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HOW FAR WE’VE COME
A Letter from the CEO, Greg Thompson

Tennessee has become one of the most exciting places in the nation for education reform. As one of the first states to win a Race to the Top grant (totaling $500 million), Tennessee has enacted bold reforms around teacher recruitment, training, compensation, and retention; created an Achievement School District to transform the lowest-performing schools in the state; developed a strong STEM initiative; and made sweeping changes to the state’s charter school law. What’s more, the Memphis City School District received one of the largest grants the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has made to date (the $90 million Teacher Effectiveness Initiative); Nashville was one of nine cities in the nation to be selected for the Gates District-Charter Compact; and the state was awarded a federally funded grant of more than $8 million for charter school expansion.

It is within this context of reform that the Tennessee Charter School Incubator (TCSI) was created. Recognizing the catalytic role public charter schools were playing in boosting student achievement in such cities as New Orleans and New York City—and seeking to capitalize on Tennessee’s growing receptivity to charter schools—Nashville Mayor Karl Dean created TCSI not only to attract high-quality charter operators from around the country to the state, but also to provide a breadth of support services to talented, local leaders starting new schools, and put thousands of students on the path to college. TCSI partnered with the Charter School Growth Fund (CSGF) in the summer of 2010 to build a $30 million fund—composed of public and private funding—to establish 40 charter schools in Tennessee (20 each in Nashville and Memphis) over a five-year period. The incubator would create 16 single-campus charter schools through a competitive fellowship training program, and CSGF would create 24 schools
by investing in the growth of charter management organizations (CMOs). The two organizations’ efforts would not only establish a solid foundation of high-performing, college-preparatory charter schools in Tennessee’s two largest cities, but would also spur additional education reforms across the state.

Two years into its work, TCSI is proud of how much has already been accomplished. We’ve launched three schools, have an additional three approved to open in fall 2013, and have four fellows who will be applying to open schools in 2014. Our first two schools, Liberty Collegiate Academy and Nashville Prep, are among the highest-performing charters in the state—outperforming the Metro Nashville Public Schools system in every subject, and outperforming the state in a number of subjects despite having significantly higher percentages of poor and minority students. We’ve also created an innovative fellowship training track, the Education Entrepreneurs Fellowship, which will prepare high-capacity leaders to turn around low-performing district schools in the state’s Achievement School District through a charter model. Over the next several years, the incubator will provide intense training and school launch support to a group of fellows who endeavor to turn around some of the most challenging public schools in Nashville and Memphis. TCSI believes this is one of the first programs in the nation that focuses on training charter school leaders for a turnaround environment, which will create a robust pipeline of education leaders for Nashville and Memphis.

We are grateful for the support of our donors, who have not only generously provided the financial resources for our work, but have also played a strong advocacy role for the incubator and the Tennessee charter school sector. We hope you will enjoy reading this report, and we look forward to partnering with you in the years ahead.

Yours in the effort,

CEO, Tennessee Charter School Incubator
THE TENNESSEE CHARter SCHOOL INCUBATOR
Since the December 2009 announcement of its creation as the first statewide charter incubator in the country, TCSI has been on a fast track to its goal: to close the education achievement gap in Tennessee, beginning with the creation of 16 high-quality, public charter schools in high-need areas of Memphis and Nashville by 2015. Developing the next generation of turnaround, charter, and charter management leaders to support the growth of excellent educational options for Tennessee students is TCSI’s central work. TCSI has two tracks for potential school leaders: the Building Excellent Schools Fellowship and the Education Entrepreneurs Fellowship. By training both new and experienced leaders to develop high-performing charter schools and offering them ongoing advocacy and support, the incubator is providing Tennessee students with greater access to schools that prepare them for success in college and beyond, while pioneering a model of education reform for the state and nation.

TCSI provides support in three key areas of charter school development: training; incubation, including help recruiting high-quality boards and school staff; and launch, especially to entrepreneur fellows, with communications and operational support in the early launch stages.

The incubator partners with Building Excellent Schools (BES) to give promising school leaders two years of training and incubation support, helping them to create a new, fresh-start, high-performing school from the ground up. BES fellows receive charter application assistance, facilities support, management and operations training, and assistance with staff recruitment and hiring. Fellows visit the country’s highest-performing charter schools, where they hone their leadership skills in extensive residencies before returning to Tennessee to design their own schools and write their charter school applications with TCSI help. Once applications are approved, fellows get TCSI help with coaching and tactical support as they prepare to lead their schools.

