



Opportunity within the *Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act (H.R. 2218)*

June 17, 2011

The Honorable Duncan Hunter
223 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Hunter:

We applaud your aim within the *Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act* to enable successful charter schools to replicate, expand and serve more students. We appreciate that this legislation encourages rigorous levels of reporting, oversight and accountability for charter school authorizers. We would also like to thank you for increasing the reauthorization from \$256M to \$300M. While demand for high quality charter school seats still significantly exceeds supply, we greatly appreciate this step forward and want to work with you through the legislative process to ensure that we do as much as possible to reach our shared goal of giving all parents who want it the choice to send their child to a high quality public school. **However, as you move to mark up this bill we strongly encourage you to incorporate the ability for high quality charter management organizations operating in more than one state to apply directly to the U.S. Department of Education to seek start-up funding.**

The Knowledge Is Power Program ("KIPP") is a national network of free, open-enrollment, college-preparatory public schools with a track record of preparing students in underserved communities for success in college and in life. Today, the KIPP network is comprised of 99 schools serving more than 28,000 students in 20 states and the District of Columbia. Currently, nearly as many students are on our waitlists as we are able to educate in our classrooms. To meet this growing demand we aspire to open approximately twenty new schools annually. With your support we are on pace to serve over 60,000 students by 2015.

While the role of the federal government is limited when it comes to the work of our schools, there is one federal program that plays an absolutely unique and catalytic role in supporting our dramatic expansion. That program is the Charter Schools Program which provides grants to plan, design and implement new charter schools, as well as to disseminate information on successful charter schools. *Unfortunately, in 2009, only 6 of KIPP's 18 new schools were able to successfully seek federal Charter Schools Program start-up funding due to a host of state-level barriers to accessing it.*

In FY2010, thanks to the Appropriations Committees' interest in growing high quality public education options, a portion of the Charter Schools Program's funding was designated for the replication and expansion of high-performing charter schools. This is something the federal government had never before supported. This \$50M investment by the Congress has allowed 76,000 more students to attend 127 new and 31 expanded charter schools in a dozen charter school networks nation-wide. To put this figure in

perspective, prior to this grant program's inception, it took some twenty years to create 167,000 high quality charter school seats under the traditional state Charter Schools Program approach.¹

As a current grant recipient of the Charter Schools Program Grants for Replication and Expansion of High quality Charter Schools, this funding is supporting the opening and expansion of over 30 KIPP schools in 14 unique communities in 2010 and 2011. We have great concerns, however, that we will again be unable to access start-up funding to grow if this process is left entirely in the hands of the states as currently proposed within the *Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act*. While the bill has many strengths, it puts the expansion of high performing, multi-state charter school networks at risk.

As you move to mark up the *Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act*, we ask that you consider incorporating the opportunity for high quality charter management organizations operating in more than one state to continue to be able to apply directly to the Secretary to replicate and expand. Specifically, we hope you will allow for this competition to continue with ample funding as part of the national activities portion of the bill.

During this difficult economic time when resources are scarce, we are ever-mindful of opportunities to shine a light on measures that will help to ensure that all students have access to a high quality public education. We are confident that helping to drive the expansion of proven high quality charter networks into multiple states is one of the most powerful, catalytic education investments the federal government can make.

Sincerely,



Richard Barth
CEO of KIPP



Mike Feinberg
Co-Founder of KIPP



Dave Levin
Co-Founder of KIPP

cc: U.S. Secretary Arne Duncan
Members of the U.S. House Education and Labor Committee
Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

¹ Public Impact. "Going Exponential: Growing the Charter School Sector's Best." Washington, DC: The Progressive Policy Institute, 2011.