SCL dimensions continued to be high in the third year of implementation and show some improvement when compared to the second year. The mean values ranged from a low of 4.25 for Collaboration to a high of 4.65 for Expectations. The largest gains were seen on the dimensions of Environment (from 4.06 to 4.41), Involvement (from 4.06 to 4.32), and Order (from 3.68 to 4.29) dimensions. Overall, the mean ratings obtained for MASE were uniformly higher than those reported in the national sample of secondary schools.

The qualitative data help explain the increasingly positive school climate at MASE. The principal commented that the second year could be characterized as “disconnected,” with better discipline but less teacher support. He maintained it has been the “best year for how the staff and students relate to one another.” When students were asked what they liked best about their school, they specifically mentioned the teachers and instruction as well as the safe yet friendly environment. However, students also made a few negative comments related to student misbehavior that adversely affected all students. In contrast, teachers offered positive evaluation of

MASE with respect to school climate. They appreciated the safe learning environment and the support from their principal. “It is well structured, organized, and has high standards for students.”

*Smithson-Craighead Academy.* Third-year findings showed a marked improvement in the school climate at SCA. The overall mean rating increased from a 3.92 reported in the second year to 4.46 in the most recent year. Mean increases from the second to third year were observed on each of the seven dimensions. The highest scores were obtained for Leadership (4.82) and the lowest scores continued to be observed for Order (3.70). With the exception of the mean rating obtained for order, the averages were also somewhat higher than those reported in the initial year of implementation. These dimension means well exceeded those reported in the national sample of elementary schools.

Although many interview responses were indicative a positive school climate, some comments suggested that student discipline and behavior problems continued to be a problem at SCA. Teachers estimated that about half of their students have special needs, have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and take medication. Because students arrive at SCA without basic academic skills and have some behavior or social problems, instruction and discipline are more challenging. Students also mention behavior problems when asked about what they don’t like about their school. On a more positive note, the principal asserted that their greatest accomplishment this year is the children’s enthusiasm toward learning. Teachers feel a sense of accomplishment by impacting the lives of their students. Likewise, the students appear to like and appreciate their teachers.

## *Cohort 2*

*City University School of Liberal Arts.* School climate improved at City U during its second year of operation. Although the SCI ratings were high in the first year, mean score gains were observed across all seven dimensions. The overall mean was a 4.49 compared to the 4.10 mean rating obtained last year. The highest mean rating was observed for Leadership, while the lowest mean was obtained for Order (4.21). The ratings well surpassed those reported for the national sample of secondary schools, but the sample size at City U was very small ( $n=6$ ).

Although the quantitative data clearly indicate a very positive school climate, the qualitative findings are mixed. The teacher and principal interview responses were generally favorable in tone. The principal described the teachers as collaborative and supportive of the school as well as one another. “The teachers have bonded this year and have a shared sense of mission.” He noted that teachers still complain about the long hours but “no longer feel burnt out from the discipline problems and overcrowded classrooms.” Teachers made similar comments, remarking that the climate was good. They appreciated the rapport with administration as well as the collaboration among teachers. Although the teachers and principals made favorable comments about the impact of the educational program on students, the students themselves were less positive. In their focus groups, responses were mainly related to the physical building and lack of resources. For example, students complained about the crowding, the absence of extracurricular activities, inefficient air conditioning, the cafeteria food, the dress code, and not having a gym, library, or computer lab. However, they also had

some positive things to say about City U as a school, most notably the safe environment and caring, helpful teachers and administrators.

*Star Academy.* School climate continued to be a strength at Star. The mean SCI ratings were nearly identical to those obtained in the previous year and clearly exceeded national norms. The overall rating this year was a 4.63 compared to a 4.69 recorded in the previous year. The Leadership dimension had the highest mean rating (4.86) and Order had the lowest mean (4.48). These high scores reflect nearly unanimous levels of agreement across all items and scales.

The interview responses clearly support the rating scale data. Principal, teacher, and students were very laudatory and supportive of their academy. A recurring theme in student comments was that they felt challenged and there were high expectations for their success. They appreciated the instructional activities, their teachers, the resources available, and the school's physical environment. A theme that emerged in teacher responses was the support they received from the principal, the commitment and collegiality among teachers, and the sense of pride and value of education instilled among students. Teachers talked about "structure" in a "caring atmosphere of learning." The principal asserted that "the school has been a life changing experience for the students", who seem excited about school most of the time. She views the continued focus on mission and goals and the positive relationship between teachers and parents as their greatest accomplishments this school year.

*Yo! Academy.* Quantitative ratings suggest a notable improvement in school climate at Yo!. There was a marked increase in mean ratings from the prior year on each of the seven dimensions. The largest gains in mean scores were observed for the

Environment (from 3.80 to 4.44), Involvement (from 3.60 to 4.27), and Order (from 3.89 to 4.37) dimensions. Overall the mean score increased from a 3.89 to a 4.37. The mean values were all well above secondary school norms.

Interview responses illuminate the positive perceptions of school climate measured by the SCI. Results across respondent groups point to a caring, supportive, and safe environment that maintains high expectations of students. Students complimented the small school environment that fostered a “family-like” yet orderly atmosphere in which teachers can afford to provide individual attention. The principal described Yo! as a “safe haven” and a “safety net” that protects students from some of the risks and problems inherent in their larger urban community. He credits teachers’ demeanor and attitudes as another contributor to the positive school climate. “The school gives teachers a sense of hope, of believing again that students want to be taught. Teachers believe they can make a difference.” Teachers concurred and noted that “all teachers are committed to the vision of the school.” They complimented the support provided from their administrators. They appreciated being treated like professionals with integrity who have autonomy in their classrooms. Another recurring thread among teacher comments was the high expectations and even admiration they held for their students. Last year the teachers were somewhat critical of the administration, but this dissatisfaction was not apparent in the current year. One possible explanation for the more positive school climate is the turnover in faculty and staff. Most of the faculty are new this year with only two teachers returning. The assistant principal, counselor, and cafeteria manager were also new to the school this year.



### *Cohort 3*

*KIPP Academy Nashville.* The data available suggest a favorable school climate for KIPP during its initial year of operation. Although the sample size was small ( $n=5$ ), the ratings point to positive perceptions of climate in this academy. The overall mean rating was 4.45, and the mean ratings for the other dimensions ranged from low of 3.79 for Involvement to a high of 4.89 for Expectations. With the exception of the mean rating obtained for Involvement, dimension means were higher than those reported in elementary school national norms. An examination of the percentages of agreement to individual items that comprise the Involvement dimension reveal that parent participation is perceived to be low at KIPP. Only 40% agreed that parents actively support school activities, are invited to serve on school advisory committees, and are used as volunteers.

Qualitative data shed some light on the pattern of quantitative findings. Regarding Involvement, the principal admitted that parent outreach was their “weakest point this year.” Other comments mirrored the quantitative ratings suggesting a favorable climate across dimensions. The principal described a school environment “where kids feel safe, where they dream big, and where they work hard to make those dreams a reality.” Several student comments focused on school characteristics related to order and safety. They talked about having strict rules governing student behavior, which were viewed as both positive and negative aspects of their school. They also noted that there were clear expectations for academic success supported by caring teachers. Teachers described their school climate as safe with a strong culture for learning. Another teacher comment highlighted the collegiality and support evident at

KIPP: “Everyone at this school works very closely together with strong support from the administrator and from the teachers for the school mission.”

*Memphis Business Academy.* The available quantitative findings reveal large variance in ratings across the seven dimensions, possibly influenced by the small sample size ( $n=4$ ). The overall mean rating of 3.76 was essentially identical to the overall national mean for secondary schools. Positive school climate was more evident for Involvement (4.21) and Collaboration (4.18). The means obtained on these dimensions were notably higher than those reported nationally. The lowest mean ratings were obtained for the Order (2.46) and Leadership (3.75) dimensions. Although both mean ratings were lower than the norms, the difference was particularly large for the Order dimension. An examination of results by individual items suggests that student behavior, discipline and absence or tardiness were particularly problematic at MBA.

During the interview, the principal was very candid and thoroughly described both the strengths and limitations evident in their initial year of operation. One strength, also reflected in the SCI data, centered on a small school atmosphere that promotes a culture of learning and affords the students more individual attention. Another strength identified was teacher support and commitment. These strengths were also cited during the teacher and student focus groups. The adjustment to long school hours within a structured environment was difficult for the students and teachers, and some discipline problems were apparent. Some students were not prepared for the level of coursework or the disciplinary policies at MBA. The principal commented that their “biggest challenge has been accepting the fact that many of our initial students were “typical

MCS students” in that they arrived academically under-prepared, were “disrespectful”, and lacked the social and familial support critical for learning. Order at MBA was a challenge during its initial year.

*Promise Academy.* The school climate at Promise appeared to be favorable. Although the response rate was very low ( $n=4$ ), the ratings were consistently high and above those reported in normative sample of elementary schools. The overall mean was 4.48 and ranged from high of 4.82 for Expectations to a low of 4.04 for Order. The ratings indicate very high rates of agreement across items and dimensions that assess school climate.

The largely positive interview responses support the rating scale results. According to the teachers, students “really enjoy being at school and love coming each day.” The principal concurred, stating that students “feel safe at school and receive lots of love and attention.” The principal and teachers agree that the climate is also positive for teachers. They described it as a supportive, nurturing environment in which teachers have bonded and work as a team.

*Southern Avenue Charter School of Academic Success.* The quantitative data suggest a positive school climate for this new charter school. It should be noted, however, that only 4 individuals completed the survey. The mean SCI ratings ranged from a low of 3.96 for the Order dimension to a high of 4.54 observed for both the Instruction and Involvement dimensions. The overall mean rating was 4.39. The results compare favorably to normative data, with mean scores that exceeded the national overall and dimension means.

