Beyond Minimally Adequate: Building Public Support for High-Quality, Accessible Charter Schools in South Carolina

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Beyond Minimally Adequate: Building Public Support for High-Quality, Accessible Charter Schools in South Carolina

Doctor of Education Leadership Capstone (Ed. L.D.)

Capstone Submitted by

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To the Harvard Graduate School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education Leadership

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Abstract

This capstone examines a strategic initiative to bring about policy changes that would facilitate the growth of high-quality charter schools specifically serving historically underserved students in the state of South Carolina. Operating from within the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD), the state’s only statewide charter school authorizer, I develop and execute a strategy to gain increased public support for the SCPCSD’s new strategic priorities of increasing charter school quality and access. I couple an in-depth analysis of the policy environment, leveraging the work of Mark Moore and John Kingdon, with a chronicle of my efforts to build the SCPCSD’s influence in its environment. Results from the initiative include the SCPCSD’s increased understanding of the policy environment and how to influence it; the development of new relationships with key decision makers and influencers; and the policy environment’s increased receptivity to the SCPCSD and its strategic goals. Analyzing the initiative through the lens of policy change and organizational strategy, I find that the deep resistance of democratic systems and their institutions to change requires organizations to be willing and to have the capacity to reshape the values of the people within the system through engaging coalitions in sustained problem-solving work. Ultimately, I argue that given the public nature of schools—whether they be charter or district-managed—and their position within our democratic system, any education reform initiative requires a companion political initiative to ensure that the environment is willing to adopt and sustain the reform.
Introduction

*We can't wait to find places where everyone feels free to risk things. . . . The question is, can we come up with a proposal which will move us from five or six or seven or ten districts that are doing these very exciting things to reach many, many more students? Can we put in a new policy mechanism that will give teachers and parents the right to "opt for" a new type of school?* (Shanker, 1988).

At its outset, the charter school movement was about creating opportunities: opportunities for students, families, and educators to create educational communities around a common vision, mission, and instructional approach. Legendary American Federation of Teachers president, Albert Shanker, spoke in 1988 about the promise of creating a “new type of school” with the potential to bring much-needed educational reform and opportunity to “many, many, more students.” Since the establishment of the first charter school in Minnesota in 1992, the quantity of charter schools and the pace of their growth have increased significantly (Mead et al., 2015). Simultaneously, charter schools became lightning rods for criticism.

Once viewed positively as an avenue for increasing the pace of education reform and innovation, charter schools have over time become viewed as the primary threat to public education. In many places—Louisiana, Washington, DC, California, Massachusetts, Tennessee, New Jersey, New York, Colorado—charter schools have significantly improved educational outcomes (Angrist et al., 2011; Angrist et al., 2013; CREDO, 2013; CREDO, 2015), particularly for low-income students and students of color in urban areas. However, in places of weak charter school authorizing, low-performing charter schools proliferated at a rapid pace, and incentives for bad actors and lax accountability led to financial abuses and poor academic outcomes. In the November
2016 election, two high-profile efforts to advance charter schools as an education reform strategy in Massachusetts and Georgia were decisively voted down on the basis that these efforts would erode funding for public schools. While there is ample local and state-based skepticism about charters, voucher and charter school proponent Betsy DeVos’ appointment to US Secretary of Education could entail even more federal incentives for charter school growth in coming years than during the pro-charter Obama years.

The future for charter schools and their role in transforming education systems remains tenuous and raises a number of questions. First, as a sector, will charter schools be able to bring more consistency to their performance while expanding the number of students they serve? Second, will charter schools ever be able to affect change in the much larger traditional public education system, particularly on behalf of improving outcomes for historically underserved students? Third, even if charter schools reduced variability in performance and closed achievement gaps, is there public appetite to sustain the growth of schools operating outside the traditional district-managed school system?

With these broad questions in mind, I started my residency at the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD), South Carolina’s statewide charter school authorizer. I envisioned that the residency would provide a ground-level view of the challenges and opportunities of a charter school education reform strategy, and would immerse me in the education policymaking networks of a state that has persistently struggled to provide high-quality public education.