Academic Benchmarks for TCSI Schools

+ 90 percent of TCSI-launched schools will be in the top quartile of open-enrollment schools in their host district within three years (as evidenced by performance on state tests).
+ Students attending TCSI-launched schools for at least two years will score proficient or advanced on state tests.
+ Students attending TCSI-launched schools will outperform district averages and the averages of neighboring schools.
+ New schools launched by TCSI will have value-add scores (grade-level/subject) that exceed those of neighboring schools, their host district, and the state.
+ Students attending TCSI-launched schools will gain at least 5 NCES (normal curve equivalents) per year on nationally norm-referenced assessments, and will achieve at least 1.5 to 2 years of learning growth each year.
+ New TCSI-launched schools that serve high schoolers will send at least 90 percent of their students to college.
The Education Entrepreneurs Fellowship, begun in August 2012, provides intensive training, incubation, and early-launch support to experienced school leaders interested in transforming persistently low-performing schools. Schools targeted for turnaround are those in the state’s Achievement School District, a non-geographic district composed of the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools across the state.

This two-year fellowship starts with a rigorous, competency-based selection process. New fellows undergo a rigorous 360-degree assessment based on the TCSI School Leadership Framework. The results are used to develop an individualized leadership plan for each fellow, within a core curriculum of high-impact training modules, visits to the highest-performing charter schools in the country, residencies in high-performing charter schools, skill-based practice clinics, and executive leadership coaching. Fellows receive hands-on assistance in developing their business plan and charter application and through the authorization process, as well as assistance with facilities, community engagement, and recruitment. After their schools are authorized, fellows get incubation and early-launch support from TCSI through ongoing turnaround leadership training, professional development grants, school quality reviews, and subsidized interim assessments aligned to state tests.

TCSI sets high academic benchmarks for its fellows’ schools (see sidebar on previous page). TCSI expects that from the start, its schools will accelerate students’ growth and achievement, outpacing students’ learning in neighboring schools, their host district, and the state. The incubator also sets expectations that within two years of attending a TCSI-incubated school, students will score proficient or advanced on state tests, achieve at least 1.5 years of growth for every year in attendance, and be on pace to attend college ready for success.

**TCSI Staff**

With offices in Memphis and Nashville, TCSI has grown to a core staff of five (below), supported by a five-member board of directors (right).

**THE TCSI TEAM**

**Greg Thompson**, chief executive officer, previously worked as the education program director for the Hyde Family Foundations in Memphis, where he oversaw Hyde’s K–12 education portfolio. Thompson also participated in the Education Pioneers Program, and was a summer fellow with a San Francisco-based charter management organization.

**Justin Testerman**, chief operating officer, had been director of education programs for Volunteers of America in Minnesota, and has long served as a board member of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers and as a charter school specialist in the Minnesota Department of Education.

**TCSI Board of Directors**

Bill DeLoache, chairman, is the executive director of the Joe C. Davis Foundation.

Michael Stewart, secretary and treasurer, is a lawyer with Bass, Berry & Sims PLC.

Charles Gerber is the chief executive officer of Gerber/Taylor Capital Advisors, Inc.

Pitt Hyde is the founder of AutoZone.

Joe Williams is the executive director of Democrats for Education Reform.
Testerman began his career in education as a middle school teacher in Newark, N.J., through Teach For America.

**Rebecca A. Lieberman**, chief talent strategy officer, was the founding dean of St. HOPE Leadership Academy Charter School in New York, and previously worked as an assistant principal in New Jersey and as the academic enrichment director at The Harpeth Hall School in Nashville.

**Hunter Schimpff**, special projects manager, previously worked in Nashville Mayor Karl Dean’s Office of Children and Youth, where he focused on adult literacy and early childhood policy for Metropolitan Nashville/Davidson County. He also taught high school math and first grade at an international school in Buenos Aires.

**Michelle Doane**, fellowship coordinator, manages the operations of the Education Entrepreneurs Fellowship. Prior to working at TCSI, Doane served as the education and community engagement manager at the Nashville Symphony.

