



2014 DC Restart Case Studies – Working Paper

July 2015

Contents

Introduction	3
Arts and Technology Academy Restart	4
Imagine Southeast Restart	8
Key Lessons Learned	12
Appendix	14

Introduction

Charter school accountability depends on the capacity of authorizers to hold operators responsible for school performance. If students at a charter school are not receiving a higher-quality education than their counterparts at a traditional school, an authorizer must consider taking action. Yet the choice to shut down a school is one of the most challenging decisions an authorizer faces, both politically and practically.

Charter restarts are a relatively new policy tool that authorizers and school operators can use to avoid some of the negative consequences of closure while continuing to adhere to the principle of charter accountability. A charter restart entails transferring the financial assets of an outgoing school operator and board (the founding operator) over to a new operator and governing board (the restart operator), while guaranteeing that the students may remain in place.ⁱ Restarts allow for greater continuity for students, avoiding the disruption to families and neighborhoods that traditional school closures often bring, while facilitating a change to new management to ensure improved performance.

Two Washington, DC charter operators, Arts and Technology Academy Public Charter School (ATA) and Imagine Southeast Public Charter School (Imagine SE), went through restarts in 2014 and are now managed by restart operators. This report examines the initial execution of the two restarts in detail – from the selection of a restart operator through the negotiations of the asset transfer – in order to pull out lessons learned for future restarts. While every restart will require a tailored approach, common challenges can be anticipated. Specifically, both the founding operator and the restart operator should plan to:

- **Start the process as early as possible**, even informally, in order to allow sufficient time for all stakeholders – particularly families of students attending the school – to prepare for the restart. Rather than waiting for an authorizer decision, founding operator boards should proactively review their school's progress annually, and if goals are not being met, plan for multiple scenarios, including a restart.
- **Conduct thorough due diligence** to ensure that all parties have a clear picture of the process and what it will entail. Founding operator boards need to engage in internal conversations to determine how they will assess quality and which factors they will prioritize so they can effectively vet potential restart operators. Similarly, potential restart operators should carefully review the founding operator to determine what the restart would require, particularly in terms of school program and staffing. Ideally, a potential restart operator would also review its internal staffing resources to see if it could handle a restart, even before there is a clear opportunity for one.
- **Allocate sufficient staff resources** both for the planning process as well as the negotiation over the specifics of implementation and associated legal agreements. The necessary staff and board time required from both the founding operator and the restart operator are easily underestimated.
- **Balance the need for transparency with tight coordination** over communication with stakeholders throughout the process. Founding and restart operators should act as a team and confer on family communication in advance to avoid confusion and mixed messages, which would undermine families' trust in the process and in the new operator.

In DC the sole charter authorizer is the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB), governed by seven volunteer board members appointed by the Mayor and approved by the DC Council.ⁱⁱ PCSB is responsible for approving new charters, overseeing existing charters, and revoking charters. To inform those decisions, PCSB evaluates schools annually on a Performance Management Framework (PMF), which publicly categorizes schools into performance tiers, with Tier 1 being the highest rating and Tier 3 the lowest.ⁱⁱⁱ A school consistently rated as Tier 3 is considered for charter revocation by PCSB. Every five years, and when a charter is up for renewal, typically after a fifteen-year term, PCSB does a thorough review of an operator's record. If a school is not meeting the goals set out in its charter, or is failing financially, it runs the risk of charter revocation or non-renewal.

The timeline for the two charter restarts reviewed in this report began with conversations between PCSB staff and school boards regarding potential non-renewal or revocation. These conversations represented the critical inflection point for the founding operator boards, because their schools faced three paths forward: renewal, closure and restart. The report ends with the legal transition over to the restart operator and does not address the ongoing management under the new operator. This report first reviews each restart in turn, relying on public documents as well as extensive stakeholder interviews and then highlights lessons learned across both examples.

Arts and Technology Academy Restart

Summary

In January 2013, PCSB met with the Arts and Technology Academy Public Charter School (ATA) board to prepare for the fifteen-year renewal of their charter. At that point, the ATA board began evaluating options to improve school performance. By the fall, seeing the risk of losing their charter, the ATA board began informally preparing for the possibility of a restart. At the beginning of January 2014, a year after the initial meeting, PCSB declined to renew ATA's charter, and within weeks, ATA's board selected KIPP DC as a restart operator. Over the next several months, ATA and KIPP DC negotiated and implemented a restart. The school was governed and operated by KIPP DC beginning in school year 2014-15.

