

GOMPERS & KEILLER CHARTER SCHOOLS

Applicant: California Charter School Association (CCSA)
Grant Request: \$200,000
Last Grant: \$25,000 (12/04)

Purpose of Project/Program:

- To enable two inner-city middle schools to dramatically improve their student outcomes by supporting them during their initial transformation into charter schools.
- To provide a model for reconstituting chronically underperforming schools.

Program Description:

- Gompers and Keiller Middle Schools, which had both been deemed “failing schools” under No Child Left Behind, were granted charters at the beginning of March 2005. They are expected to open with completely revamped programs and systems in September 2005.
- Both schools generated tremendous parent, community and even teacher support for their charter proposals. As a result, they were able to overcome several attempts by members of the San Diego Unified School Board to sabotage their efforts to go charter.
- Both schools are working with local universities to find ways to dramatically improve their performance.
 - UCSD is helping Gompers to adapt the Preuss School model.
 - USD is helping Keiller adopt new teaching methods and student support systems.
- CCSA has recommended a team of experienced charter school operators and legal and business experts to assist both schools with all aspects of converting to independent status, including:
 - Developing their business plans
 - Establishing their financial and business management systems
 - Preparing all of their legal documents
 - Creating and implementing parent/community engagement plans
 - Coaching their leadership teams and governing boards through the transition.
- Both schools are struggling to find the resources needed to accomplish their radical transformations.
 - Neither school received start-up funding through the Public Charter School Grant Program, and it is unclear what, if any, carryover funds they will receive from the district.
 - Funds are needed to: 1) pay for the technical assistance related to charter school start-up, 2) bring faculty and staff on board over the summer to develop and implement the new programs, and 3) compensate the universities for their faculty involvement in the projects. (Note: both universities are providing substantial in-kind support.)
- The current proposal to Girard will help Gompers and Keiller through their initial start-up phase and will build the capacity they need to successfully pursue other start-up grants such as the High Quality Charter Grants funded by Walton Family Foundation.

Population/Area Served:

- Both schools are located in Southeast San Diego.
- Gompers has 1000 students; Keiller has 543.
- Both schools serve populations that are predominantly low-income, minority children.

Outcomes:

- Improved school performance on a variety of measures (student achievement, parental involvement, etc.)
- Evidence that charters can successfully turnaround failing schools.

(over)

Timeline/Milestones:

- The new boards of both schools will be in place by the end of April.
- The schools will officially convert to charter status in late June.
- The new school year begins in September.

Budget/Costs:

- A preliminary estimates are that it will take at least \$300,000 per school in start-up costs. (That figure does not yet include compensation for university faculty who will be working with the schools over the summer.)
- At the moment, the only known funds the two schools have to cover these costs are the \$20,000 High Quality Charter Planning Grants each school has received through CCSA. The schools are awaiting word from the district regarding carryover funds that might transfer to the new charters, but they are not expecting the amounts to be significant.

Strengths:

- The two principals, Vince Riveroll and Patty Ladd, are talented, dedicated and very receptive to advice.
- CCSA has assembled a top-notch team of consultants to assist the schools with their start-up activities.
- The university teams have substantial expertise and are committed to helping the schools be successful.

Challenges/Concerns:

- The timeframe for transforming these schools is unbelievably tight. Most charter conversions take at least 18 months.
- At this point, the cost of transforming these schools exceeds known sources of funding.

Comments:

- Over the last two months, I have worked closely with the leaders of both schools, their university partners, CCSA and some of the potential consultants to help them clarify their action plans, their funding needs and possible sources of assistance. The task of turning around these schools is going to be monumental, but the people who have accepted the challenge to do it are worthy of our trust and support.