The interview results help confirm the SCI ratings. Two themes apparent in the principal and teacher interviews were parent involvement and support for instruction. The principal stated, “We have included the parents and we have wonderful parent support.” With regard to teacher support, the principal commented that, “we try to get the materials and the things they need to be successful and to empower them to teach.” According to the teachers, the small school context facilitates cohesion among teachers and students. As a first year school, there have been challenges in developing programs and policies, but teachers support the school’s mission and educational program. Students seem to appreciate the extracurricular activities, such as art, music, and karate.

*Soulsville Charter School.* Although the sample size was small ( $n=4$ ), the SCI ratings suggest that school climate at Soulsville during the initial year was moderate. The overall mean of 3.79 was virtually identical to the national secondary school norm (3.73). Whereas the mean ratings obtained on four of the seven dimensions (Collaboration, Environment, Involvement, and Leadership) were somewhat lower than national norms, those on the Expectations and Order dimensions were markedly higher than the norms. The lowest mean rating was obtained for the Involvement dimension (3.39) and the highest for Expectations (4.43).

Perceptions of school climate differed among response groups. The principal’s description of the climate was more positive than those of the teachers and students. He stated that students have grown academically and socially, and that the school has high levels of community and parental support. The changes in staff were viewed as the biggest challenge. Although teachers stated that the students seemed “to be

happy” and more motivated to achieve academically, the strict disciplinary procedures and lack of physical activity were limitations. According to the teachers, administration did not provide enough support for teachers or encourage parent participation. They describe their own morale as low. “The biggest challenge for the school during the first year of operation has been maintaining staff morale and the long hours with no substitutes or staff support available.” The students concurred that the long school hours were a difficult adjustment. They also had mainly negative reactions to the strict discipline policy that employed fines for misbehavior. As one student put it, “The hardest things to get used to were the hours, discipline, fines, getting home late.” The low SCI ratings on the Order dimension may reflect negative reactions to the strict disciplinary rules and the qualitative data may reflect some difficulty in adjustment among students.

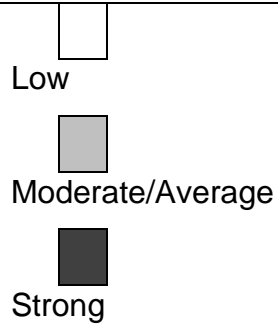
*Summary findings across schools.* Table 7 depicts the summary results based on SCI ratings and qualitative data collected for each of the 12 charter schools organized by cohort. Overall, school climate remains a definite strength of these charter schools. The quantitative SCI data indicated that all but two schools have a strong school climate. The exceptions were MBA and Soulsville, both third cohort schools in their initial year of implementation. These schools had somewhat lower mean ratings when compared to the normative samples. It should be noted, however, that the sample size was very small, especially among the 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort schools. The qualitative data also suggested a favorable school climate for 9 of the 12 schools that also had high mean ratings. The only exception was SCA, which was considered strong in climate based on the quantitative ratings but only moderate based on the interview

findings. As reported last year, student behavior and order continue to be a challenge at SCA due to the large population of special needs students at this charter school.

With respect to other trends across time, there was an improvement in school climate when compared to the previous year's findings. Among first cohort schools, a drop in SCI ratings were observed from the first to the second year, but in the third year the scores rebounded to levels equal to or above those reported in the initial year. Interview responses were also more positive. Improvements in school climate indices were also noted among second cohort schools. The fact that school climate was already high compared to the norms and continue to improve bodes well for the success of charter schools, particularly if improvement in climate is ultimately linked to improvement in student success.

**Table 7**  
**Summary Results for School Climate**

School	School Climate Ratings	Qualitative Responses
<u>Cohort 1</u>		
COSLA	Strong	Strong
MAHS	Strong	Strong
MASE	Strong	Strong
SCA	Strong	Moderate/Average
<u>Cohort 2</u>		
CityU	Strong	Strong
Star	Strong	Strong
Yo!	Strong	Strong
<u>Cohort 3</u>		
KIPP	Strong	Strong
MBA	Moderate/Average	Moderate/Average
Promise	Strong	Strong
Southern	Strong	Strong
Soulsville	Moderate/Average	Moderate/Average



*Question 4. To what degree and levels of quality are the goals and strategies of the charter school being implemented?*

Data obtained from implementation benchmarks, the teacher questionnaire, teacher focus groups, principal interview, and classroom observations (SOM and RSCA) were used to address this evaluation question. To facilitate summarization of findings, the goals and strategies were divided into five major categories: curriculum, instruction, organization (leadership, governance), support (resources and professional development), and evaluation (accountability, assessment). See Table 8 for summary findings.

#### *Cohort 1*

*Circles of Success Learning Academy.* Given that COSLA is in its third year of implementation, the designation of most benchmarks in intermediate and final phases of development were not surprising. In benchmarks related to both curriculum and instruction, the school would seem to be Phase II. According to the principal, they are still in the process of selecting and fully implementing programs in their various subject areas. Though they evaluated their literacy program to be strong, they have made changes in their curriculum and are considering other programs. SOM and particularly RSCA data indicate that instructional benchmarks may not be fully implemented. More student-centered instructional strategies and the integration of technology would advance efforts in this category. Some of the instructional strategies may change depending on the particular curricular programs adopted. In the remaining three categories of organization, support, and evaluation, COSLA was at more advanced stages of goal implementation. Based on teacher perceptions, one exception to this



trend may be the lack of support from state and local educational agencies and the need for more resources to support instruction.

*Memphis Academy of Health Sciences.* The evidence from various sources points to intermediate stages of development for most benchmarks. The leadership team also placed most benchmarks at similar levels of implementation. Notable progress has been made in the area of support, but some improvement in the areas of support and resources are needed. Parent involvement was judged to be moderate and teachers identified the need for more professional development, sufficient planning time, technological resources, or other educational materials. Support and organizational structure was also affected by the lack of effective assistance from state and local educational agencies. Although the leadership team placed their school at the Phase III on benchmarks related to curriculum and instruction, the current findings suggest more progress toward implementation is still warranted. The SOM and RSCA data indicate some decline in the use of student-centered, higher order strategies when compared to the previous year's data. It appears that closer alignment between the curriculum and instruction is needed. Beyond having a challenging curriculum, it is not entirely clear from the benchmark documents or evaluation reports what specific components or materials contribute to the educational program at MAHS. Surprisingly, there is little detail or explanation about the integration or focus on health sciences. Evaluation and assessment remain strong components of the educational program at MAHS.

*Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering.* The leadership team judged most benchmarks to be in Phase II. The present findings also suggest that implementation of most benchmarks are in the intermediate phases of development.

However, the leadership team may have been too optimistic in their evaluation of progress made in the category of instruction. The Phase III designation on benchmarks related to the application of higher-order thinking skills, subject integration, and the use of technology was not supported by SOM and RSCA data. However, in interviews, both the principal and teachers described more technology integration exemplified by the provision of laptop computers for students. As was true in previous years, it was difficult to track progress in assessment and evaluation due to the absence of benchmarks in these areas. However, nearly all teachers agreed that goals were reviewed regularly to evaluate progress. The leadership team might consider adding benchmarks related to evaluation, assessment, and accountability in the next version of the document.

*Smithson-Craighead Academy.* Last year, the majority of benchmarks were evaluated to be in the initial stages of implementation. This year, the leadership team has designated all benchmarks to be in Phase III, and substantial progress appears to have been achieved in the areas of curriculum, organization, and evaluation. However, the current findings do not support all designations as in the final stage of development. The evidence suggests more moderate ratings in the areas of support and instruction. For example, parent involvement and support from state and local educational agencies were limited. Needs for more resources were identified. These included having sufficient faculty and staff, meeting the requirements of special needs students, and technological resources. Observation data suggest that few higher-order learning strategies and moderate levels of student-centered strategies were employed in the classrooms.

## *Cohort 2*

*City University School of the Liberal Arts.* When compared to last year and the available data sources, more accurate designations for levels of implementation were apparent this year. As indicated by the leadership team, most benchmarks seemed to be appropriately assigned to Phase II, with the exception of instruction. Traditional, teacher-directed instruction was dominant with little observational evidence to support the use of student-centered activities, higher-order strategies or the integration of technology. In regard to assessment, some of the suggested improvements in the benchmark document itself were not made. This is an essential tool in measuring implementation progress. As noted last year, some of the indicators are difficult to measure or objectively assess. For example, the indicator for Phase III under external support and assistance states that, “all decisions made by personnel at CityU are in the best interest of our scholars and programs.” The evidence for this indicator includes list of recommendations and feedback from the president, professors, parents, and scholars. Thus, some benchmark indicators might be revised and better aligned with more objective evidence and written with more distinct gradations across Phases, culminating in more challenging long-term goals. To their credit, the leadership team has included benchmarks specifically addressing evaluation and identified appropriate indicators and evidence. Some of the evaluation benchmarks might be integrated as sources of evidence for other benchmarks throughout the document. For example, school climate surveys are listed as source of evidence for the benchmark related to evaluation strategies, but these data could also be used to inform benchmarks related to support or parent/ community involvement. The evaluation of assessment progress

was also confirmed by teachers' endorsement of the statement that academic and non-academic goals are regularly reviewed by school staff.

*Star Academy.* With the exception the implementation of new programs, the consensus of the leadership team was that the implementation of most goals and strategies were in Phase II of development. With regard to curriculum, the specific program identified for math and reading was McMillan McGraw Hill, and these programs do appear to be fully implemented. New programs included Voyager for reading and a character development program. Understandably, these programs are in earlier stages of implementation. Progress was apparent in the implementation of benchmarks targeting instruction. Cooperative learning and peer tutoring were aligned with their instructional strategies and were frequently observed during observations. Other student-centered and higher-order strategies were more commonly employed. However, they were not observed a majority of the time as prescribed in the final phase of their corresponding benchmark. (That goal, however, might be unrealistic and need to be moderated.) The indicators for benchmarks related to organization and support were considered to be in Phase II, and survey data support this ranking. Teachers responded positively about their involvement in decision-making and various areas of support and resources. The exception was low levels of agreement to the items about assistance from educational agencies or external partners, the adequacy of technological resources, and meeting the requirements of special needs students. As also noted last year, goals related to evaluation could be improved by revising the document to include benchmarks related to evaluation, assessment, and accountability

as well as more benchmarks in the category of support. All teachers did agree that goals were regularly reviewed to evaluate progress.