Founding Operator: Arts & Technology Academy

ATA was founded in 1999 in Washington, DC's Ward 7 with a mission focused on providing an "academically and artistically-rich foundation infused with technology" to the community.^{iv} As of school year 2013-14, eighty percent of its students lived in Ward 7, and more than ten percent lived in neighboring Ward 8. Ninety-nine percent of ATA's students were African American, and ninety-five percent qualified for free/reduced lunch.

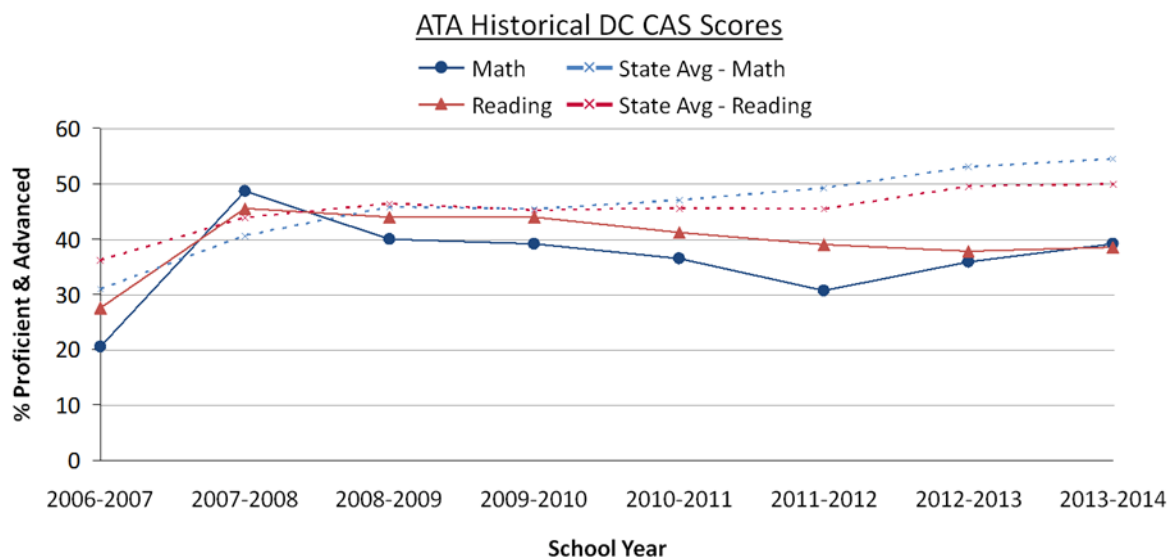
Restart Operator: KIPP DC

KIPP DC was founded in Washington, DC in 2001 as part of the national KIPP network of public charter schools. During school year 2013-14, the KIPP DC network served over 3,600 students at twelve schools with a goal of serving over 5,000 students as those schools matured. Across the KIPP DC network, ninety-nine percent of students were African-American, and eighty-seven percent qualified for free/reduced lunch.

	Founding Operator: Arts & Technology Academy (single-site school)	Restart Operator: KIPP DC (network of schools)
Year founded:	1999	2001
Number of schools:	1 school	12 schools (no previous restarts)
Number of students served in SY13-14:	618	3,629
Grades served in SY13-14:	PK3-5	PK3-12
2013 PMF Tier:	3	1

Decision to Conduct a Restart

ATA passed its ten-year charter review in 2009 with full continuance but performance began declining the following school year.^v By school year 2011-12, DC CAS scores fell to below forty percent proficient and advanced in both math and reading.^{vi} In preparation for ATA's fifteen-year renewal, representatives from the boards of PCSB and ATA met in January 2013. PCSB established that ATA's entire fifteen-year history would be examined and renewal was in jeopardy unless they saw significant improvements in performance across multiple measures.



ATA's board members did not discuss the possibility of closure at this point, but they did recognize the need to quickly address student performance. During the spring and summer, ATA conducted a detailed internal analysis of its performance data, specifically in reference to the goals detailed in its charter application. ATA hired a new principal from a Tier 1 charter middle school in DC for school year 2013-14 in order to improve its academic performance. At the same time, ATA asked NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF) to present a primer on restarts, and sent representatives from ATA's board to attend an event on restarts.