This capstone examines my efforts to develop and execute a policy agenda for the SCPCSD with the goal of creating conditions in the South Carolina education policy environment that will enable high-quality charter schools serving low-income students of
color to thrive. At its heart, this capstone sits at the nexus of politics, policy, and practice. It provides an exploration of the complexity of advancing policy changes in our democratic system of governance through the lens of my attempt to influence charter school policy in South Carolina. I begin with framing the residency context: the residency site, the strategic project, and the education and charter school policy landscape. The complexity of the policy environment plays a central role in shaping both the approach and the outcomes of my work. I then introduce my Review of Knowledge for Action and my resulting theory of action for how to advance the SCPCSD’s goals in the South Carolina education policy environment. Next, I detail my efforts, review the evidence of my impact, and analyze the project as a whole. From the analysis implications emerge for myself as an education leader, for the SCPCSD as a lead actor in bringing about education reform in South Carolina, and for the broader education sector.
The Residency Context

Overview: The SCPCSD and the Residency Project

Established by the South Carolina General Assembly in 2006, the SCPCSD is the only operating charter school authorizer in South Carolina with statewide authorizing power.\(^1\) Governed by a politically appointed nine-member board of trustees, the SCPCSD has the power to approve charter schools anywhere in the state and the responsibility for overseeing the performance of the charters it authorizes.\(^2\) The SCPCSD’s primary functions are to evaluate applications for new charter schools; negotiate charter contracts with approved charter applicants; and monitor the performance of charter schools, including their adherence to the mission and goals in their charter contracts. The board of trustees must vote on all charter school contracts and charter school revocations or nonrenewals. In addition to having authorizing power, the SCPCSD also serves as the local education agency for all the charter schools in its portfolio. As a local education agency, the SCPCSD is responsible for administering federal and state funds and ensuring compliance with federal and state programs, including Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The SCPCSD is one of only two statewide charter school authorizers in the nation that serves as both an authorizer and a local education agency.

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\(^1\) South Carolina’s charter school law allows local school districts to authorize charter schools within their jurisdictions. SCPCSD has the authority to approve charter schools serving any jurisdiction in the state. Institutions of higher education (IHEs) in South Carolina are also permitted to authorize charter schools, although no IHE charter school authors currently operate in the state.

\(^2\) The SCPCSD board of trustees was appointed by the executive and legislative branches of government. The governor had seven appointments, five of which had to come through specific groups, including the South Carolina Association of School Administrators, the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, the South Carolina School Boards Association, the South Carolina Alliance of Black Educators, and the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee. Leaders of the House of Representatives and the Senate appointed the other two board members.
A new leader, Elliot Smalley, was appointed as the SCPCSD superintendent in October 2015. Superintendent Smalley came to SCPCSD with experience working for reforms at the local (Charleston County Public Schools), state (Tennessee Achievement School District), and federal (US Department of Education) levels. Deeply committed to expanding educational opportunities for students currently not well served by the state’s traditional public education system, Smalley was chosen to lead a new era for SCPCSD, during which the authorizer would become a more central actor in pushing for high-quality educational options in the state. Superintendent Smalley believed the SCPCSD should do more than just expand the number of students in charter schools, as was its focus in the past; rather, it should model the way of creating a system of autonomous, high-quality schools where power is concentrated at the school level (E. Smalley, personal communication, April 14, 2016).

While the SCPCSD’s superintendent and its board aspired to build a portfolio of high-quality autonomous charter schools, our current condition was far from its aspirations. First, although it had schools all over the state, the SCPCSD’s student demographics were more white and more affluent than the demographics of the South Carolina public school system as whole (Appendix A). Second, only a handful of SCPCSD charter schools would be considered “high performing” according to standardized testing results, and none of these schools achieves great results for low-income students of color (Appendix A). In the 2015–16 school year, 48 percent of SCPCSD students met or exceeded standards on the South Carolina reading assessment and 39 percent of students met or exceeded standards on the South Carolina math assessment (South Carolina Department of Education, 2016). Thus, the charter
experiment in South Carolina to “improve student learning and to create new, innovative, and more flexible ways of educating children within the public school system, with the goal of closing achievement gaps between low performing student groups and high performing student groups” had been largely unsuccessful to date (S.C. Code of Laws Title 59 Chapter 40, 2012).

Over the next five years, the SCPCSD aimed to improve the overall performance of its portfolio of schools while expanding access to high-quality charter schools to students underrepresented in charter schools, including African American, Hispanic, low-income, and special needs students. The focus on performance accountability, high-quality, and increasing access to charters for underserved groups of students represented a dramatic shift in the original vision for the SCPCSD.