*Yo! Academy.* Results suggest that Yo! has made substantial progress in the implementation of their benchmarks. In their benchmark document, levels of implementation were primarily identified as in Phase II. The exceptions were in the benchmarks targeting curriculum and instruction, which were designated as Phase III. The evaluation findings support these designations with the exception of the instructional category. Although observational data showed an increase in the use of higher-order strategies, there was little use of subject area integration and no project-based learning, which would be expected given the focus of an art-infused, integrated curriculum. Traditional pedagogical strategies were most frequently observed. And as noted last year, the benchmark document was not very specific about what curricula or instructional strategies were targeted. Evaluation efforts would be improved by more thoroughly detailing the curriculum aligned with instructional strategies. Benchmarks related to support and organization appeared to approach fuller implementation as evidenced by parent, teacher, and school climate data.

### *Cohort 3*

*KIPP Academy Nashville.* Given that KIPP was in its initial year of operation, one would expect the implementation of benchmarks to be in early phases of development. The leadership team has judged that all benchmarks are in Phase I of development, and these rankings are supported by the evaluation findings. In the area of instructional strategies, their benchmark and indicators emphasized cooperative or collaborative learning. Based on observational findings, KIPP was judged to be strong in terms of

employing higher-order strategies, not in cooperative or collaborative learning. They might build on their pedagogical strengths and include benchmarks and evidence related to higher order learning strategies in conjunction with group learning orientations. The integration of technology in teaching is an area in need of improvement and they might also target this area in their benchmark document. These suggestions exemplify ways to improve the benchmark document to promote better planning and evaluation. Although KIPP is in the initial stages of implementation, the school has made progress in many areas that should advance it to the next stages of development.

*Memphis Business Academy.* As would be expected for a school in its initial year of operation, most benchmarks are considered to be in Phase I and perhaps in early stages of Phase II for curriculum development and implementation. During interviews, the principal clearly described the infusion of business concepts into the curriculum and teachers described the adoption of specific curricular programs across disciplines. Although curriculum implementation might be considered to be in Phase II, benchmarks for instruction were more clearly in Phase I. If a variety of innovative, research-based strategies were consistently employed (as indicated), it would be expected that more student-centered strategies and more integration of technology would have been observed. The use of technology in a business-themed school would seem to be essential. The data indicate that neither professional development nor parental involvement emerged as strengths of this charter school and should be more appropriately considered to be in the initial phases of development. There were no indicators provided for parent and community involvement, which hinders evaluation

efforts in these areas. The leadership's designation of Phase I in other benchmark categories was appropriate, even though the indicators and corresponding evidence could be improved.

*Promise Academy.* The leadership team at Promise Academy has designated its school to be at Phase II for all but one benchmark. However, the evaluation findings suggest that Promise is in earlier stages of development for benchmarks related to curriculum, instruction, and evaluation. As the benchmarks are written, they may well be in the early stage of Phase II for support and organization. With regard to curriculum, several programs and associated strategies were identified during interviews, but teachers commented that they were just beginning to use the Socratic method, a strategy emphasized in their professional development activities. And, although they described the other curricular programs favorably, they were dissatisfied with Everyday Math and talked of pursuing a new math curriculum the following year. SOM and RSCA data indicate teacher directed instruction to be more prevalent, although student-centered and higher-order strategies were sometimes observed. It would appear that "teachers are beginning to use innovative, research-based strategies" as described in Phase I of their benchmark document. The leadership did recognize that Promise was in the Phase I with respect to the benchmark on measurable goals and standards. It seems that having measurable goals and standard go hand in hand with more advanced evaluation strategies. There is evidence for strong internal support but evidence for external support was more mixed. The types of evidence used to confirm indicators were weaker in this area. Specifically, the evidence across phases was simply listed as "support from various agencies."

*Southern Avenue Charter School of Academic Excellence.* Southern Avenue Charter School of Academic Excellence seems to have made significant progress implementing its benchmarks in its initial year of operation. However, it is doubtful that all benchmarks are in the second and third phases of implementation as designated on Southern's benchmark document. This discrepancy may be partially explained by the benchmarks themselves. For example, the benchmark under the umbrella of curriculum indicates that all strategies and methods are scientifically based; however, there is no indicator to gauge the quality or frequency of their use. A similar pattern was noted for other benchmarks. More specific indicators and evidence could be used to judge achievement in the three phases of development. The principal and teachers characterize their curricular programs as "progressing" and note some limitations in their science, math, and language arts programs. The benchmark document also designates their instructional strategies as in third and final phase of development. The observational data, however, show that direct and student-centered instruction was strong, but higher-order strategies and technology integration were weaker. Also, the findings do not support Phase III indicators that characterize instruction as fully differentiated and used by all teachers. Data do suggest more intermediate phases of development for the categories of support and organization. Teacher, parent, and school climate data suggest a good deal of internal support and organizational strength. Evidence for external support and parental involvement was more mixed. With respect to the evaluation category, some of the benchmarks targeting curriculum could be improved to better support the school evaluation and assessment.



*Soulsville Charter School.* Overall findings suggest that Soulsville Charter School is in the initial phases of development, as seems appropriate for its first year of operation. The leadership team also indicated they were at the initial stage of development for most benchmarks. However, there were some exceptions. In the area of curriculum, the principal stated the math curriculum, Math Renaissance, has not yet been implemented. They plan to implement this program next year (2006-2007). Further, teachers described some adjustments that may be needed in reading and science curricula to make them more appropriate for students in their grade levels. Their benchmark document also indicated, "Teachers routinely and skillfully use research-based teacher teaching strategies the majority of the time in all classes" (Phase III). This was not evidenced in the SOM and RSCA data that showed predominant use of direct instruction and rare use of student-centered strategies. School climate and teacher and principal survey data further support the findings that benchmarks under the categories of support, organization, and evaluation are in their initial phases of development. When compared to national norms, school climate data showed lower than average ratings on the dimensions of collaboration, environment, involvement, and leadership. More preliminary stages of development were also suggested by the teacher survey results indicating the need for more common planning time, more faculty and staff, and the ability to meet the requirements of special needs students. In addition, only 25% of teachers agreed that school staff regularly reviewed academic and non-academic goals to evaluate progress.




*Summary findings across schools.* Table 8 provides the summary ratings for the level of implementation of goals and strategies in five broad areas. Not surprisingly, the

most advanced levels of implementation were observed among first cohort schools in their third year of operation. First cohort schools were either in intermediate or final phases of development across categories. The only exception was weaker levels of implementation of support systems at SCA, which included the need for more resources. Ratings for the implementation of goals and strategies tended to be moderate or intermediate for 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort schools. Exceptions were lower levels of implementation in the categories of instruction (City U and Yo!) and evaluation (City U). Low to intermediate levels of implementation were apparent among 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort schools in their initial year of operation. Somewhat more implementation progress was observed at Southern and Promise, with both rated as moderate in two or more categories. It should be noted that ratings are at least partially affected by the benchmarks themselves, with some schools setting the bar higher than others in terms of indicators and evidence.

Overall, it was predictable that these charter schools have not fully implemented all benchmarks because it is a multi-year process compounded with the challenge of launching a new school. Continued improvement is implicit in the schools' development goals. Across all schools, the strongest levels of implementation tended to be for benchmarks targeting support and organization. The achievement of these benchmarks may be a precursor to achieving full implementation of the curriculum and instructional strategies routinely employed at the individual classroom level.

**Table 8**  
**Summary Ratings for Implementation of Goals and Strategies**

School	Curriculum	Instruction	Support	Organization	Evaluation
<u>Cohort 1</u>					
COSLA	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Strong
MAHS	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Strong
MASE	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
SCA	Strong	Moderate	Beginning	Strong	Strong
<u>Cohort 2</u>					
CityU	Moderate	Beginning	Moderate	Moderate	Beginning
Star	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Yo!	Moderate	Beginning	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
<u>Cohort 3</u>					
KIPP	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning
MBA	Moderate	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning
Promise	Beginning	Beginning	Moderate	Moderate	Beginning
Southern	Beginning	Beginning	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Soulsville	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning	Beginning

 Beginning  
 Moderate  
 Strong

*Question 5. What are teacher reactions to and experiences in the charter school?  
What are the adequacy and quality of professional development and resources?*

The Charter School Teacher Questionnaire (CSTQ) and teacher focus group data were used to address teachers' reactions to and experiences in the charter school, including their responses targeting professional development and resources. The responses were organized into four categories. The first category (Program/Mission) encompassed two broad areas: teachers' understanding of the mission and support of the educational program, and their perceptions that the program would result in successful student outcomes. The second category was professional development. The third category, resources, included whether teachers had adequate planning time, educational materials, technology, and if the school had a sufficient number of faculty and staff. The fourth and final category was support from the community, parents, and state and local educational agencies. See Table 9 for summary findings.

#### *Cohort 1*

*Circles of Success Learning Academy.* There seems little doubt that teachers at COSLA have continued to support their educational mission and program. There was unanimous agreement on all CSTQ items related to this category, and the ratings have been consistently high across the school's three years of operation. For example, all teachers agreed that they have a thorough understanding of the school's mission and the educational program is positively impacting student achievement. Teachers also perceived professional development as adequate and effective. Nearly all (83%) agreed that they received adequate professional development, and the level of agreement has remained high across years. In their focus group, teachers

characterized professional development as positive and cited conferences and mentoring sessions for new teachers offered by the district as examples. With regard to resources, teachers unanimously agreed that educational materials were readily available, but tended to disagree that they were given sufficient planning time or that the school had a sufficient number of faculty and staff (33% agreement on both). Open-ended comments identified the need for more support staff that included teaching assistants, a curriculum coordinator, and a guidance counselor. They also said they needed more time and partners for collaboration. As in previous years, CSTQ ratings indicate high parent participation. However, decreases in ratings on items related to support from other institutions and agencies were noted. None agreed that they received effective assistance from the school district, and only one-third of respondents rated the assistance received from the State Department of Education as effective. During the focus group, the teachers remarked that Memphis City School teachers and employees were not supportive of charter schools.