In early fall, ATA's board decided to pursue a conditional charter renewal, with a back-up option of a restart. ATA submitted an application to renew the school's charter on October 18, 2013. After internal review as well as a public hearing, on January 8, 2014, PCSB declined ATA's charter renewal request, but agreed to allow the ATA board to find a restart partner^{vii}.

Finding a Partner

PCSB's final decision on ATA's renewal was made on January 8, 2014, leaving ATA with a short window to identify a restart operator and inform parents before the citywide lottery application deadline of March 3, 2014, when parents would need to decide whether they would apply for a new school for their student. In anticipation of this tight timeline, ATA's board had begun informal planning in advance of PCSB's vote, but did not formally launch the process until PCSB's decision was finalized.

Initial Planning (November – December 2013):

In advance of PCSB's decision not to renew ATA's charter, starting in November 2013, ATA's board began to informally discuss the possibility of a restart with other charter school network leaders to gauge interest and give them an opportunity to prepare for a proposal. During this time, PCSB conducted a public hearing at the school, giving parents an opportunity to share concerns about the potential for closure. Though ATA's board was already privately and informally considering the restart

possibility, at the public hearing, ATA representatives explained the school's plans to improve performance and advocated for charter renewal.

Soliciting Bids (January 2014):

To solicit and vet potential restart operators, the ATA board assembled a list of high-priority items and a matrix by which it would evaluate all proposals. The list included: incorporating arts instruction into the school day, continuing to provide key social supports for families including before- and after-care, providing an opportunity for all current staff to interview for jobs with the restart operator, retaining "Arts & Technology Academy" in the name of the school, and granting two board seats for current ATA board members on the restart operator's board. ATA's board considered these high-priority elements to be essential to its character, and valued by the community and the families who had selected the school.

ATA reached out to potential restart operators in and around DC requesting two documents: (1) a statement about the restart operators' charter school network, its principles, and why they believed they would be effective; and (2) a direct response to the high-priority list outlining how each specific item would be addressed by the operator. Charter networks had 8 days to respond to the request, in order to allow the ATA board enough time to select an operator prior to the citywide lottery deadline^{viii}.

Presentations and Follow Up Diligence (January 2014):

ATA requested that each school respond with a presentation to the entire board. Following the presentation, representatives from ATA met with each potential operator to discuss their responses to the high-priority items. Simultaneously, ATA's board conducted financial due diligence on each applicant, including verifying the potential restart operator's ability to take ownership of ATA's building.

KIPP DC was one of the operators which ATA approached informally in December and formally in early January to solicit a proposal. Since KIPP DC had never conducted a restart before, its leadership needed to carefully consider whether or not it was ready for the unique challenge. KIPP DC sought to grow rapidly, and typically did so by opening new campuses and adding grade levels each year, but it faced a dearth of facilities and the economic challenges of opening and scaling a school. After initial correspondence with ATA, KIPP DC remained committed to continuing to open its own new schools but decided to pursue the restart opportunity given these unique circumstances: a large student body, an affordable facility, and a community in need. Critical to this decision was KIPP DC's large talent pool of school leaders and teachers to serve at the new school, as well administrative talent for restart project management.

KIPP DC quickly secured full approval and support from its board for the proposal, as well as from the national KIPP Foundation. KIPP DC's leadership led an initial call with its board on January 17 to discuss the restart and request support to put together a proposal. Upon securing its board's blessing, KIPP DC leadership then quickly formulated a response to each of ATA's requests, a budget for the new school, a proposed school leadership team, and a communication plan to use if it were selected as a restart partner. KIPP DC's leadership presented to ATA's board on January 22, 2014.

Final Decision (January 27, 2014):

Once the financial due diligence was complete, each ATA board member ranked applications according to the board's decision matrix. The ATA board deliberated and then voted, and KIPP DC was selected as the restart partner. PCSB quickly approved KIPP DC as the restart operator within a few weeks due to the network's strong academic track record in DC and demonstrated financial and administrative capacity to manage the restart.