**TCSI Funding**

TCSI is committed to investing approximately $13.9 million in the Tennessee charter school sector, launching up to 16 new, college-preparatory charter schools in Nashville and Memphis, as well as providing support to existing charter schools. Its funding comes from local Tennessee foundations, the Walton Family Foundation, and the state of Tennessee’s Race to the Top program. The incubator also plans to raise an additional $700,000 in Nashville in 2012 and 2013 to support its charter school launches through 2015. TCSI spends about $500,000 to $600,000 on each fellow and his or her school, including training the leaders, and providing support services and launch support.
ACCOMPLISHMENTS
2010–2013
The First Schools: Early Results Show Breakout Success

Through the BES fellowship, TCSI supported its first fellows in creating and launching two public charter schools covering grades 5–12 that opened their doors in the 2011–12 school year: Liberty Collegiate Academy and Nashville Preparatory Academy. The schools serve some of the highest-need student populations in Nashville, and in the short time they have been open, have already outperformed district and state averages on state achievement tests in math, reading/ELA, and science (see tables and more detailed information throughout the following pages). In addition, TCSI supported the creation and launch of a Memphis elementary school that began serving students in 2012: Aurora Collegiate Academy.

Student Enrollment at TCSI’s First Two Schools: Nashville Prep and Liberty Collegiate

In 2011–12, nearly 93 percent of students enrolled at Nashville Prep and 73 percent of students enrolled at Liberty Collegiate were African-American, compared with 46 percent in the district as a whole, and 24 percent across the state.

Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity, 2011–12

Enrollment data for Nashville Prep and Liberty Collegiate are for fifth-grade students; data for MNPS and the State of Tennessee include K–12. (Source: Tennessee Department of Education 2012 State Report Card.)

- % Asian/Pacific Islander
- % Hispanic
- % White
- % African American
In 2011–12, 86 percent of students enrolled at Nashville Prep and 91 percent of students enrolled at Liberty Collegiate were economically disadvantaged, compared with 72 percent in the district as a whole, and 59 percent across the state.

**Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students, 2011–12**

Enrollment data for Nashville Prep and Liberty Collegiate are for fifth-grade students; data for MNPS and the State of Tennessee include K–12. (Source: Tennessee Department of Education 2012 State Report Card.)
In 2011–12, economically disadvantaged students at Nashville Prep and Liberty Collegiate outperformed their economically disadvantaged peers in Metro Nashville Public Schools by a wide margin in every subject. Economically disadvantaged students at both schools outperformed their peers across the state in math, reading/ELA, science, and social studies; economically disadvantaged students at Nashville Prep also outperformed the state in writing.

In 2011–12, students with disabilities at Nashville Prep outperformed their peers in Metro Nashville Public Schools and the state by a wide margin in every subject. Students with disabilities at Liberty Collegiate outperformed their peers in Metro Nashville Public Schools in social studies and writing.

### TCAP Results from TCSI’s First Two Schools: Nashville Prep and Liberty Collegiate

#### 2012 TCAP Achievement: Economically Disadvantaged Students — 5th grade

(Source: Tennessee Department of Education 2012 State Report Card.)

- Nashville Prep
- Liberty Collegiate
- Metro Nashville Public Schools
- Tennessee

#### 2012 TCAP Achievement: Students with Disabilities — 5th grade

(Source: Tennessee Department of Education 2012 State Report Card.)

- Nashville Prep
- Liberty Collegiate
- Metro Nashville Public Schools
- Tennessee

13.3% of Nashville Prep students are students with disabilities, and 11.6% of Liberty Collegiate students are students with disabilities. (Source: E-mail correspondence with Metro Nashville Public Schools, November 2, 2012.)
In 2011–12, students at Nashville Prep outperformed their fifth-grade peers across the district and the state in every tested subject. Liberty Collegiate students outperformed the district in all subjects and bested their peers across the state in math.
LIBERTY COLLEGIATE ACADEMY

As one of the first TCSI fellows, Liberty Collegiate founder and principal Linda Lentz came to East Nashville with a Teach for America background and a successful job as the founding dean of students at Gary Comer College Prep, part of the highly successful Noble Street charter network in Chicago.

Lentz recruited Liberty’s first students the old-fashioned way: by knocking on the doors of eligible fourth-graders. Her first class of 100 fifth-graders entered the school reading on average at a third-grade level, and included 22 functional non-readers. Under Lentz’s leadership, the school set high expectations for fast progress, using a combination of longer school days and years, a math and literacy focus, an emphasis on discipline and behavior, and tutoring targeting each student’s needs.