*Memphis Academy of Health Sciences.* Both quantitative ratings and qualitative responses reflected strong teacher support for the educational mission and program at MAHS as well as the belief that they are positively impacting student success. These findings have been apparent in all three years. In contrast, professional development opportunities to implement the educational program have been viewed less favorably. Nearly two-thirds (60%) of the teachers agreed that professional development has been adequate, while 40% were either neutral or disagreed. Teachers commented on the need for more professional development in open-ended responses to the CSTQ and in the focus group. With regard to resources, the findings were somewhat mixed. Most

teachers concurred (80%) that the school had sufficient numbers of faculty and staff, but tended to disagree that they had adequate technological resources (80% disagreed or were neutral) or educational materials (60% disagreed or were neutral). One-third of respondents further disagreed that they were given sufficient planning time. The need for more technology and planning time also emerged in the qualitative responses. Although parent participation and community support were considered to be strong, support from the state and local educational agencies was perceived to be lacking. Only 20% of teachers agreed that they received effective assistance from these agencies, which were similar to the levels of agreement observed in previous years. One comment specifically identified “more district-wide support and encouragement” as an area in need of improvement.

*Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering.* Teachers’ reactions to their experiences in MASE were extremely positive, especially when compared to previous years. The increasingly high levels of agreement on CSTQ items were apparent across the categories of support for the educational program, professional development, resources, and support from educational agencies, external partners, the community, and parents. The only exception was the 50% level of agreement that the program adequately meets the requirement of children with special needs. However, this percentage increased from only 10% agreement for this item last year. Teachers’ open-ended comments were largely positive and support the item responses. However, when asked what they consider negative aspects of their charter school or areas in need of improvement, communication problems among staff, parents, and administrators were identified. Some of the communication difficulties seemed to relate

to the lack of advance planning and notification about events. Another recurrent response was the lack of space in the school.

*Smithson-Craighead Academy.* Teachers' reactions to and experiences at SCA have improved with time. The CSTQ findings show unanimous or nearly unanimous support for the educational program, understanding of the school mission, and expectations of student success at this charter school. Levels of agreement on whether teachers are adequately involved in decision-making increased markedly across years. Responses to this item increased from 33% and 20% agreement in the first two years, respectively, to over 90% agreement in the third year. There has also been increasingly strong endorsement for the adequacy of professional development to implement the educational program (from 50% in the first year to over 90% in the third year).

Teachers' open-ended responses indicated that they received in-service training at the school, and few resources for professional development were provided by the district. This type of comment provides some explanation for the lower ratings observed on some items related to support for the charter school. Specifically, over 70% of respondents disagreed or were neutral on whether the school receives effective assistance from state and local educational agencies. A higher percentage of teachers believed that the community's perception of the charter school was positive (73%), that the school receives effective assistance from external partners (73%), and that parents are offered substantial opportunities to participate in their child's education (91%). Rating gains were observed on all three of these items across years. Even though respondents believed that parents had opportunity to participate in their child's education, they did not consider parents to be active partners with the school (64%

either disagreed or were neutral on this item). Open-ended responses were also somewhat mixed with regard to perceptions about parental involvement. For instance teachers noted that parents “had great things to say about the school,” whereas another suggested the need for parent training to increase their support, particularly in the area of student conduct and discipline. Teachers endorsed most statements associated with the adequacy of resources. The only exception targeted sufficient numbers of faculty and staff. Just over 50% of teachers agreed with this statement.

### *Cohort 2*

*City University School of Liberal Arts.* Survey findings clearly reflect teachers’ support of the educational program at City U and a thorough understanding of its mission. All teachers indicated they are involved in the decision-making at this school. The high percentages of teachers endorsing these characteristics were similar to last year’s findings. Although respondents believed that City U promoted student achievement, a lower percentage of respondents (67%) agreed that the educational program encouraged students to have high standards for their own work when contrasted to last year (88%). Open-ended responses did not illuminate this change in perceptions.

Compared to last year’s ratings, more teachers agreed that they received adequate professional development (83% in the second year and 75% in the first). Focus group responses revealed that teachers had training in the areas of on-line grading, classroom management, and special education as well as discussion of a book on quality schools. Professional development was described as “informative and effective.” The pattern of results pertaining to resources, however, was somewhat



mixed. In the areas of technology, educational materials, and addressing the requirements of special needs students, the findings were more positive and demonstrate an increase from the previous years. However, there was less endorsement of the assertion that there was sufficient faculty and staff (33% agreement in the second year versus 88% agreement in the first year). Open-ended comments reinforced the need for more staff to teach resource classes. Although support from parents and community were considered to be strong, support from the local educational agency and external partners was not apparent. Only 17% of the teachers agreed that they received effective assistance from the school district, and only one-third agreed that they received effective assistance from external partners.

*Star Academy.* There was unanimous agreement among teachers on CSTQ items that reflected support for and understanding of the school's educational program, the promotion of student achievement, and the adequacy of professional development. These impressive results were also observed in the previous year and supported by qualitative findings. Notable decreases in the ratings were apparent among some items pertaining to the adequacy and availability of resources across years. Fewer teachers agreed that there was a sufficient number of faculty and staff members (64% in the second year compared to 100% in the first), that they had adequate technological resources (27% versus 86%), or that the requirements of special needs students were adequately addressed (27% versus 86%). In their comments, teachers cited the need for more technology, more classroom space, and more assistance with special education. However, teacher responses did indicate that planning time was sufficient (82% agreement) and educational materials were readily available (91% agreement).

With regard to support, perceptions of parent involvement and participation remained high, whereas support from state or local educational agencies and external partners was viewed less favorably in both an absolute sense and relative to the previous year. The percentage of agreement was only 27% in these three areas. The lack of support from the state, district or external agencies did not emerge as a theme in the qualitative findings.

*Yo! Academy.* Compared to the first year of operation, questionnaire data show that teachers' reactions and experiences have improved in all areas. The percent of agreement was unanimous, or nearly so, for all items related to support for the educational program and high expectations for student success. Perceptions of professional development were more positive in this second year (from 56% to 89% agreement). During focus groups, faculty described a wide array of professional development activities including training in the use of a technological tool to analyze data, discussions on classroom management and rapport, and graduate coursework. Ratings on items related to resources were also high and showed improvement compared to the previous year. The lowest level of agreement was observed on the item assessing the availability of educational materials (67% compared to 33% in the first year). The largest gain in scores was obtained on the item assessing the adequacy of technological resources (89% compared to 33% in the first year). However, one called for expansion of technological training, while two others called for more resources in art and classroom materials. The CSTQ findings on items that reflected support were mixed. All teachers agreed that parent participation was strong, and most concurred that community perceptions of Yo! were positive (78%). Qualitative responses about

community support and perceptions were also positive. In contrast, the levels of agreement for items reflecting support from local and state agencies were much lower (44% and 56%, respectively). The teachers did describe resources provided by the school district during the focus group interview but did not address the effectiveness of assistance.

### *Cohort 3*

*KIPP Academy Nashville.* Teacher responses to the CSTQ reflected strong support and understanding of the school's educational program and mission. There was 100% agreement on items related to this category. They also believed that the educational program was positively impacting student achievement and encouraging high academic standards. Their reactions to the adequacy of professional development were also positive (80%). In the interview, teachers described their professional development activities favorably. They appreciated the training tailored to charter schools and the latitude to focus development efforts in areas they thought they needed. Results pertaining to the availability and adequacy of resources were mixed. Less than half of the teachers agreed that they were given sufficient planning time, the school had a sufficient number of faculty and staff members, or had adequate technological resources. One comment targeted the lack of materials and resources as an area in need of improvement: "They have acquired lots of things this year, but this is a first-year school and materials are still limited." According to teachers, support from the state and school district were lacking. No one agreed that these educational agencies provided effective assistance. Teachers were much more positive about external partners, parents, and the community.

*Memphis Business Academy.* All four respondents uniformly endorsed items related to support and understanding of the educational program and had high expectations for the student academic success. Only half agreed that they adequate professional development to support their program. One teacher commented that more mentoring of first-year teachers was needed. Findings pertaining to resources varied. There was strong agreement that technological resources, teacher planning time, and the ability to meet the requirements of special needs students were adequate. Lower levels of agreement were found for having sufficient faculty and staff, and availability of educational materials. External support was considered weak in most areas. No respondents agreed that they received effective assistance from state or local educational agencies or that parents were active partners in the schools. In contrast, they all agreed that they received effective assistance from external partners, and that parents were offered substantial opportunities to participate in their child's education. While 100% of teachers agreed parents had substantial opportunities for involvement, 75% disagreed that parents were active partners in the school. In open-ended comments, the lack of parental involvement was repeatedly cited as an area in need of improvement. Three of the four teachers considered community perceptions of the school to be positive.

*Promise Academy.* The three teachers who responded to the CSTQ agreed or strongly agreed to nearly all items across areas. There was 100% agreement on 16 of the 20 items, indicating very favorable reactions to the educational program, expectations for student success, professional development, resources, and parental support. The only exception to this pattern of uniformly high ratings was on items

reflecting assistance from state and local educational agencies (33% agreement), external partners, and community support (67% agreement for both items). The qualitative responses were primarily favorable. Teachers expanded upon their ratings by identifying resources and support for their educational mission, particularly in relation to having high expectations for student success. One said, “They are given opportunities to explore, experiment, investigate and be involved in educational opportunities that can use throughout life.” The lower rating related to support from the local educational agency may have been due to a perceived threat to autonomy. When asked what they considered a negative aspect of their charter school, one teacher said it was the inability to “change aspects of the program without having to go through LEA board.”