Negotiations

After the operator selection was made, ATA and KIPP DC negotiated the legal documents required to formalize the transaction over the next five months (See Appendix I for an overview of the required legal documentation for a charter restart). Many complex decisions needed to be made, including: wind-down budgets for ATA, policies and procedures for staff rehiring, and transfer of assets and liabilities to KIPP DC. In addition, some of the high-priority items originally set by ATA during the selection

process were ultimately renegotiated during the legal process. Since the restart operator selection timeline was hurried, conversations that might have occurred earlier were deferred until the legal negotiations. The lack of available templates and previous experiences from other restarts left KIPP DC and ATA to develop the legal agreements organically, which also added time and expense.

Community Engagement

Community engagement required a careful balancing act: On the one hand, the ATA board was committed to being transparent with families about the process and seeking their input in a meaningful way. On the other hand, the board needed to manage the transition efficiently to adhere to tight timelines. ATA's board held a series of parent meetings at key decision points where they shared updates or solicited feedback. However, the process and timeline were primarily driven by PCSB's vote in early January and the need to select and announce a partner prior to the lottery deadline.

In the fall of 2013, ATA held a parent meeting to discuss the potential options for the school – renewal, restart, and closure – and discussed the implications of each option for families. ATA heard parents' concerns and comments regarding potential restart partners. Another parent information meeting was held upon ATA's decision to pursue charter renewal with a back-up restart option with PCSB. Many parents also participated in a public PCSB hearing in December 2013, held at the school, to voice concerns and share feedback. In early January, ATA held a parent meeting to discuss PCSB's vote for non-renewal and the pending restart, and then sought feedback from parents on the list of high-priority items. A few weeks later ATA held a final parent meeting to announce the selection of KIPP DC as the new operator.

After the restart announcement, communication with parents became more complicated. Though both ATA and KIPP DC were committed to keeping families informed, coordination was inherently challenging given the different styles and institutional interests of the two operators. KIPP DC crafted many of the messages about upcoming processes with respect to re-enrollment, school changes, and the following school year. But since ATA continued to run the school for the remainder of the year, ATA school leadership, not KIPP, managed the distribution of those messages, such as sending letters home in students' backpacks. This division of labor created parent confusion about who to go to with questions or concerns.

As of August 2014, KIPP DC was able to re-enroll seventy percent of ATA's previous students.^{ix} In addition to the 393 re-enrolled students, KIPP DC enrolled 106 new students, including a new preschool class of three-year-olds, accounting for just over half of the new students.

Imagine Southeast Restart

Summary

The Imagine Southeast Public Charter School (Imagine SE) restart happened during the same year, but the process unfolded differently. In February 2013, PCSB agreed to renew Imagine SE's charter only if it met a defined performance target, and Imagine SE's board agreed then that if it did not hit that target it would close or transfer to a new restart operator. While simultaneously attempting an internal turnaround effort to meet the performance target, Imagine SE's board began researching potential restart operators. In the fall of 2013, Imagine SE issued a formal request for proposals (RFP) and subsequently selected Democracy Prep Public Schools (Democracy Prep) as the new restart operator, with PCSB's approval. Imagine SE and Democracy Prep then negotiated the specifics of the restart over the next several months, and the school was fully managed by Democracy Prep beginning in school year 2014-15.

Founding Operator: Imagine Southeast

Imagine SE was founded in Washington, DC in fall 2008 and was managed through a contract with a for-profit charter management organization (CMO) called Imagine Schools Inc.^x Imagine SE offered gender-specific instruction for students, with single-sex classrooms starting in first grade. The school was located in the Congress Heights neighborhood of Ward 8; the student body was one-hundred percent African American, and ninety-nine percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch.