The SCPCSD leadership team and board’s desire to leverage charter schools as a mechanism to increase educational opportunities for underserved South Carolina students represented a departure from the original purpose of the state charter school district. Making this pivot required the SCPCSD to renegotiate its purpose with its many stakeholders, including those that oversee the district and authorize resources for its continued existence in the state. The need to look outward and ensure broad support for new strategic priorities is a common challenge facing many public-sector organizations, and my strategic project was to explore this challenge. My task was to develop and execute a policy strategy that would facilitate conditions for the growth of high-quality charter schools serving low-income students of color in South Carolina.
South Carolina Education Context

Low-performing charter schools exist in a larger public education ecosystem with persistently poor performance. In March 2017, US News and World Report ranked South Carolina’s public education system last in the nation (Ziegler, 2017). In any public education system, the performance of the current system is truly a legacy of the past. In South Carolina, the current system reflects centuries of low investment in public education, beginning with the resistance to even establish free, public schools during the Common Schools movement in the mid-1800s, and centuries of systemic oppression of African Americans originating with the denial of even the most basic education under slavery (Abbeville County School District v. The State of South Carolina, 2014; Anderson, 1988; Baker, 2006; Estes, 2015; Parker & Hawes, 2015). On top of the weak educational infrastructure and the deep-seeded inequity between black and white communities is a political system built to thwart any centralization of power in favor of local control. This political climate fosters disparities between jurisdictions, allows for those in power to systemically disadvantage minority groups, and obstructs attempts at systemwide reform.

An example of the state’s persistent struggle to address systemic inequity between rural, low-income, majority-black communities and suburban/urban, majority-white communities is the 20-year Abbeville County School District v. State of South Carolina case. In 2014, the South Carolina Supreme Court issued an indictment of the state’s education system, calling on the General Assembly to remedy its failure to provide the “minimally adequate” public education guaranteed by the South Carolina Constitution (Abbeville County School District v. the State of South Carolina, 2014; S.C. Const. art.
XI § 3). Legislative remedies to *Abbeville* proposed in the 2015 and 2016 legislative sessions seemed inadequate to address the systemic performance issues in poor, rural school districts. In an atmosphere that reflected the deference to local control, there was no political will to use the state’s authority to restructure these districts or intervene in such a way that would significantly disrupt the cycle of failure (Brack, 2016).

**South Carolina Education Policy Landscape**

The education policy landscape in South Carolina provides important context for understanding both the historic underperformance of the system and the specific forces that would shape my residency project. First, there is no centralized authority to establish an education agenda across the P–20 pipeline, let alone in K–12. Governance of the public education system is highly fragmented, and the roles of the various actors are unclear to the actors themselves as well as to the public at large. While in many states the governor sets the education vision and agenda, in South Carolina the governor is structurally weak on many fronts, including education. The governor does not appoint the state superintendent of education; rather, the superintendent is elected in a statewide election every four years and is responsible for leading the South Carolina Department of

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3 In 2014, the South Carolina Supreme Court decided in favor of 36 poor, rural school districts. The court found that students in those districts were denied their constitutional right to a minimally adequate public education, and that the General Assembly was responsible for comprehensive education reform to address this inequity. The court also cited the responsibility of the plaintiff districts to rectify actions that consistently disadvantaged their students, including misuse of funding (e.g., district funding athletic facilities over critical instructional needs) and inefficient district structures (e.g., having multiple small districts and thus district administrative overhead in a community where student population supports having only one district administrative unit) (*Abbeville County School District v. the State of South Carolina*, 2014).

4 The weakness of the South Carolina governor is part of the legacy of post-Civil War Reconstruction. After Northern-appointed governors left the South at the end of Reconstruction, South Carolina intentionally weakened the power of the governor to ensure that if the North appointed another governor, he would not have the authority to equalize rights for African Americans (e.g., repeal Jim Crow, protect African American voting rights). The weakness of the governor meant that power would be concentrated in the South Carolina General Assembly, a body that was extremely deferential to majority (white) interests.
Education (SCDE). At the time of this residency, Nikki Haley was in her second and final term as South Carolina governor, and Molly Spearman was in her first term as state superintendent. Haley viewed education as one of her top priorities, but short of using her bully pulpit and proposing education initiatives through her annual budget proposal, she had little power to drive an education reform agenda.