Liberty, like all schools supported by TCSI, keeps its students focused on college from day one, with homerooms named after teachers’ alma maters and frequent college visits. By adding a grade each year, Lentz intends to provide students with smooth transitions to a middle and high school that maintain the college focus. From the start, students learn the behavior expectations behind the school’s core values of Respect, Integrity, Grit, Optimism, and Risk (RIGOR), as the school focuses on building a supportive community that celebrates students’ academic achievements.

Liberty’s students attend school 185 days a year (10 more than traditional public schools), from 7:30 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. Monday through Thursday, with individual and small-group tutoring from 4:15 to 5 p.m. On Fridays, students are released early to give teachers time for professional development. During the school day, they spend more than 100 minutes per day each in math and literacy instruction. Additionally, Liberty offers a variety of extracurricular activities, such as school clubs, basketball and lacrosse, and choir.

RESULTS

In its first year, Liberty Collegiate Academy’s academic focus has paid off: The school outscored Metro Nashville Public Schools in every subject tested on the state TCAP (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program) achievement test. The school also outperformed the state in math.

Economically disadvantaged students at Liberty Collegiate scored far above their peers in the district and across the state, with nearly 67 percent of students at the school scoring proficient or advanced in math in the school’s first year, compared to just 39 percent in Metro Nashville and 45 percent across the state. Liberty’s economically disadvantaged students outperformed the district by more than 21 percentage points in science, 14 percentage points in reading/ELA, 11 percentage points in social studies, and 3 percentage points in writing.
2012 TCAP Achievement: All Students – 5th grade
(Source: Tennessee Department of Education 2012 State Report Card.)

- Liberty Collegiate
- Metro Nashville Public Schools

2012 TCAP Achievement: Economically Disadvantaged Students – 5th grade
91% of Liberty Collegiate students are economically disadvantaged.
(Source: Tennessee Department of Education 2012 State Report Card.)

- Liberty Collegiate
- Metro Nashville Public Schools
**2012 TCAP Achievement: Students with Disabilities – 5th grade**

(Source: Tennessee Department of Education 2012 State Report Card.)

11.6% of Liberty Collegiate students are students with disabilities. (Source: E-mail correspondence with Metro Nashville Public Schools, November 2, 2012.)

- Liberty Collegiate
- Metro Nashville Public Schools

Students with disabilities at Liberty Collegiate scored above their peers in the district in social studies and writing.

**GOING FORWARD**

New charter schools typically struggle to find and afford adequate facilities, but TCSI created a novel approach to remove this burden for Liberty and schools that follow: It leased an abandoned, 4,800-square-foot building from the city of Nashville and added 5,000 square feet, providing adequate space for Liberty’s first two years. In fall 2013, the school will move to a larger facility, allowing another TCSI school, Nashville Classical, to take its place.
NASHVILLE PREPARATORY ACADEMY

Leader Ravi Gupta opened Nashville Prep with a bold target: Despite the fact that its incoming fifth-graders were working, on average, at a third-grade level, Nashville Prep would beat the results of Williamson County schools—the top-ranked in the state, in one of the wealthiest counties in the nation—in all subjects in two years. After just one year, it’s already done that in math.

Gupta has created a no-excuses school that bested every other Nashville charter school in math, language arts, science, and social studies, and performed at achievement levels comparable to Nashville’s selective academic magnet schools. Moreover, a study by the Center for Research on Education (CREDO) at Stanford University that uses a distinct methodology to examine school performance by match—comparing schools with similar demographics—showed that Nashville Prep was the highest-performing charter school in Tennessee in 2011–12.

Like other TCSi schools, Nashville Prep maintains a tight focus on college readiness. The school day runs from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., and the year for 190 days—and includes every-other-Saturday school. Each day, students receive more than two hours of literacy and math instruction each, as well as an hour of enrichment activities, such as chess club, chorus, drama, dance, basketball, and journalism. Despite the long days and intensity required of teachers, the school had more than 800 applications for its 10 founding staff positions, and every person who was offered a job accepted it.

In addition to its rigorous academic focus, Nashville Prep is dedicated to character education and discipline. Parents clearly like what it has offered in its early years; according to a survey done at the end of 2011 (with 82 percent of families responding), more than 90 percent of parents were very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of instruction, academic standards and expectations, quality of teachers, expectations of guardians, school safety, and the program overall. Nearly all said they chose the school because of its academic quality, and more than half chose it because of its discipline.