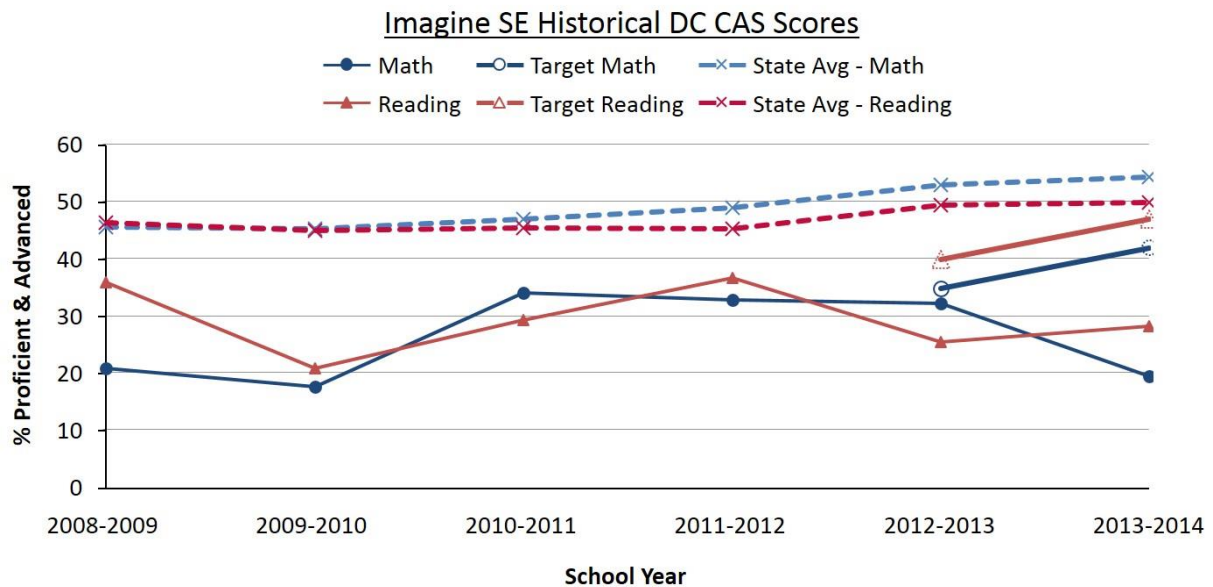
Restart Operator: Democracy Prep

Democracy Prep Public Schools opened its flagship charter school, Democracy Prep Charter School, in 2005 in New York City. The school was grounded in a college-prep culture with a curriculum focused on civic education. During school year 2013-14, the network educated over 2,400 students in Harlem, New York, and Camden, New Jersey. The student population was one-hundred percent African American or Latino, and eighty-nine percent qualified for free or reduced lunch. Democracy Prep took on its first restart at Harlem Day in 2011 and based on its early success, the network took on its second restart in fall 2013 in Camden, NJ.

	Founding Operator: Imagine SE (single-site school)	Restart Operator: Democracy Prep (network of schools in NYC and NJ)
Year founded:	2008	2005
Number of schools:	1 school	9 schools (including 2 restarts)
Number of students served in SY13-14:	468	2,338
Grades served in SY13-14:	PK3-6	K-12
2013 PMF Tier ^{xi} :	3	N/A – did not previously operate any schools in DC

Deciding to Conduct a Restart

During Imagine SE's first five years of operation, student proficiency rates on the DC CAS were consistently below state averages. Initially PCSB revoked Imagine SE's charter in January 2013, however it quickly revised this decision in response to Imagine SE's internal turnaround plan. PCSB agreed to grant a charter renewal if Imagine SE was able to execute its plan and raise its PMF scores to 43 by school year 2012-13 and to 57 by school year 2013-14. If the school was unable to meet these targets, the Imagine SE board agreed to either transition to another operator or close.



Note: Target refers to the target DC CAS score Imagine SE submitted to PCSB as part of its turnaround plan. This score would contribute to Imagine SE achieving PMF scores of 43 and 57 by 2012-13 and 2013-14, respectively.

Imagine SE undertook a turnaround plan which included bringing in an academic improvement team to increase DC CAS scores, attendance, and re-enrollment over the following two years. However, Imagine SE failed to meet the agreed turnaround performance targets for school year 2012-13. As a result, the board, in compliance with its agreement, immediately began planning for a restart and looking for another operator to continue to serve the community.

Finding a Partner

In the winter and spring of 2013, while Imagine SE remained committed to an internal turnaround effort, the board knew it needed to simultaneously develop a back-up plan for a restart. To support both efforts, the board split into two working groups: one to manage the internal turnaround and another to manage the restart process. The preparations by the second working group allowed the board to move forward more quickly once the board knew that charter renewal was no longer an option.

Initial Planning (pre-September 2013):

During the spring of 2013, staff from PCSB and other local organizations made recommendations of known high-quality school operators to the Imagine SE board. NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF) referred the board to several operators, including Democracy Prep, and also facilitated visits to each. These informal opportunities allowed the founding board to learn more about and build relationships with high quality operators.

A working group of Imagine SE board members also began to develop a detailed RFP. Given the relatively recent emergence of restarts nationally, there are few available templates and guidelines to assist founding operators in planning for a restart. The working group reviewed examples from other cities, as well as research conducted by NSVF, and created an RFP to suit Imagine SE's needs.