Superintendent Spearman, a former legislator and executive director of the South Carolina Association of School Administrators (SCASA) came to power on an agenda of opposing Common Core, protecting local control of schools, and dismantling state-driven accountability for teachers and schools (Cope, 2014). Although she did not campaign on a reform agenda, Spearman would have been hard pressed to lead any significant reform, given her lack of authority. The state superintendent is primarily an administrative head of the SCDE, which has little authority beyond administering state and federal grant programs. The State Board of Education controls all policy and regulations of the SCDE. The General Assembly’s control of 16 of the 17 appointments to the Board of Education gives it considerable influence over this policymaking body.

In addition to its control over the State Board appointments, the General Assembly created its own entity directly responsible for overseeing public education, which has often clashed with the state superintendent and the SCDE. The Education Oversight Committee (EOC) is a legislative oversight committee that includes House and Senate members and state leaders from the business, educator, and parent communities. The EOC’s primary charge is developing the state’s accountability system, but over the years the EOC has built up its own professional agency staff, who manage several grant

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5In January 2017, Governor Haley resigned to become the US Ambassador to the United Nations in the Trump administration. She was succeeded by Lieutenant Governor Henry McMaster.
programs aimed at reforming the public education system and driving innovation. When I entered residency, the EOC and SCDE were beginning a battle over South Carolina’s school accountability system, with the EOC pushing for greater accountability aligned with college readiness and the SCDE attempting to water down accountability to allow for a broad interpretation of college and career readiness. This accountability battle would consume most of the legislature’s attention to education policy, inhibiting legislators and their staff from addressing other pressing issues, such as a response to the Abbeville lawsuit.

With a weak governor and state superintendent, the General Assembly, specifically the House and Senate education committees and the House and Senate K–12 budget subcommittees, have played an outsize role in forming education policy for the state. These committees are the primary forum where policy ideas are debated each legislative cycle. Despite its significant authority over education policy, the General Assembly has very few staff people available to develop and vet policy proposals.

The lack of legislative staff capacity and the education system’s fragmented governance structure has opened the door for organized interest groups to advance particular agendas. In this environment, with no overarching vision or coordinated set of policies and funding priorities, each interest group can influence the education and budget committee members to advance their causes. Without a doubt, the most powerful education interest group is SCASA, which represents the state’s 82 school district superintendents. In addition to SCASA—and often aligned with it—are the South Carolina School Boards Association, the South Carolina Education Association (a division of the National Education Association), and the Palmetto State Teachers
Association. SCASA, South Carolina School Boards Association, and the two teachers associations formed a “policy monopoly” whose primary goal is protecting the traditional school district system, which often puts them at odds with school choice and charter school advocates. During the accountability system debate, these three groups aligned in lockstep with the state superintendent to oppose the EOC’s more rigorous accountability proposal.

Charter school policy is made in a small corner of the education policy networks, given the small size of the sector relative to total public school enrollment. The primary voice for the charter schools is the South Carolina Charter School Alliance (hereinafter “the Alliance”). A membership organization representing all South Carolina charter schools, the Alliance lobbies to increase charter school funding and to ensure a high degree of charter school operator autonomy. The Alliance played a critical role in advocating for the establishment of the SCPCSD, and thus legislators often view the Alliance as the sole authority on charter schools in the state. Also influential in the charter school policy space are for-profit virtual charter schools (e.g., K12, Inc. and Connections Academy, Inc.) and for-profit education management organizations (e.g., Charter Schools USA) and their lobbying teams. These entities typically align with the Alliance to promote the expansion of school choice and limit the oversight authority of charter school authorizers like the SCPCSD. The Alliance and the for-profit charter school lobby form the primary opposition to the SCPCSD’s efforts to pivot toward increased charter school accountability.
History of the South Carolina Charter Sector

Understanding the current challenges of the SCPCSD requires an examination of the South Carolina charter school sector and the events precipitating the creation of the SCPCSD. South Carolina enacted its charter school law in 1996, with the stated purpose to “improve opportunities for student learning . . . create new professional opportunities for teachers . . . and assist South Carolina in reaching academic excellence” (S.C. Code of Laws Title 59 Chapter 40, 1996). The quantity of charter schools grew slowly but steadily, with approximately three new schools opening each year until 2006. From 1996 to 2006, charter schools could be approved only through a local school district board. Seeking to increase school choice, the South Carolina General Assembly created the SCPCSD in 2006, with the hope that it would increase the supply of charter schools (Education Week, 2006). After signing the bill, Governor Mark Sanford (2006) said, “This bill has been a priority for us because creating more charter schools in our state would be a great win for every parent and student in South Carolina.”