RESULTS

Nashville Prep’s achievement results on the 2012 TCAP exams far exceeded fifth-grade averages in Metro Nashville Public Schools. In the school’s first year, it outscored the district by nearly 34 percentage points in math and more than 38 percentage points in science. In math, Nashville Prep students also bested Williamson County—the wealthiest county in the state. Students at Nashville Prep outscored their peers across the state in every tested TCAP subject.

Economically disadvantaged students at Nashville Prep significantly outscored their peers in the district and across the state, with more than 77 percent of students at the school scoring proficient or advanced in math in the school’s first year, compared to 39 percent in Metro Nashville and 45 percent across the state. Nashville Prep’s economically disadvantaged students outperformed their district

AT A GLANCE

Nashville Prep and Founder Ravi Gupta

330 10th Avenue North, Nashville

• Opened August 2011 with 100 fifth-graders
• Will ultimately serve 560 students in grades 5–12

Ravi Gupta shifted into education after working as special assistant to Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and as special assistant to Barack Obama’s chief campaign strategist, David Axelrod, during his final year at Yale Law School. While still an undergraduate, Gupta launched a scholarship fund for Ghanaian children and spent summers teaching English and other subjects in Ghana.
Students with disabilities at Nashville Prep significantly outscored their peers in the district and state in every subject, with more than 73 percent of students with disabilities scoring proficient or advanced compared to 43 percent in Metro Nashville and 44 percent across the state. Nashville Prep’s students with disabilities outperformed their district peers by more than 45 percentage points in reading/ELA, 73 percentage points in science, 36 percentage points in social studies, and 18 percentage points in writing.
GOING FORWARD

Nashville Prep holds classes on the Avon-Williams downtown campus of Tennessee State University. The facility is a temporary space for the first two years of the school, and Nashville Prep will move into a larger facility to accommodate its student body as it adds a grade each year.
AURORA COLLEGIATE ACADEMY

With a facilities-sharing partnership with the Boys and Girls Club in north Memphis, initiated and facilitated by TCSI, Aurora Collegiate Academy founder Ciji Pittman has ensured that her students have options beyond the end of the school day. The club’s Ira Samelson Jr. site in the Raleigh neighborhood of Memphis now houses a modular campus for Aurora, and the club’s staff oversees students before and after school, giving them the chance to play, exercise in the gym, and use the computer lab for homework. While in class, students focus on literacy, with more than 13 hours of literacy instruction each week. Students attend school on an extended schedule from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday–Thursday, with an early release on Fridays for focused staff development time.

Pittman is working to create a culture of PRIDE: Personal Responsibility, Respect, Integrity, Determination, and Excellence. Aurora promises student visits to at least six colleges and civic or historical sites, along with enrichment courses such as art, music, and technology.
2013–14: Expanding Our Impact

Following the successful launches of its first fellows’ schools, TCST will dramatically expand its impact by supporting the opening and operations of three more BES fellows’ schools for the 2013–14 school year. These schools’ charters have been approved by their authorizer, Metro Nashville Public Schools. The schools’ leaders will receive assistance from TCST through their start-up phase and early operations in such areas as recruiting high-quality school staff, student recruitment, communications, facilities, and operations support.

INTREPID COLLEGE PREP

Under leader Mia Howard, Intrepid College Prep will offer students an extra area of focus beyond reading, writing, math, and science: financial literacy. It plans to hire “Blue Chip” teachers who focus on the school’s PRIDE values: Professionalism, Rigor, Initiative, Discipline and Endurance.

Intrepid students will attend school from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. over a 190-day school year. Students will receive at least three and a half hours of literacy and reading instruction daily.

NASHVILLE CLASSICAL

At Nashville Classical, Charlie Friedman aims to create an educational experience focused on the classics, with literacy at its core, under the belief that “college preparation starts in kindergarten.” That means putting both character and academics “FIRST”—by instilling students with values of Focus, Integrity, Resilience, Scholarship, and Team.

Under Friedman’s model, students will attend school from 7:45 a.m. to 4 p.m., with three hours in the morning devoted to literacy, plus another 45 minutes in the afternoon on writing. The school will be housed for its first two years in the TCST-provided incubation site now used by Liberty Collegiate.
PURPOSE PREPARATORY ACADEMY

Purpose Preparatory Academy, with Lagra Newman at its helm, will focus on literacy as it begins to prepare its first class of kindergarteners in North Nashville for college.