*Southern Avenue Charter School of Academic Excellence.* Teachers indicated strong support for Southern’s educational program including its high expectations for the academic accomplishments of students. All four of the respondents agreed to these items. Three teachers also agreed that they received adequate professional development. In the focus group, they favorably described their professional development activities, which focused on classroom management and instructional “best practices” that they could “easily” apply in their classrooms. Questionnaire ratings related to resources were largely favorable. All teachers considered educational materials as readily available, technological resources as adequate, and the number of faculty and staff as sufficient. However, only half of the teachers thought they had sufficient planning time, and only one (25%) agreed that the educational program adequately addressed the requirements of special needs students. Two of the open-

ended comments identified lack of consistent planning time to be a negative aspect of their school. Only half of the teachers agreed that they received effective assistance from local educational agencies, the state, or external partners. All considered parents to be involved with substantial opportunities for participation and perceived community reactions to be positive (100% agreement).

*Soulsville Charter School.* Of the four teachers who responded to the questionnaire, most agreed with items indicative of support for the educational program (100%), understanding of the school mission (75%), and beliefs that the program was positively impacting student achievement (75% across 3 items). Apparently one of the four teachers did not respond to these last items resulting in 75% percent agreement rather than 100%. Only two of the teachers perceived professional development to be adequate. Teachers commented that more thorough professional development was needed before the implementation of new programs. Both quantitative and qualitative responses suggested that resources such as common planning time, sufficient faculty and staff, and the ability to meet the requirements of special needs students were lacking. In open-ended responses, teachers commented that the school days were too long and often included Saturdays, that they had little time for planning, and that there were too few staff members with no substitutes or tutors. Three of the teachers agreed educational materials and technological resources were available. One teacher said the school had more resources due to extra funding that enabled them to implement programs that would not be in the budget otherwise. The findings reflect low levels of external support, especially from parents. One teacher remarked that parental support

was available, yet they did not take full advantage of this resource. On the other hand, three teachers agreed that community support was positive.




*Summary findings across schools.* Overall, teachers' reactions to and experiences in the charter schools tended to be very positive. Responses related to support of the educational program, understanding of the mission, and the likelihood for student success were particularly favorable. All charter schools were considered to be strong in this category. Most charter schools were also rated as strong in the area of professional development. Only two charter schools (MAHS and MBA) were judged to be moderately successful in this area, and one first-year charter school (Soulsville) was evaluated as low or weak. Teacher perceptions of the availability and adequacy of resources were more varied with most schools rated as moderate. Three schools (MASE, Yo! and Promise) were rated as strong in this category and one (MAHS) was rated low. Although there were differences by school in the type of resources that respondents endorsed as sufficient or adequate, having enough common planning time and faculty or staff more commonly emerged as areas in need of improvement. With regard to perceptions of support or assistance from educational agencies, the community, and parents, teachers' ratings and comments were less favorable. Only one school (MASE) was judged as strong in these three areas of support. In all other schools, teachers consistently reported a lack of effective assistance provided by state and local educational agencies, and this finding may be more of a reflection on these agencies rather than the charter schools. Two schools (MBA and Soulsville) were rated as low in the support category, and both schools were in their initial year of operation. In terms of trends observed across years, there was notable improvement in teachers'

reactions in many schools. Given that the perceptions were largely positive in previous years, this continued improvement is impressive. However, findings should be interpreted with some caution because the sizes of the faculty tended to be small, particularly in Cohort 3 schools. With very small samples, anonymity and candor may be threatened.



**Table 9**  
**Summary Ratings for Teachers' Reactions**

School	Program/ mission	Professional development	Resources	Support
<u>Cohort 1</u>				
COSLA	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate
MAHS	Strong	Moderate	Low/Weak	Moderate
MASE	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong
SCA	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate
<u>Cohort 2</u>				
CityU	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate
Star	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate
Yo!	Strong	Strong	Strong	Moderate
<u>Cohort 3</u>				
KIPP	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate
MBA	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Low/Weak
Promise	Strong	Strong	Strong	Moderate
Southern	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate
Soulsville	Strong	Low/Weak	Moderate	Low/Weak

 Low/Weak  
 Moderate  
 Strong

*Question 6. What are parent (caregiver) reactions to and experiences with the charter school?*

To address this final evaluation question, we relied primarily on quantitative and qualitative data collected on the parent questionnaire. It should be noted, however, that the return rate for parent questionnaires at some of the schools was low, as normally occurs in schools serving low socioeconomic areas; thus the sample data may not be generalizable to the parent populations at the respective schools. For example, when we divide the number of completed parent questionnaires by the number of students enrolled, the response rate at CityU was only 15% and only 13% at MASE. In other schools the response rate was about 50%. The parent questionnaire results were augmented by the teacher questionnaire, teacher focus group, and the principal interview. For ease of expression, we refer to “parents,” but our use of this term also encompasses caregivers and guardians. The findings are organized into two categories: parent satisfaction and parent involvement.

#### *Cohort 1*

*Circles of Success Learning Academy.* Parent satisfaction ratings and comments remained positive across years on most questionnaire items, but as noted earlier the response rate was only 15% at this charter school for the most current year. At least 80% of the respondents agreed with 14 of the 17 positive attributes of the charter school, and these high ratings were consistent across years. The highest level of agreement was observed on items assessing the quality of instruction provided by teachers and the encouragement of parental involvement (97% for both items). In their comments, many parents praised the small class sizes that contributed to high-quality

instruction. Notable declines in ratings were observed on two items related to the principal's leadership (from 98% agreement in the second year to 57% in the third year) and the attractiveness of classrooms and hallways (from 98% agreement in the second year to 71% in the third year). The decrease in ratings pertaining to principal leadership may be due to the fact that there is a new principal at COSLA this year. In their open-ended responses, parents identified the need for more physical space for classes, cafeteria, auditorium, play areas; better transportation and parking options; more nutritious, better quality food; and more extracurricular activities.

Data obtained from parent and teacher questionnaires point to a high level of parent involvement at COSLA. Many parents commented that their involvement was a strength of this charter school. Teachers unanimously agreed with the questionnaire item stating that parents were active partners with the school. In open-ended comments, teachers cited parent involvement and participation as one of the most successful aspects of their charter school. The interview responses are somewhat contradictory because teachers and the principal both noted a decrease in parent involvement. However, teachers went on to explain that they still considered parent involvement to be strong but attribute the decrease to the change in administrators. They also suggested that parents felt more comfortable with the school now that the "newness has worn off" and don't need to continually monitor activities. Even though there was some variation noted across years, the formal contract signed by parents to volunteer for at least 20 hours may account for the continued higher levels of parent involvement in this school.

*Memphis Academy of Health Sciences.* Although the majority of parent satisfaction ratings remained high, there was some decline in scores when compared to the previous year. For most items, the drop in ratings was small. Some of this variation may be due to the low response rate this year compared to last. Whereas 86 parents responded last year, only 29 responded this year. Parents seemed least satisfied with items reflecting the physical environment (classrooms, hallways, school grounds, and transportation). Additionally, there were notable decreases in the percentage of agreement on teacher availability and whether their child liked attending the school (79% agreement for both items). When compared to last year, many of the same strengths emerged in the open-ended comments and support the rating scale results. Parents cited the academically challenging curriculum, the small student-to-teacher ratios, high expectations of students, principal leadership, and teacher quality. With only a couple of exceptions, praise for order and discipline at MAHS emerged as an additional theme in the open-ended comments. In response to suggestions for improvement, parents still hoped to have a new building and some of the advantages a new building would afford, such as a library, school office, cafeteria, and more space in general. Other suggestions were to have a guidance counselor and to add more grade levels and specialized classes (e.g. languages, health).

The evidence pertaining to parental involvement was mixed. In open-ended comments, some parents noted the lack of parent involvement and suggested the need for improved communication with school staff. Teacher questionnaire data revealed an increase in the percentage of teachers who agreed that parents are active participants in the school (from 36% percent in the second year to 73% in the third). In contrast, all

teachers agreed that the school offered parents substantial opportunities to participate in the education of their children. In their open-ended comments, one teacher considered parent involvement to be exceptional, yet another thought it was high but could be improved. During interviews, the principal described parent involvement as constant, while teachers described it as increasing. Some of the variation in responses may be due to how parental involvement is defined and then evaluated. This is reflected in the following comment from the teacher focus group. “The school is the parent’s community, but they are not educated on how to support us.”

*Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering.* With few exceptions, parents remained very satisfied with the education provided at MASE. However, the response rate of 13% was particularly low at this school. The rating scale data indicate consistently high rates of endorsement in nearly all areas across years. The three exceptions were the relatively lower levels of agreement on items related to the attractiveness of schools and hallways (66% agreement), the adequacy of transportation (42%), and regular receipt of information about their child’s progress (59%). These items also received lower levels of endorsement in previous years. The qualitative data was primarily favorable. School strengths identified in parents’ open-ended responses were similar to those in previous years. Most parents cited the challenging curriculum, leadership, and dedicated teachers as strengths of the school. Other themes included the high expectations for students, school safety, discipline, and individual attention or caring for students. In reference to areas in need of improvement, parents disliked the long hours, transportation problems, and the lack of timely communication and interaction with staff. They suggested more traffic guidance

for pick-ups and drop-offs, greater use of technology, and more extracurricular activities, particularly athletics or physical education.

Evidence for levels of parental involvement was mixed. As noted, parents identified lack of communication with teachers and staff as limitations. They also mentioned the need for interaction with parents and timely communication and feedback about their child and school events. In contrast, teachers had very positive perceptions of parent involvement. On rating scale items, all teachers agreed that parents were active partners in the school and were provided substantial opportunities for participation. In open-ended comments, they cited parental involvement as strengths of their charter school. Interview data from the principal and teachers also suggest strong levels of parental involvement. Again, different types of involvement may be perceived and valued differently by parents and staff. Many parents may want more timely, consistent communication about their child's educational progress and events even though they may be involved in fund-raising, committees, and other volunteer activities.