It is important to note the origins of the SCPCSD. It was never intended to improve the overall performance of South Carolina’s public school system nor reduce the deep educational inequities. Rather, the SCPCSD served as a compromise vehicle to expand school choice at a more rapid pace, with a particular focus on opening virtual schools, which were largely targeted at white homeschooling families or white families in small private schools. The 2006 legislation creating the SCPCSD came one year after school choice advocates narrowly lost a battle to create a voucher program that would have allowed families to use publicly funded vouchers to enroll students in private schools. Many of the private schools that would have benefited from vouchers saw the
program as an alternative way to increase fiscal sustainability by converting private
schools to charter schools, a prospect that the SCPCSD made easier by allowing schools
to be chartered without local school board approval.

In addition to voucher supporters, the South Carolina pro–school–choice tent
included charter advocates largely backed by lobbyists from national, for-profit virtual
school organizations. Virtual schools have aggressively sought new markets and engaged
in advocacy and lobbying to shape policy in their favor. In South Carolina, virtual
schools needed a path to charter authorization that would allow them to operate schools
that enroll students from across the state, not just in a single district. Thus, the statewide
charter district (SCPCSD), with independent authorizing ability and no district attendance
boundaries, satisfied brick-and-mortar charter advocates supportive of increasing the
number of charters and virtual school operators whose business models depend on the
ability to enroll large numbers of students.

The creation of the SCPCSD was the ultimate compromise between conflicting
factions in the education policy environment. Even anti–school-choice groups, which
include interest groups representing South Carolina’s district superintendents, school
boards, and teachers, had a financial interest in the SCPCSD. The state, not local school
districts, bears the cost of funding charter schools authorized by the SCPCSD. When a
SCPCSD charter school opens in a school district’s jurisdiction, the local dollars that
would have gone toward the education of the students do not follow the students to the
charter school; instead, the state makes up the local portion.6

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6If a student in the Greenville County School District were to attend an SCPCSD charter school in
Greenville, then the Greenville County School District would no longer receive the state dollars for that
student. However, it would continue to raise the same amount of local tax revenue, which would now be
spread over fewer students, thereby increasing the local funding per student with each student attending an
Clearly, in 2006, the SCPCSD provided a pathway for the expansion of school choice that seemed to satisfy both pro–school choice and anti–school-choice groups. However, absent from the debate over the SCPCSD was any examination of how the new entity would be set up to deliver on the purpose of the Charter Act, including the improvement of learning opportunities for students. Compromises to ensure the bill’s passage meant that the resources necessary to create high-quality, accessible charter school operators were not provided. Specifically, the per-pupil amount was low and differed significantly from funding provided to students in the highest-poverty school districts in the state. Additionally, SCPCSD charters received no transportation funding in a state that is largely rural and lacks public transportation systems. Because the virtual schools, which have lower overhead and costs, were the primary advocates for charter schools in the SCPCSD bill debate, adequate funding for brick-and-mortar schools was not secured.

Despite suboptimal funding conditions, in 2017, the SCPCSD oversaw a portfolio of 35 charter schools, serving 22,000 students across South Carolina and representing 50 percent of all the charter schools in the state. Over its 10 years of operation, the SCPCSD significantly expanded the quantity of charter schools. Twice as many charter schools were opened in the 10-year period following the establishment of SCPCSD as in the 10-year period prior to the SCPCSD’s existence. However, the 32,570 students attending 69 South Carolina charter schools comprise a small share—4 percent—of total public school

SCPCSD charter school. If the charter school were locally authorized by the Greenville County School District, the district would be required to fund the school through its state and local revenues, thus giving the impression that the opening of school district–authorized charter schools takes money away from the local district.

7The total per student revenue for the SCPCSD in 2016–17 was $8,217 compared with $12,696 for the state, and compared to an average of per pupil of $13,000 for the Abbeville plaintiff districts (“Revenue Per Pupil Report FY 2016–2017,” 2016).
enrollment. Significantly contributing to the growth in charter school enrollment are five virtual charter schools serving just under 10,000 students; these schools account for 30 percent of total charter school enrollment.