At Purpose Prep, students will focus on how to “rise with Purpose”: with Respect, Integrity, Self-Determination, and Excellence. In the course of a school day beginning at 7:50 a.m. and ending at 4 p.m., they will spend three hours on literacy instruction in the mornings, plus writing in the afternoon. Students will also have a longer school year, at 185 days.

2014 PLANS

Building Excellent Schools Fellow Jack Vuylsteke will found Memphis Rise Academy, which will open its doors in August 2014. After visiting and studying the highly acclaimed Noble Street charter school network in Chicago, Vuylsteke successfully implemented a “no-excuses” program at his Teach For America post at the Cleveland NJROTC High School in St. Louis. He also devised an advising system for his high school that combined Noble Street’s college and achievement focus with Cleveland’s structure and discipline. His success led another nearby high school to replicate his system; he looks forward to bringing a similar high-performing model to Memphis.

His professional experience also includes serving as the operations manager for the TFA Institute, an English learning team leader for TFA, and an AP professional development coordinator for St. Louis Public Schools.
Education Entrepreneurs Fellows

TCSI selected two outstanding fellows for its first class in 2012, and anticipates that four more fellows will be selected in 2013.

TURNAROUND FOCUS FELLOW: BOBBY WHITE

Bobby White knows Memphis City Schools inside and out. A graduate of Frayser High School, where he was a football star, and a Memphis teacher and administrator since 2000, White came to Frayser’s Westside Middle School in 2009, when the school was one of the lowest-performing in the state. Of the 14 schools in the Frayser cluster in Memphis, 12 rank in the state’s bottom 5 percent. Under White’s principalship, Westside saw double-digit academic gains for several consecutive years. White accepted TCSI’s first turnaround fellowship to get the training needed to develop a high-performing charter school in the Frayser cluster. As part of his training, he served in a residency with the Achievement School District as its head of community development and partnership during the summer and early fall of 2012.

Under the Education Entrepreneurs Fellowship, which has included a month-long residency at the highly successful charter network Yes Prep, White will work to build a board of directors and submit a charter school application to the ASD in April 2013, with the goal of being matched to take over his alma mater, Frayser High.

CMO FOCUS FELLOW: TODD DICKSON

The media spotlight that followed Todd Dickson from California to Nashville trumpeted the arrival of a charter school “superstar,” who plans to start a charter school network of eight to 10 schools. After a successful career as a real estate broker, Dickson found his life’s calling in education, which led him to the economically and racially diverse Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood, CA. Summit Prep has seen nearly all its graduates since 2007 accepted to four-year colleges; Newsweek magazine called the school one of the top 10 transformational schools in the country, and it was featured in the “Waiting for Superman” documentary. Dickson took on the leadership at Summit knowing he wanted to open his own charter school one day, and a tour of Summit that he gave to Nashville Mayor Karl Dean started a conversation that eventually led him to do so in Nashville.

Dickson entered the TCSI fellowship in 2012, which will prepare him to start a network of high-performing charter schools in Nashville beginning in 2014.
Other Incubator Support Services

TCSI does not stop supporting its fellows after their two years end; new school leaders receive early-launch support and academic, operations, and governance support in the early years. For example:

+ **FACILITIES**: TCSI provides direct facilities and financing support to new school leaders, enabling them to focus more of their work on their schools’ programs and students’ needs.
  - Overcoming one of the biggest stumbling blocks for new charter schools, TCSI, with the help of the mayor’s office, leased from Nashville an abandoned Head Start building and rehabilitated its interior for one of its first fellows to use for two years, until her school, Liberty Collegiate, outgrows the space as it adds grades. At that point, another fellow will use the space for his new school, and another fellow two years after that.
  - Working with the Charter School Development Corporation (CSDC), a national charter facilities developer and lender, the incubator will create the Tennessee Charter School Loan Fund by spring 2013. This credit enhancement fund will help the incubator’s new schools, and potentially other schools, obtain facilities financing. This fund should be in place in time to help Purpose Prep and Intrepid with their facilities. The CSDC will also work with Liberty to lease and rehabilitate a new facility for the school to move into, and it will serve as a developer for both Liberty and Nashville Prep, assisting them with financing and credit enhancements.

+ **TALENT AND STUDENT RECRUITMENT**: Recognizing that the talent in the school building is one of the greatest factors contributing to its success, TCSI offers fellows assistance in recruiting and hiring excellent teachers. It also hosts a robust charter school job board for Tennessee charter schools. In addition, TCSI helps leaders identify and recruit their first class of students by providing, for example, staff time and funding to place radio ads and conduct door-to-door canvassing.

