SB1882 Comments – Presented by City Education Partners

City Education Partners is a non-profit organization in San Antonio, TX that helps to create groundbreaking public schools for our most educationally underserved student populations. Believing in the notion that schools are the unit of change and offering the ability for each school to directly serve its community, we understand the value and importance of Senate Bill 1882. Furthermore, San Antonio has been the highest implementer of these partnerships and thus we have learned a lot. Within our city, we have two districts that are primarily engaging in this work – San Antonio ISD and Edgewood ISD. Below are our responses to the questions posed that represent our experience as a support organization outside of the system in the last 4 years.

Question 5: The stated purpose of these partnerships with charters was to serve as incubators of innovative ideas in how to turn around failing campuses. Have any successful programs been identified that can be replicated by struggling campuses?

While this is absolutely the right question to ask, it is still too soon to see results at the turnaround campuses where partnerships have been established. However, what we can look at is whether or not the conditions within the partnerships will enable student growth and achievement to occure.

SAISD has implemented many 1882 partnerships but most of their focus has been on the replication of great options. The Democracy Prep partnership was the first turnaround partner at Stewart Elementary. This was definitely innovative in that it was a contract between a fully autonomous, out of state charter management organization and teachers at the campus are now on at-will teacher contracts. However, because of the backlash from the teacher unions and a lack of community engagement efforts, this partnership style has not replicated again by SAISD. In it's first year of management, there weren't significant gains in student growth or achievement as determined by TEA, however we did see strong levels of student engagement and positive culture upon walking the campus.

The Relay Lab Schools partnership with SAISD was innovative in that the goal was twofold – develop high quality teachers and increase student outcomes. This partnership has been successful on developing teachers, but the evidence of student growth and achievement also has yet to be seen. If this program were to be replicated, the key principles to remember are that teacher training with a residency model can be expensive and ensuring they are supported in finding good placement sites after their training is critical.

Edgewood ISD has implemented two partnerships for failing campuses and that is with PreK4SA and with Texas A&M University San Antonio. PreK4SA is working with just grades pk-2 and at Gardendale and hence aren't tested grade levels. TAMUSA is working with Gus Garcia, which is a failing campus, but this is their first year and results haven't been demonstrated yet. Moreover, TAMUSA has never managed schools before so their success is undetermined. Given the campus is also implementing ACE, EISD is

trying all of the possibilities at campuses and there is a possibility of too many things happening at one campus.

Question 6: Have certain types of new partnerships been more successful than other types of alternative educational arrangements?

The partnerships that we have seen to be most successful are ones in which the district and operating partner are completely aligned on the level of autonomy and support that the district expects. We have seen that the partnerships with the network principal initiative in SAISD with strong principals now taking over multiple schools has been successful. Schools that are a part of this group include the Advanced Learning Academy, Young Women's Leadership Academy and Gates ES/Cameron ES. Within these relationships, the principal already had a partnership with another school and has been able to oversee multiple campuses. However, at Bowden ES, we saw that the leader was managing two different models with his initial campus focusing on project-based learning and the other a turnaround school. From our vantage point, due to the lack in alignment at the two campuses, this partnership has not demonstrated the same amount of success as the others.

With Edgewood ISD, their partnership with PreK4SA has created a positive impact at Gardendale ES, which had previously been a failing campus.   The partnership allowed for additional professional development and support. This is to date presenting as a positive partnership.

New partnerships that have seen the most success in terms of student achievement have been campuses that are starting one or two grades at a time rather than working through a full school turnaround. Given that it is incredibly difficult to fill in 2 to 3 years of learning gaps, the turnaround work takes longer time than we would expect to see outcomes and the 2-year waiver on accountability may not be sufficient time to see results in achievement, rather than just growth.

Question 7: What type of resources (financial and other types of supports) have been necessary to implement new turn-around partnerships?

With the 1882 partnerships overall, the biggest gap that we have seen is the need for district support to also be implemented. Within these partnerships, operators are required to receive managing control of finances, human resources and instructional decisions at campuses. However, these departments within central office are not set up to support this change. For this reason, innovation officers will sign contracts and then it takes years for systems to get in line with agreements already signed. This year, TEA has implemented additional support like ERS for SGS districts, which has been helpful and much needed. However, there is still not alignment across the state about human resource autonomy. The only way to get around this is to change teacher contracts and districts are still very hesitant to take on the unions and staff. There has to be a concerted effort to share the value in having the ability to hire and fire staff.

Another support that we feel is necessary is a full year of planning time to launch a partnership. Leaders and organizations that want to serve as operating partners need allocated resources and time to not only prepare their charter application but also prepare for school launch.   To do community engagement well and develop an innovative model, if you aren't an organization that already has this capacity, you need guidance and support with this. For this reason, we believe that support organizations for operators are critical. Organizations that don't have a strong plan or a strong community base are being authorized to run campuses and then not making significant changes at the campus. If changes don't occur as a result of the partnership, it seems futile to engage. It can actually be detrimental because the responsibility of outcomes is placed on an entity that isn't prepared to take it on.

Lastly, for new organizations, back office supports that are sometimes offered by regional service centers could be strengthened to create faith in the autonomy of organizations to manage finances and hr. Districts often don't want to give up these services for fear of mismanagement so district management strong/more flexible, would allow for operators to have the autonomy the law is granting to them.

Question 8: What measures of "success" are being used to know if these partnerships are working and sustainable?

Given TEA student achievement data is not yet available for most partnerships, what we can tangibly see for measures of success are campuses that have been able to experience a shift in both student and adult culture. We have seen with many partnership campuses that have engaged operators, that schools are experiencing positive changes. At both the Relay Lab School campuses and Democracy Prep campuses – staff and community share their sentiment that the culture feels much calmer and focused on learning. This is also true of the Prek4sa campus. There are some operators where nothing seems to have changed and we see this heavily with the TCIS IB partnership.

The other success metric we could use is NWEA MAP data, which many partners are using but aside from our grantees, we don't get access to these results. From our grantees, we have seen double digit growth from beginning to end of year at the Relay Lab School campuses.

Question 9: Can programs that have been deemed successful at these low-rated campuses been replicated at other campuses within the district? If not, why? If yes, have similar results in increased student achievement been realized?

I believe turnaround partnerships can be replicated although we haven't seen it yet. With Edgewood, TAMUSA has already applied to replicate their model at additional questions. Our biggest concern around the replication of turnaround partnerships is the immediacy in which folks are attempting to start them. Without data, it is not advisable to replicate these partnerships because then districts are turning over schools to operators that may have results elsewhere but not with their students.

Most importantly, no school and particularly a turnaround school can be successful without deep community and parent engagement. It is critical that even organizations with success in other markets be required to demonstrate their ability to create partnerships and engage parents. An operating partner is not the solution alone in communities that are serving almost 100% educationally underserved students. It will take much more than an operator and that means the focus needs to be on a school by school solution rather than a generic replication across cities and states. If we just create state-wide operators that are spread too thin and not focused on individual campuses, we will essentially just be creating districts that now have no boundaries. It is critical that we not lose sight of the value of 1882 being community driven solutions on a campus by campus basis.

Lastly, while previous turnaround experience is important for operators, it is also integral to fund leaders that are from the community to engage in the 1882 work. It will be critical for leaders to have the supports necessary to take on the autonomy and decision making that can allow them to create change at the school level.