After DC CAS scores were released over the summer of 2013, the board realized that Imagine SE was not meeting its turnaround performance targets and would need to leverage this planning and conduct a restart.

Soliciting Bids (September-October 2013):

The RFP was completed on September 12, 2013. A detailed document, the RFP outlined Imagine SE's history, performance, student demographics, and current standing and timeline with PCSB. The RFP also requested a variety of items from prospective restart operators, including an overview of the operator's current schools with respect to capacity, culture and academic results, their plan for the restart with respect to budget, staffing and governance, and three years of audited financial statements.^{xiii} The Imagine SE board posted announcements in the *Washington Post* and circulated the RFP informally as well. The RFP required responses by October 18, 2013 so that a plan could be submitted to PCSB by December 1, approximately nine months in advance of the next school year.

Democracy Prep found the Imagine SE restart opportunity through recommendations from local partners. While Democracy Prep originally hoped to open a new school in DC, the Imagine SE opportunity presented many of the characteristics the network looked for in restart: the opportunity to build out the school staff, an existing school facility, a neighborhood in need, and adequate financial resources to cover restart expenses. On the other hand, Imagine SE presented a few unique challenges that Democracy Prep had not tackled before, including the need to serve preschool students and develop a model for single-sex education. However, during the RFP process, Democracy Prep was able to research best practices and visit best-in-class schools that took on each of these challenges, and thereby formulate a plan for the Imagine SE restart.

Review of Application and Interviews (October-November 2013):

After the RFP deadline, the Imagine SE board held interviews from October 21 to November 1, asking each candidate operator the same set of questions. The board focused on the previous track record of the potential restart operators and plans for the restart, with particular importance given to the plans to continue single-sex education and ensuring all current students had seats in the new school. The board made its decision to approve Democracy Prep shortly after the operator interviews.

Negotiations

After the founding board of Imagine SE selected Democracy Prep, the two parties worked through the formal negotiations of the restart process. In contrast to the straightforward process to select a restart operator, negotiations over the formal legal agreements were more complex, and each side had varying levels of prior experience with restarts and of staff support. For the volunteer members of the Imagine SE board, this was the first restart negotiation in which they had participated, while it was the third for Democracy Prep's leadership. Additionally, the process was managed by volunteer board members for Imagine SE, whereas Democracy Prep dedicated home office staff members to the negotiation.

Some of the legal issues at play were common to most restarts, such as the process and terms by which current students would be offered enrollment with the new restart operator, and how current staff would be considered for positions with the new operator. However, other issues were specific to Imagine SE and Democracy Prep. For example, Imagine SE had contracted with a for-profit CMO, called Imagine Schools Inc., to manage the school, and Democracy Prep requested that Imagine Schools Inc. provide indemnification for all actions taken prior to the restart. The reason for the request was that the Imagine SE non-profit would be dissolved subsequent to the restart, and therefore could not itself provide indemnification. This issue, combined with a request for indemnification on the building which was not owned by Imagine SE, required four months for the lawyers to negotiate. Despite these challenges, all negotiations were completed in time to transition the school to Democracy Prep for school year 2014-15.

Community Engagement

Imagine SE's consistent communications with its families enabled a relatively smooth transition of students from Imagine SE to Democracy Prep. Imagine SE had hired a crisis consultant to manage parent communication beginning in school year 2012-13 when the school replaced its principal. Since then, updates regarding the Imagine SE's leadership changes, PMF targets, and the selection of Democracy Prep as a restart operator were shared regularly with families through letters and meetings.

In addition to the efforts of Imagine SE, Democracy Prep had a comprehensive communications plan to engage the community around the school. Prior to submitting a bid, Democracy Prep engaged community leaders in conversations focused on understanding the community's views of schools in general and of charter schools specifically.^{xiii} Democracy Prep also engaged families who had previously participated in Imagine SE's focus groups to discuss Democracy Prep's program model, including the length and structure of the school day, and to directly address any potential misperceptions among parents. Finally, Democracy Prep retained Democracy Builders, a parent advocacy organization, to support student recruitment and enrollment.

Democracy Prep re-enrolled 68.3% of Imagine SE's students.^{xiv} In addition, during the first round of the school lottery, Democracy Prep enrolled an additional 25 siblings of current Imagine SE students in the citywide lottery system.

