

BREAKTHROUGH

CITIZENS PREP INTERGENERATIONAL SCHOOLS

Alan Roskamm – Written Testimony

Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to discuss Breakthrough Schools and the transformative education efforts happening in Cleveland, Ohio. Breakthrough is a nonprofit charter management organization operating 9 schools, with over 2,500 students, growing to serve almost 7,000 students by 2020. Our student population is 96% minority and 84% low-income. For the 2nd year in a row, Breakthrough is the highest rated charter network in the state of Ohio.

Our network had a unique start, growing out of a collaborative effort by three existing independent charter schools each with a distinct educational model. In 2009, they came together to improve their schools' long-term financial sustainability and to enable growth so that they could serve more children.

As a result of the combined efforts of our students, families, teachers and support staff, the Ohio Department of Education shows our students continuing their record of exceptional academic performance. In 2012-2013, Breakthrough students, on average, outperformed their peers across the city, county, and state in every subject. Breakthrough has grown rapidly - from 4 schools serving 1,100 students in 2011 to 9 schools serving 2,500 students today. Nationally, Breakthrough Schools were recognized as 1st in reading growth and 4th in math growth among urban charter school networks in the United States in a study by the CREDO Institute at Stanford University. The report analyzed student growth in reading and math across 167 charter school networks.

Breakthrough has received national attention when it became 1 of only 9 CMOs in the country to receive start-up and replication funding from the U.S. Department of Education in 2011 and 1 of only 35 grantees in the nation to receive a 2012 Teacher Incentive Fund grant.

Our partnership with families is key to our students' success. Our teachers conduct summer home visits and parent teacher conferences approach 100% participation in many of our schools. Our Through College Program mentors students and their parents in the selection of high-quality college preparatory high schools that best fit their needs. Those efforts culminate in one of my proudest evenings of the year, where the 24 best high schools in Cleveland – independent, parochial, charter and District – all join us for a high school fair, with our parents and children shopping together for the right high school.

At Breakthrough we value our relationship with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Breakthrough schools are currently the only charter schools in the city sponsored by the District. Together, we work towards solutions that benefit children. Breakthrough's principals and a group of District principals meet regularly for professional development and to share best practices. I feel I have a true partner in District CEO Eric Gordon.

We have also collaborated on facilities since 2011 when we purchased four closed school buildings from the district and co-located one of our new schools inside of an existing district

high school. In both instances, these were firsts in Ohio. The co-location arose when the church lease we were counting on fell through just a few weeks before our new west side school was to open. Eric and his Board of Education showed tremendous courage and vision, allowing our elementary school to open in the basement of a District high school. Very quickly, we had CMSD high school students greeting our kindergartners at the door and walking them upstairs to breakfast each morning. When we outgrew the space, the District agreed to a lease of the empty school building next door for only \$1 a year. There is a definite sense on both sides that we really are in this together. Our goal is to create more high-quality seats for children regardless of who owns them.

Our city is best known for our unique collaborative approach to urban education reform. The greatest example of our partnership has been the work with the Mayor's office, the Cleveland chamber of commerce, two of our community foundations, the District and Breakthrough to create and pass the Cleveland Plan: transformative bipartisan legislation that has enabled our city to pursue our shared vision of a portfolio school district offering high quality school options in every neighborhood. Part of the Cleveland Plan included the creation of the Transformation Alliance, a nonprofit organization charged with monitoring the quality of all Cleveland public schools, District and charter, to enable parents to make informed school choices.

Following the Plan's passage, we worked closely with the District, the Mayor's office and the Cleveland Teachers' Union to pass a 15 mill operating levy, the first operating levy to pass in 16 years. Cleveland is only the second city in the country, behind Denver, to allow charter schools to receive a small portion of local tax levy dollars. As I think the Committee can see, in Cleveland all of us have put traditional differences aside for the children's benefit.

Breakthrough is an example of how educational entrepreneurs have created schools that work and then proceeded to replicate to create quality seats for many more children. This phenomenon is taking place across the nation. Breakthrough is one of 24 high-performing charter management organizations that collectively operate more than 400 schools across 53 communities and 23 states, serving 154,000 students. If we operated as a district, we would be the 15th largest and the highest performing urban district in the country. With your ongoing support, we plan collectively to open more than 370 new schools over the next five years and to serve an additional 200,000 students. High-quality charters like those in the Breakthrough network and our peers across the country are proving every day that historically disadvantaged students can learn and succeed.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning and I look forward to your questions.