+ **BOARD DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING**: Charter school governing boards, which hold a school’s charter, are crucial to its healthy operations and long-term success. TCSI helps fellows find talented professionals to volunteer for their school’s board, and offers ongoing training and development opportunities to help board members understand and fill their governing roles effectively.

+ **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**: TCSI has provided this for leaders, teachers, and staff, including site visits to and training from high-performing charter networks.

+ **COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS SUPPORT**: TCSI helps its fellows publicize to local funders and supporters what their schools do and their results.
Additionally, TCSI provides services and funding to support the overall charter school sector in Tennessee — both those run by its fellows and existing charter schools throughout the state. For example:

**INVESTING IN ONGOING IMPROVEMENT OF EXISTING CHARTER SCHOOLS:**
- TCSI provides services to existing charter schools chosen through a competitive RFP and grant process, including school reviews, board training and development, and recruiting assistance. In 2011 and 2012, TCSI funded school reviews for a dozen Nashville and Memphis charter schools, focusing on school culture, school leadership, teaching and learning, assessment, finance, operations, and governance.
- TCSI brought EdTec (a well-regarded charter school back-office company) to Tennessee, helping to establish relationships between EdTec and other charter schools. It provided office space for EdTec during its start-up phase, and joined with it to provide free financial management training to charter school leaders in Tennessee.
- In 2011, TCSI invested in the Achievement Network, a nonprofit that provides its schools with assessments to identify and close achievement gaps, and coaching services to teach schools how to analyze their assessment results, then create and implement effective plans to close the gaps.
- TCSI commissioned a national consulting firm, Educational Support Systems, to conduct a review of special education service delivery in 14 charter schools in Nashville and Memphis. The goals of the reviews were to identify strengths and challenges in special education in charter schools and offer recommendations for overcoming barriers to high-quality and cost-effective service delivery at a systems level. The reports also provided participating charter school leaders with the data necessary to make strategic decisions on how to improve special education services at their individual schools.

**INFORMING STATE ADVOCACY EFFORTS:** TCSI, in partnership with the Tennessee Charter School Association, received a grant from the Colorado League of Charter Schools and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools to conduct a comprehensive survey of charter school facilities in Tennessee. The report, published in May 2012, provided evidence that charter school students in Tennessee do not have equitable access to high-quality facilities, and it continues to drive policy discussions at the state legislature to address this issue.

**LEADING ON ALIGNED CHARTER-DISTRICT SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY:** TCSI has been a leading participant in the Nashville-Davidson County District-Charter Collaboration Compact, an initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to share best practices among classrooms, schools, and education leaders to create more student-centered, innovative, and
collaborative high-performing schools. Through the compact, TCSI worked with district officials to develop a common performance framework for assessing results in both district and charter schools. In November 2012, the compact debuted its Nashville Public Schools Scorecard (www.scorecard.mnps.org), which allows families to compare all schools in the district—traditional and charter—based on common performance metrics. In addition to assessing both types of schools on a common yardstick, the scorecard enables families to compare their children’s locally zoned school to school choice options throughout the city, including magnet schools, charter schools, and optional design centers.

+ **FACILITATING SHARING OF BEST PRACTICES:** Through the Gates-funded compact, TCSI participated in the new Shared Practices Fellows Program, a partnership between the compact and Lipscomb University’s College of Education. This program provided an opportunity for 13 traditional and charter school teachers to focus on specific problems in education and come up with possible solutions to share statewide through school visits, research, and discussion.

+ **INFORMING THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE BASICS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS:** TCSI worked with the Tennessee Charter School Association to produce a video, “Tennessee Public Charter Schools: Get the Facts.” This primer aims to clear up many of the misconceptions about charter schools, such as admissions policies and accountability expectations, and highlight the benefits of charters and their bipartisan support in the state. (Watch it here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkzzw05Q1_k.)

**Looking Ahead**

The Tennessee Charter School Incubator takes great pride in what its fellows have accomplished in a short time, and looks forward to the continued growth of high-quality charter schools formed under its sponsorship in Nashville and Memphis. With this and future annual reports, TCSI is committed to making performance data transparent about all the schools it supports, while sharing information about its own activities, successes, and growth.