Key Lessons Learned

As these examples illustrate, even within the same city, each restart has unique nuances specific to the schools, their programs and the community they serve. However, a few generalized insights can be gleaned to inform future restarts.

Start early. Several elements of the process are likely to take longer than might be expected and a hurried timeline can have greater consequences for the overall long-term success of the restart. For families served by the founding operator, advance notice of the potential of a restart is critical to allow parents enough time to make an informed decision about re-enrolling, as well as to allow school staff to meaningfully engage parents in the process to select a restart operator. Additionally, both the founding operator and the restart operator need sufficient time to prepare, and once the restart operator is selected, both parties will likely need several months to determine the specifics of the arrangement. Whether the particulars are negotiated during the selection of a restart operator, or through the execution of the formal legal documents, it will take time to work through the necessary details.

A founding operator board can gain additional time by taking a proactive approach. Boards should have clear visibility into how their schools are performing against charter goals, and should understand the implications for underperformance, including closure and restart. Boards typically know well in advance that a charter non-renewal or revocation is a possibility, and planning for a restart scenario can begin at that point. For example, one or more board members can begin discussions and planning for a restart while others within the organization focus on alternatives, such as an internal turnaround. To determine when this type of multi-scenario planning is appropriate, boards should conduct an annual review of performance against charter goals and share the results of the review with PCSB. This gives both the board and the authorizer an early indicator of any potential issues. In addition to conducting their own internal annual review, boards should also carefully examine the results of each five-year review conducted by PCSB. If any serious deficiencies are noted in one of these reviews, or if a campus is rated Tier 3 at any point in the charter term, the board should consider this as grounds to begin multi-scenario planning, including planning for a potential restart.

Conduct a thorough due diligence process. Founding operators and restart operators must carefully review their own priorities and assess what it will take for the restart to be successful.

For the founding operator: how will potential restart operators be assessed? Regardless of whether an informal networking process or a formal RFP is used, a founding operator board must think through how it will evaluate operator quality, and which data points it will need to collect in order to make an informed decision, and to seek PCSB approval. Will there be any elements of the current school model which the founding operator should request that a new operator keep? Engaging the parent community on this question can be helpful. How will potential restart operators' financial and staffing resources be evaluated?

For a potential restart operator: Does the restart operator have the capacity to serve the students well and how will it assess that? And as the restart operator evaluates the existing school program, which elements should be changed and which should be kept, either because they are currently successful, or because the school community is requesting their continuance in some way? Simply reviewing publicly available reports is insufficient. The restart operator needs to have enough information, collected through school visits and from a variety of stakeholders, to ensure they have a clear picture of the current status of the school and their vision for the restart. In addition, the potential restart operator should do an internal review to consider whether it has sufficient staff resources ready for deployment to a restart implementation.

The depth and quality of advance research and planning will assist both parties in the selection and negotiation process, as well as in the implementation of the restart.

Allocate sufficient staff and board capacity to the process. The planning and research described above take significant staff and board resources. Additionally, the selection of a restart operator and the negotiation over legal agreements require staff and board time over a sustained period of several months. A restart operator should ideally have a deep bench of administrative talent to pull from internally to manage the restart. In both of the examples discussed in this report, the restart operators assigned

senior home office staff to manage the restart planning and negotiation, and their involvement and time commitment were critical to the process.

Since restarts are a relatively new policy option for schools and authorizers across the country, the negotiating parties must often take extra staff and board time to create new documents and processes, rather than being able to pull from an array of existing templates.

Balance transparency for families throughout the process with tight coordination on communications between founding and restart operators. The families of students served by the founding operator are a critical stakeholder in the restart process, and the possibility of a school closure or restart can be unnerving for a school community. To make informed choices about their children's education, families need to fully understand the potential scenarios early on, in time to make critical decisions, such as submitting lottery applications for the next school year. On the other hand, if the founding operator gives families too much detail too soon, without coordinating with the restart operator, it can lead to later problems and misunderstandings, including heightened anxiety about the new operator.

Founding operators typically continue to manage daily operations of the school for the remainder of the school year in which a restart is conducted, so by default serve as a point of contact for families even after legal agreements are negotiated. Parents may be uncertain of whether or not to re-enroll their child and have many questions about the new operator. Simultaneously, that period can be a tense, stressful time for staff of the current operator who may be interviewing for positions with the new operator and unsure about their own future at the school.