*Smithson-Craighead Academy.* Both quantitative and qualitative questionnaire data indicate very high levels of parent satisfaction at SCA. The rating scale results show that levels of parent satisfaction have remained consistently high across items and years. Percentages of agreement were nearly 90% or above for all but two items. The first was challenge of the curriculum, which showed a decline from 85% in the second year to 73% in the third. And 74% of the parents agreed that the classrooms and hallways are attractive (compared to 80% last year). The dominant theme to emerge from parent comments about the school's strengths was their appreciation of the teachers. Teachers were described as caring, helpful, concerned, and skilled.

Other strengths noted were smaller class sizes, quality curricula, and a safe, nurturing yet structured climate. Responses to areas in need of improvement were varied. Many parents said “nothing” needed improvement, and that they were very satisfied with the school. Other recurring suggestions were related to the physical space (e.g., having a library or playground), transportation, and extending the number of grade levels served.

In contrast to the high levels of parent satisfaction, teacher data suggested that parental involvement was not as strong. Only 36% of the teachers agreed that parents were active partners in the school. By comparison, 91% agreed that parents were offered substantial opportunities to participate in the education of their children. An open-ended comment suggested that many parents did not model appropriate behavior for their children and suggested the need for parent training. In focus groups, the teachers noted that although parents are “saying great things about the school.” the support from the community was sometimes mixed. They went on to explain that SCA was not a neighborhood school for most of these students, which may account for less involvement from the local community. The principal stated that parents were pleased with the services provided at the school and were involved but was not specific in describing the ways in which parents were involved. Although there seemed to be some disagreement about the level of parent involvement, teachers and the principal favorably described the involvement of grandparents via a program offered from Metro City Services.

#### *Cohort 2*

*City University School of Liberal Arts.* Responses to the parent questionnaire revealed a good deal of variation in responses. There was a general decline in scores

compared to the previous year's data, but the percentages of agreement remained high (over 79%) on 8 of the 17 items. The largest declines were observed on items assessing whether the school grounds were well maintained (from 82% to 41%), teachers were available to parents (from 100% to 64%), the curriculum was appropriate (from 100% to 73%), and regular information about their child's progress was received (from 100% to 73%). The two items with relatively low agreement rates across years concerned the attractiveness of classrooms and hallways (41%), and the adequacy of transportation services (36%). In open-ended comments, parents cited as strengths the challenging academic program, the small class sizes that afforded individual student attention, and the nurturing relationships between students and staff. Recurring topics in parent suggestions were to include more extracurricular activities, provide more space, and promote a more open, respectful climate. Overall, most parent comments about City-U were very favorable.

The evidence suggests high levels of parent involvement, which is especially impressive for a high school. The principal described parent involvement as increasing and "excellent." In their focus group, teachers essentially made the same comments about the increasing involvement of parents. On the teacher questionnaire 100% agreed that parents were active partners with the school and noted parent involvement as a strength in their open-ended comments.

*Star Academy.* Similar to last year, rating scale data indicated very high levels of satisfaction on parent questionnaire items. Nearly all percentages of agreement ranged from 95% to 100%. Adequacy of transportation services was the only item that received a lower level of agreement (65%). Parent open-ended comments were overwhelmingly



positive. Among the numerous strengths noted were a challenging curriculum, high expectations for students, low student-to-teacher ratios, teacher dedication, principal leadership, parental involvement, and a safe environment for their children. When asked what they would like to see improved at the school, many parents responded with “nothing” or “everything is wonderful.” Some recurring suggestions were to add more physical space that would afford larger classrooms, a cafeteria, a library, adding more grade levels, improving transportation, and offering athletic or other specialized programs.

Evidence points to strong levels of parental involvement. Ratings on the teacher questionnaire showed about 82% agreement with the statement that parents are active partners with the school and 100% agreement on the item indicating that parents are offered substantial opportunities to participate in the education of their children. When teachers were asked about strengths of their school and how it differed from a regular public school, high levels of parental involvement emerged as a recurring topic. These favorable sentiments regarding parental involvement were also expressed during the teacher focus groups. The principal described parental support as on the rise and noted they were active participants in field trips, school productions, and monthly parent-teacher meetings. High levels of parent involvement may be attributable to the formal contract signed by parents that specifies they will volunteer a minimum of 20 hours per year.

*Yo! Academy.* Although the parent questionnaire suggested mostly high levels of satisfaction, a decline in ratings compared to previous year was observed. The largest declines were seen on items reflecting consistent enforcement of rules (from 96% to

67%), school safety (from 92% to 72%), principal leadership (from 92% to 72%), and the appropriateness of the curriculum (from 96% to 72%). Surprisingly, the parents' open-ended comments did not shed light on possible reasons for the decrease in agreement levels. When parents were asked about areas in need of improvement, many commented with "nothing" or that they "love it just the way it is." Identified strengths included the dedication and quality of teachers, smaller class sizes, and school leadership.

In contrast to some decline in parent satisfaction ratings, other indicators suggest an increase in the level of parent involvement. All teachers (100%) agreed that parents were active partners in school and were offered substantial opportunities to participate in the education of their children. Teachers also noted that, "parental support was strong at the outset and has continued to grow." The principal and teachers concurred that they have high attendance at parent-teacher meetings, but the principal estimated that only half of the parents were actively involved. According to the teachers, they have personally interacted with all parents, but the level of participation for some parents may not extend beyond communication and meeting attendance.

### *Cohort 3*

*KIPP Academy Nashville.* Questionnaire data indicate that parents are very satisfied with nearly all aspects of their children's education at KIPP. The percentages of agreement ranged from a low of 68% on the attractiveness of hallways and classrooms to 100% agreement on four items: high quality instruction, principal leadership, high expectations for students, and being pleased that their child attends KIPP. The only other item that had relatively low levels of agreement was related to the

maintenance of school grounds (77%). Parents' qualitative data supported the quantitative rankings. They particularly appreciated the quality teachers, strong leadership, challenging curriculum, and high expectations of students. In addition to comments indicating no improvement was needed, other parents suggested more extracurricular activities, extension of grade levels into high school, and providing student lockers.

Although parents seemed clearly satisfied with this charter school, their level of involvement was not as clear. On the questionnaire, four of the five teachers did agree that parents were active partners in the school, but one teacher specifically noted the lack of parent involvement as a negative aspect or area in need of improvement. In interviews, the teachers said involvement was consistently high. The principal noted high attendance at parent meetings and remarked that the school provided regular feedback to parents on their children's progress. On the School Climate Inventory, the average rating on the Involvement dimension which primarily assessed parental participation was lower than the means on other dimensions. Given the mixed evidence, parent involvement was judged to be moderate at KIPP.

*Memphis Business Academy.* Questionnaire data revealed high rates of parent satisfaction. With only one exception, the percentages of agreement ranged from 82% to 100%. The three items with 100% agreement reflected parent satisfaction with the high expectations for student achievement, the encouragement of parental involvement, and treating parents respectfully. The only exception was their apparent dissatisfaction with transportation services (48% agreement). The parents' open-ended comments support the quantitative data. Small class sizes that afforded more individual attention

for students was most commonly cited, but other strengths included the high expectations for students and a strong, challenging curriculum. Parents commented that they appreciated the regular communication from teachers, respect from school personnel, and the “open-door policy” at MBA. Although the positive comments outweighed the negative, some parents mentioned disciplinary procedures as in need of improvement and also suggested more physical education activities.

In contrast to parents’ high level of satisfaction with MBA, they do not appear to be actively involved in the school. None of the teachers agreed that parents were active partners in the school, even though they all agreed that parents were offered substantial opportunities to participate in the education of their children. The lack of parental involvement also emerged as a consistent theme when teachers were asked to identify negative aspects or areas in need of improvement at their school. During focus groups teachers commented that they had an “open door” for parents and welcomed their support, but parent support was low and in need of improvement. For increasing parent involvement, the principal described plans that included hiring a part-time parent coordinator and arranging mandatory parent meetings.

*Promise Academy.* Based on questionnaire data, the parents appear to be very satisfied with all aspects of their children’s education at Promise. The levels of agreement ranged from a low of 83% to a high of 100%. The highest ratings (100% agreement) were observed on the three items assessing teachers’ provision of high quality instruction, school safety, and encouragement of parental involvement. The parent comments were overwhelming positive with praise for the care and nurturing their children receive at Promise. A familial, loving atmosphere combined with a strong

curriculum and dedicated teachers were recurrent themes. Many parents responded that there was “nothing” to improve, while others suggested more space and extracurricular activities. However, parents did note that parental involvement needed to be improved with specific mention of more involvement in PTO meetings.

With the exception of lower participation at PTO meetings, the teachers and principal indicated that parents were involved in the school. All three of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire agreed that parents were active partners in the school and were offered substantial opportunities to participate in the education of their children. In teacher interviews, their comments concurred with those of parents indicating low or “varied” involvement in PTO, but they maintained that there was a large parent turnout at special events and regular communication with parents. The principal contended that parental involvement had increased since the school opened and parents were regularly kept informed.

*Southern Avenue Charter School of Academic Excellence.* With rare exceptions, consistently high levels of parent satisfaction were apparent at Southern. Most levels of agreement on the questionnaire hovered close to 90% or above. All parents (100%) agreed that they regularly received information about their child’s progress, and that school personnel treated them respectfully. Parents seemed dissatisfied with the transportation services (36%), and only moderately satisfied (78%) that rules for student behavior were consistently enforced. Several parents identified their involvement as strengths of the school. They also appreciated the small class sizes, the challenging curriculum, and caring atmosphere for students. Although most parents identified parental involvement as a strength at Southern, a few others considered it an area in

need of improvement. Other parents identified discipline policies and transportation as areas in need of improvement. Some hoped that more grade levels would be added.

Most parents, teachers, and the principal concurred that there were high levels of parent involvement. All four teachers respondents agreed that parents were active partners and offered substantial opportunities to participate in the education of their children. In the focus group, teachers stated that parent involvement has remained consistent since the school opened. They explained that parents are required to volunteer for at least 10 hours a semester and spend 30 minutes per day reading with their child. The principal characterized parental involvement as increasing and specifically described numerous efforts to inform and involve parents in the school. The formal parent engagement contract may account for higher levels of parent involvement at this charter school.