Coordination between founding operators and restart operators about what to share with families and when is a critical piece of the implementation of the restart. Communication around the re-enrollment process and requirements is particularly sensitive, given that a key goal of a successful restart is to maximize the number of current students who remain with the new operator. Ideally staff from the founding operator and restart operator should confer on a communications plan as soon as the restart operator is selected, and that plan should make explicit how roles and responsibilities are divided between the two parties.

Though the specifics of a restart will vary based on the unique needs of particular programs and communities, these general principles of starting as early as possible, conducting a thoughtful diligence process, dedicating sufficient staff and board time, and coordinating on communications with families should be considered by any operators contemplating restarts.

Appendix I

Key Legal Documents for Restarts

Traditionally, in a charter restart, the founding operator transfers all of its assets to the restart operator in return for a commitment that the restart operator will guarantee seats for all current students. Beyond this basic commitment, remaining elements of the transfer must be negotiated between the two parties.

There are two required fundamental legal documents for a charter school restart:

- **Memorandum of understanding (MOU):** basic, preliminary document that outlines the agreement
- **An asset acquisition agreement or asset purchase agreement:** document which details the specifics of the transaction

These documents should cover the specifics of the restart, including: student transition/re-enrollment processes, school staff employment opportunities, wind-down budgets, and the transfer of any assets or liabilities. Beyond these standard topics, the agreements should also address any unique program elements that the parties agree should be incorporated into the restart. For example, in the case of Democracy Prep and Imagine SE the continuation of single-sex education needed to be included. For ATA and KIPP DC, the agreement specified the continuation of ATA's art program, maintenance of social services, and improvements to the school's facilities.

ⁱ Report from Public Impact and NewSchools Venture Fund entitled "The Role of Charter Restarts in School Reform": http://www.newschools.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/the_role_of_charter_restarts_in_school_reform.pdf

ⁱⁱ DC Public Charter School Board website: <http://www.dcpsb.org/public-charter-school-board>

ⁱⁱⁱ DC Public Charter School Board press release: <http://www.dcpsb.org/charter-board-releases-2014-performance-management-framework-pmf-results>

^{iv} ATA website: http://artandtech.ss3.sharpschool.com/about_a_t_a/mission_statement

^v PCSB found ATA to have met two of three academic performance standards and four of four non-academic performance standards. Additionally, PCSB found ATA to be exemplary in all organizational governance categories and exemplary in six of seven organizational compliance categories. Source: PCSB 2013-2014 Charter Renewal Report for Arts and Technology Academy Public Charter School.

^{vi} The DC CAS is designed to measure the academic proficiency of students in the DC relative to their mastery of the DC Content Standards. The tests are aligned to the English Language Arts and Mathematics standards of DC. Reading and mathematics tests have been operational since 2006 and are administered to students in grades 2-10.

^{vii} PCSB meeting binder and materials: <http://www.livebinders.com/media/get/NzA4MTUxMg==>

^{viii} The lottery set the timeline as current ATA families needed to decide to enter the lottery if they did not want to remain at the restarted school and new families needed to rank the newly formed school on their lottery application, if they were interested in attending the restart in its inaugural year.

^{ix} Total ATA enrollment was 560 for SY 2013-14, excluding students who were retrained and excluding students who were not eligible for reenrollment due to residency.

^x Imagine Schools Inc. operates approximately seventy schools across twelve states. It is a for-profit school network based in Arlington, Virginia.

^{xi} Performance Management Framework, the DC Public Charter School Board's rating system for charter schools. Using a 100-point scale and based on the scores for the academic scoring screen, standard schools are identified as Tier 1 (high-performers), Tier 2 (mid-performers), or Tier 3 (low-performers). Tier 1 schools earn at least 65.0% of the possible points. Tier 2 schools earn between 35.0% and 64.9% of the possible points. Tier 3 schools earn less than 35.0% of the possible points

^{xii} Imagine SE RFP for High Performing Charter School Operator, 2013

^{xiii} Community leaders: ANC Chair, Congress Heights Community Association, Ward 8 Representative to DC School Board

^{xiv} This figure is based on the 436 students in prekindergarten through fifth grade who, assuming promotion to the next grade level, would be eligible to enroll with Democracy Prep.