*Soulsville Charter School.* Questionnaire data suggested primarily high levels of parent satisfaction. Most levels of agreement on survey items were 80% or above. The highest percentages were obtained on the maintenance of school grounds (100%), school safety (97%), and high expectations for student achievement (97%). More moderate levels of agreement were obtained on whether the principal was a good leader (74%) and the availability of teachers (77%). It makes sense that some parents appreciated the musically enriched program at Soulsville. Others appreciated the challenge of the curriculum as well as the order, discipline, and safety at Soulsville. Whereas many parents cited order and discipline as strengths of the schools, others found the policies too severe and in need of improvement. Other suggestions for improvement were the inclusion of more physical education and other extracurricular

activities. It is noteworthy that a recurrent theme was the need for more parental involvement and regular communication with the school personnel.

Consistent with the parents' perceptions, teachers also indicated low levels of parental involvement. None of the four teacher respondents agreed that parents were offered substantial opportunities to participate in education of their children, and only one teacher (25%) agreed that parents were active partners in the school. In open-ended questionnaire comments and in the focus group, the teachers described the principal's difficulty in communicating with and encouraging the participation of parents. The principal, however, characterized parental support as good and stated that parental involvement has remained constant.




*Summary findings across schools.* All 12 charter schools were rated as strong with respect to parent satisfaction (see Table 10). These findings were similar to those obtained in previous years. Clearly, the parents had primarily favorable reactions to these schools. Both parent rating scale data and their open-ended responses supported these findings. Although most responses were favorable, some common areas were identified as in need of improvement. These included more extracurricular activities, particularly physical education or athletics, better transportation or parking options, and more physical space for the school. As was true in previous years, ratings in the category of involvement were more varied. The findings suggest that strong levels of satisfaction do not necessarily correspond to high levels of involvement. There was a pattern of more moderate to low levels of involvement in third cohort schools, which would make sense for schools just launching their programs. A pattern of findings by grade level was also detected. Three of the four schools judged to have

high levels of parent involvement served early elementary grade levels. The exception was City-U, a secondary school in the second cohort. The charter schools rated as low in terms of parent involvement were third cohort schools serving sixth graders. The exception was SCA, a first cohort school serving Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students.



**Table 10**  
**Summary Results for Parental Satisfaction and Involvement**

School	Satisfaction	Involvement
<u>Cohort 1</u>		
COSLA	Strong	Strong
MAHS	Strong	Moderate
MASE	Strong	Moderate
SCA	Strong	Beginning/Low
<u>Cohort 2</u>		
CityU	Strong	Strong
Star	Strong	Strong
Yo!	Strong	Moderate
<u>Cohort 3</u>		
KIPP	Strong	Moderate
MBA	Strong	Beginning/Low
Promise	Strong	Moderate
Southern	Strong	Strong
Soulsville	Strong	Beginning/Low

 Beginning/Low  
 Moderate  
 Strong

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### *Conclusions by Evaluation Question*

The present study used a variety of data sources to address the questions guiding the third-year evaluation of Tennessee charter schools. There were a total of 12 charter schools evaluated. The first cohort of four schools was initiated in the 2003-2004 school year and has completed its third year of operation. The second cohort of three schools began operating in the 2004-2005 school year and has completed its second year. The final and third cohort of five schools began in 2005-2006 and just completed their initial year.

The first evaluation question focused on instructional orientation and strategies, and the findings were similar to those obtained in previous years. Traditional, direct instruction remained the dominant pedagogical practice across charter schools. The rates were comparable to national norms in many cases, but still reflect limited success by the schools to implement the more innovative pedagogy described in benchmarks and instructional plans, or to take advantage of some of the unique conditions afforded by their charter status. One area in need of improvement was the integration of technology into classroom instruction. In some schools, the lack of technology integration may be due to a lack of resources, but in others it may be due to restricting its use to lower-level tasks (e.g., typing, calculations, reading) rather than to enrich and advance higher-level learning. RSCA data show that even when technology was employed in classrooms, its application to support higher-order thinking was limited. Commonly cited features of the charter schools were smaller class sizes and more challenging instruction and curriculum. One might expect therefore to observe more

student-centered, higher-order strategies supported by technology implemented in these instructional environments. This expectation was reinforced by the schools' own benchmarks comprising their school improvement plans in the areas of curriculum and instruction. Although there were notable increases in these types of strategies among some schools, the rates were still low to moderate overall.

School climate was addressed by the next research question. As reported last year, a favorable school climate continues to be an impressive strength of these charter schools. In some schools, the findings showed increases from already high averages when compared to previous years, and in second cohort schools, the decline in scores observed in the previous year appeared to rebound. On all dimensions, the SCI ratings obtained for the charter schools were higher than national norms. Still, as true in the national sample, scores on Order tended to be lower than those on other dimensions. Two third cohort schools, MBA and Soulsville, were designated as having lower indices of school climate, primarily due to problems with order and discipline. Consistent with findings in previous years, order and discipline problems also emerged in qualitative data collected at SCA. Nevertheless, less favorable evaluation of school climate was the exception across charter schools.

The next question addressed the degree and level of quality with which the goals and strategies of the charter school were implemented. Not unexpectedly, the levels of benchmark implementation were related to cohort or year of operation. First cohort schools were either in intermediate or full phases of development across categories. Ratings for the implementation of goals and strategies tended to be moderate or intermediate for second cohort schools. Finally, low to intermediate levels of

implementation were apparent among third cohort schools in their initial year of operation. Across schools, the strongest levels of implementation tended to be for benchmarks targeting support and organization, whereas, lower levels of implementation were more apparent in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and evaluation. The school leadership team seemed to overestimate the extent of progress they had made in the implementation of the various benchmark goals and strategies, particularly as they related to curriculum and instruction. This tendency to overestimate progress signals a need to revise the benchmark document and become more comfortable with formative evaluation as a means for accurately assessing status and guiding improvement planning.

In examining teacher reactions and experiences with charter schools, we found teacher responses remained primarily favorable. As reported in previous years, teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the school's mission and program as evidenced by strong ratings in this category among all 12 schools. Compared to last year, there seemed to be some improvement in their experiences with professional development because this category received a strong ranking in all but three schools. Teachers tended to be less enthusiastic about available resources and support. Although there were differences by school in the type of resources that respondents endorsed as sufficient or adequate, having enough common planning time and faculty or staff more commonly emerged as areas in need of improvement. With regard to perceptions of support or assistance from educational agencies, teachers' ratings and comments were less favorable. They consistently reported a lack of effective assistance provided by state and local educational agencies, and this finding may be

more of a reflection on these agencies rather than the charter schools. Regarding longitudinal trends, improvement in teacher responses were noted in several schools, and patterns related to cohorts were not detected.

Parent satisfaction was another definite strength of all charter schools across all years. The areas for which parents expressed less satisfaction were often those related to the physical building, facilities, surroundings, transportation, and lack of additional extracurricular activities such as sports programs. These limitations are more difficult for schools to address because they require substantial resources. The levels of parental involvement were more varied across schools, with most considered to be strong or moderate in this category. There was a pattern of more moderate to low levels of involvement in third cohort schools, which would make sense for schools just launching their programs. The definition of what constitutes parental involvement remains elusive, especially when interpreting the qualitative data. If defined as support or communication, the levels of involvement would be considered stronger than if defined as active, regular participation in activities related to the education of their children. The difficulty associated with encouraging and maintaining high levels of parent satisfaction and involvement is not unique to charter schools, and arguably these charter schools have been more successful in this endeavor than many public schools serving similar types of students.

These conclusions should be tempered with the recognition of the limitations associated with the evaluation data. Small sample sizes and low response rates diminish the validity of the findings. This limitation was particularly problematic in third cohort schools that had few respondents on the school climate and teacher surveys.

When making comparisons across years, the fact that there were different groups of respondents may have contributed to the changing trends across time. Finally, we based some results on the benchmark documents, which varied in quality and were prepared by the leadership team, not the evaluators. Every effort was made to base the findings on multiple data sources.

### *Recommendations*

Due to a consistent pattern of findings across years, the recommendations are similar to those presented in previous reports. However, there are fewer recommendations this year because the areas identified as in need of improvement last year did not emerge as limitations globally affecting charter schools this year. Order or discipline issues and meeting the requirements of special needs students were not addressed this year because they emerged as limitations in a minority of the charter schools studied. This is not to say that these areas are no longer a problem in any of the charter schools. Rather, they did not emerge as limitations in the majority of schools.

Based on the overall findings, the following recommendations apply to the charter schools as a group and not necessarily to individual schools. The recommendations specific to each school can be found in the individual school reports.

Charter schools might adopt a wider array of instructional orientations or strategies shown to promote student achievement. Whereas there was improvement noted in some schools, there was little change in other schools or even an increase in more traditional instructional approaches. Many of the research-based practices and the schools' own benchmarks call for the implementation of more student-centered

strategies that entail higher-order thinking and technology integration. Teacher led, direct instruction can be an effective orientation, but a better balance among a variety of effective pedagogical practices might be achieved. The low teacher-to-pupil ratios, perceived to be strengths of these charter schools, would seem to be an ideal environment for achieving this balance. The integration of technology into the classrooms to enrich learning and foster higher-ordering thinking may be a good starting point.

Benchmark documents need to be modified to better align with objective indicators and available data. Continued improvement in developing and then attaining benchmarks was noted among earlier cohort schools. However, in other schools, especially third cohort schools, benchmark development might be improved. Benchmark documents are intended to be a dynamic tool used for school improvement. Planning, evaluation, and ultimately improvement can be facilitated by a sound, ambitious, and long-range benchmark document. Results and data from this report, independent classroom observations, and student outcome results exemplify some of the evidence that might be provided to document goal attainment. An honest, accurate appraisal of the extent to which benchmarks have been successfully implemented will enhance school improvement efforts.

Efforts to continue developing supportive, collaborative relationship with the school district and external partners should continue. Across cohorts, the present findings have consistently indicated a lack of effective assistance from local and state educational agencies and, in some cases, external partners. The educational reform literature clearly emphasizes the importance to the sustainability of school change of

having close connections to the parent school district. Strategies include having more open channels of communication and holding meetings to clarify policies, procedures, and available resources. Furthermore, representatives of charter schools should continue to seek the support and assistance of various external partners. Publicity and notices in the form of newsletters, invitations to school functions, and community events might be used in conjunction with direct requests for assistance to promote more involvement from businesses, community groups, colleges, and parents. However, we also recognize that the schools' potential progress in establishing and furthering such relationships is directly dependent on the degree of involvement desired and investment made by the respective external organizations

Although improvement in the extent of parental involvement was apparent in some schools, in others it was at moderate or low levels. Therefore, another recommendation is to continue efforts to increase active parent involvement or participation. As noted in previous years, schools that had formal contracts of agreement with parents specifying the minimum number of hours of participation required (COSLA, Star, and Southern) tended to have more parental involvement. Furthermore, the definition and types of parental involvement might be reconsidered. In some school improvement plans, involvement translates into support for and understanding of the mission and educational program or maintaining regular contact. In others, it specifies more active participation in parent organizations, school activities, and the provision of academic support for students. Both are necessary and important, and both might be included on benchmark documents that identify more specific



strategies used to encourage involvement coupled with more objective evidence to indicate their effectiveness.

The final recommendation is to prioritize, coordinate, and secure more resources. Because the specific type of resource needed varied by individual schools, resources are broadly defined. In some schools limited resources in the areas of technology, educational materials, and common planning time were noted. In others, the need for more faculty and staff was cited. Parents tended to suggest changes that required substantial resources such a new larger school building that would house a library, gymnasium, or cafeteria. The selection of targeted resources would be guided by the school improvement plan. Admittedly, this recommendation is the most difficult to achieve. Additional resources may be garnered by working toward achieving a collaborative, supportive relationship with the school district, state educational agency, and external partners.

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# APPENDIX

## School Observation Measure (SOM) Data Summary

### *National Norms for Elementary Schools*

**Number of School Observation Visits for**

**N = 688**

*Note: One school observation visit equals approximately 10 individual classroom visits.*

The extent to which each of the following was used or present in the school...	Percent None	Percent Rarely	Percent Occasionally	Percent Frequently	Percent Extensively
<b><i>Instructional Orientation</i></b>					
Direct instruction (lecture)	3.0	10.4	23.7	34.8	28.1
Team teaching	49.8	32.3	11.9	5.6	0.4
Cooperative/collaborative learning	38.1	41.8	13.1	5.2	1.9
Individual tutoring (teacher, peer, aide, adult volunteer)	44.6	31.8	16.1	5.2	2.2
<b><i>Classroom Organization</i></b>					
Ability groups	36.3	22.5	15.7	12.7	12.7
Multi-age grouping	70.1	15.7	7.5	4.1	2.6
Work centers (for individuals or groups)	27.3	27.7	26.2	15.4	3.4
<b><i>Instructional Strategies</i></b>					
Higher-level instructional feedback (written or verbal) to enhance student learning	28.0	36.2	26.5	7.1	2.2
Integration of subject areas (interdisciplinary/thematic units)	58.3	30.7	7.6	3.0	0.4
Project-based learning	75.4	15.8	5.0	3.8	0.0
Use of higher-level questioning strategies	19.5	32.7	32.0	12.4	3.4
Teacher acting as a coach/facilitator	7.1	20.2	28.5	34.5	9.7
Parent/community involvement in learning activities	75.3	18.4	6.0	0.4	0.0
<b><i>Student Activities</i></b>					
Independent seatwork (self-paced worksheets, individual assignments)	4.1	13.7	39.6	31.1	11.5
Experiential, hands-on learning	30.5	36.4	24.9	6.3	1.9
Systematic individual instruction (differential assignments geared to individual needs)	64.9	26.5	5.6	2.2	0.7
Sustained writing/composition (self-selected or teacher-generated topics)	56.0	32.8	7.8	2.2	1.1
Sustained reading	43.3	31.9	18.5	4.1	2.2
Independent inquiry/research on the part of students	82.8	13.1	2.6	1.5	0.0
Student discussion	46.0	24.5	16.6	9.1	3.8

**National Norms for Elementary Schools, CONTINUED**

**Number of School Observation Visits for**

**N = 688**

*Note: One school observation visit equals approximately 10 individual classroom visits.*

<b>The extent to which each of the following was used or present in the school...</b>	<b>Percent None</b>	<b>Percent Rarely</b>	<b>Percent Occasionally</b>	<b>Percent Frequently</b>	<b>Percent Extensively</b>
<b>Technology Use</b>					
Computer for instructional delivery (e.g. CAI, drill & practice)	35.2	37.1	20.6	6.7	0.4
Technology as a learning tool or resource (e.g., Internet research, spreadsheet or database creation, multi-media, CD Rom, Laser disk)	49.6	29.9	16.4	3.4	0.7
<b>Assessment</b>					
Performance assessment strategies	66.4	16.4	9.9	5.7	1.5
Student self-assessment (portfolios, individual record books)	72.9	18.7	5.7	2.7	0.0

<b>Summary Items</b>					
High academically focused class time	0.4	1.5	17.1	38.3	42.8
High level of student attention/interest/engagement	0.4	3.0	20.1	48.3	28.3

**Rubric for SOM Scoring**

- (0) None:** Strategy was never observed.
- (1) Rarely:** Observed in only one or two classes. Receives isolated use and/or little time in classes. Clearly not a prevalent/emphasized component of teaching and learning across classes.
- (2) Occasionally:** Observed in some classes. Receives minimal or modest time or emphasis in classes. Not a prevalent/emphasized component of teaching and learning across classes.
- (3) Frequently:** Observed in many but not all classes. Receives substantive time or emphasis in classes. A prevalent component of teaching and learning across classes.
- (4) Extensively:** Observed in most or all classes. Receives substantive time and/or emphasis in classes. A highly prevalent component of teaching and learning across classes.

## School Observation Measure (SOM) Data Summary

### National Norms for Secondary Schools

#### Number of School Observation Visits for

N = 370

*Note: One school observation visit equals approximately 10 individual classroom visits.*

The extent to which each of the following was used or present in the school...	Percent None	Percent Rarely	Percent Occasionally	Percent Frequently	Percent Extensively
<b><i>Instructional Orientation</i></b>					
Direct instruction (lecture)	1.6	8.7	19.0	44.0	26.6
Team teaching	64.1	30.3	5.4	0.3	0.0
Cooperative/collaborative learning	35.7	36.5	23.2	4.4	0.3
Individual tutoring (teacher, peer, aide, adult volunteer)	76.5	17.8	1.9	3.0	0.8
<b><i>Classroom Organization</i></b>					
Ability groups	40.1	29.8	13.3	7.3	9.5
Multi-age grouping	53.7	10.6	8.9	17.1	9.8
Work centers (for individuals or groups)	69.4	23.0	7.3	0.3	0.0
<b><i>Instructional Strategies</i></b>					
Higher-level instructional feedback (written or verbal) to enhance student learning	25.1	24.9	25.7	18.1	6.2
Integration of subject areas (interdisciplinary/thematic units)	66.1	21.7	8.9	1.4	1.9
Project-based learning	51.1	35.1	10.6	2.4	0.8
Use of higher-level questioning strategies	19.2	29.0	32.8	17.1	1.9
Teacher acting as a coach/facilitator	3.8	16.3	27.9	28.5	23.6
Parent/community involvement in learning activities	93.0	6.0	1.1	0.0	0.0
<b><i>Student Activities</i></b>					
Independent seatwork (self-paced worksheets, individual assignments)	1.1	9.8	26.0	39.6	23.6
Experiential, hands-on learning	44.0	36.4	14.7	4.6	0.3
Systematic individual instruction (differential assignments geared to individual needs)	76.1	20.9	2.7	0.3	0.0
Sustained writing/composition (self-selected or teacher-generated topics)	54.5	33.2	10.4	1.6	0.3
Sustained reading	52.5	36.0	10.7	0.8	0.0
Independent inquiry/research on the part of students	67.7	24.5	7.1	0.8	0.0
Student discussion	65.7	17.2	8.7	4.6	3.8

## School Observation Measure (SOM) Data Summary, continued

### *National Norms for Secondary Schools*

The extent to which each of the following was used or present in the school...	Percent None	Percent Rarely	Percent Occasionally	Percent Frequently	Percent Extensively
<b><i>Technology Use</i></b>					
Computer for instructional delivery (e.g. CAI, drill & practice)	49.6	40.1	8.1	2.2	0.0
Technology as a learning tool or resource (e.g., Internet research, spreadsheet or database creation, multi-media, CD Rom, Laser disk)	45.5	37.9	11.9	4.6	0.0
<b><i>Assessment</i></b>					
Performance assessment strategies	59.2	26.3	11.8	2.7	0.0
Student self-assessment (portfolios, individual record books)	77.7	17.1	4.1	1.1	0.0

<b><i>Summary Items</i></b>					
High academically focused class time	0.0	1.6	23.4	59.4	15.5
High level of student attention/interest/engagement	0.0	3.3	42.0	46.9	7.9

### Rubric for SOM Scoring

- (0) None:** Strategy was never observed.
- (1) Rarely:** Observed in only one or two classes. Receives isolated use and/or little time in classes. Clearly not a prevalent/emphasized component of teaching and learning across classes.
- (2) Occasionally:** Observed in some classes. Receives minimal or modest time or emphasis in classes. Not a prevalent/emphasized component of teaching and learning across classes.
- (3) Frequently:** Observed in many but not all classes. Receives substantive time or emphasis in classes. A prevalent component of teaching and learning across classes.
- (4) Extensively:** Observed in most or all classes. Receives substantive time and/or emphasis in classes. A highly prevalent component of teaching and learning across classes.