To advance an agenda championing increased access to high-quality education for underserved students, the SCPCSD would have to contend with its historical origins and purpose and with the complex, fragmented education policy environment. The SCPCSD wanted to shift its purpose to better serve the educational needs of South Carolina students, but those who authorized the SCPCSD’s existence did not want the state’s charter school district to change in this way. Therefore, the SCPCSD needed to find a way to have its new activities authorized within the education policy environment. South Carolina’s governance system and the control of the legislature, an entity which is by nature highly deferential to local interests and incremental change, made gaining this new authorization quite challenging.
Review of Knowledge for Action

This Review of Knowledge for Action draws on public management, political science, and leadership research. These bodies of literature provide insight into the question of how the SCPCSD can engage and influence its external environment in order to create the conditions to advance its strategic goals of increasing the quality and accessibility of charter schools in South Carolina, particularly for underserved students of color. My starting point for understanding the work of SCPCSD is Mark Moore’s theory of strategic public management, in which “public managers must respond to diverse and volatile political and social environments with equally restless, value-seeking imaginations” (Moore, 2013, p. 8). Moore’s work defines an “authorizing environment” surrounding all public institutions. This environment includes the actors and institutions that authorize public sector organizations “to take action” or who “appropriate money for them to use” (Moore & Khagram, 2004, p. 6).

The SCPCSD, like all public agencies, exists in a highly political environment. Created by the South Carolina General Assembly, the SCPCSD’s board members are appointed by elected officials. All the SCPCSD’s operating funds come through an annual budget appropriation request that requires executive and legislative support. Thus, in the case of the SCPCSD and its desire to shift its strategic focus away from its original purpose, the authorizing environment takes center stage. In an effort to explain the authorizing environment and how to influence it, I begin with an exploration of Moore’s public value framework and its application to the SCPCSD. Having outlined the work to be done in the authorizing environment, I explore literature informing how the SCPCSD might build legitimacy and support for its new strategic goals. This requires examining
literature on policymaking, agenda development, and coalition building. What results is a theory of action for how the SCPCSD can advance its strategic goals in the external environment through engaging in the policymaking process.

**Shifting Public Value and the Authorizing Environment**

Unlike the private sector, the arbiters of value in the public sector are a complex web of constituents, many of which are not direct consumers or clients of the public service provided (Moore, 2013). Taking the example of a state public education system, customers include the students attending schools, the parents who make choices for their school-age children and often purchase property according to the perceived quality of the schools, the taxpayers in the jurisdiction who fund the schools, and the citizens who depend on the schools for educating the youth population to participate productively in economic and civic life. Interestingly, none of these customers independently control the resources used to fund the state’s education system. In fact, the education system’s primary customers—students—contribute no resources. Democratic processes at the local, state, and federal levels of government determine the quantity and distribution of the resources that fund the operation of the school systems. Thus, any desired change in the education system requires the support of a broad base of constituents with the requisite political power to demand a redirection of resources (Moore, 2013).

In order to create change in political environments, within which all public institutions are situated, managers must align three critical domains: “the concept of public value to be pursued, the bases of legitimacy and support that can justify and sustain the enterprise over time, and the development and deployment of the operational capacity to achieve the desired result” (Moore, 2013, p. 12). The starting point in this
strategic management framework is defining the public value proposition an organization wants to pursue. From there, legitimacy and support must be built to allow the organization the freedom and flexibility to pursue that value, and then organizations must build the operational capacity to execute on that value.

As previously discussed, the SCPCSD aimed to shift its value to the state of South Carolina away from purely increasing the quantity of school options to establishing high-quality charter school options for students most historically underserved by the existing public education system. According to Moore’s framework, pursuing this new public value required the SCPCSD to build new operational capacity and gain legitimacy and support. Over the past three years, the SCPCSD has been quite active in building its operational capacity to ensure a portfolio of high-quality charter schools. Key activities include instituting a performance management process for holding schools accountable, raising the bar for the granting of new charters, and monitoring access barriers for students in SCPCSD schools.

As the SCPCSD enacted statewide operational change to move toward a focus on quality and access, it also needed to acquire the requisite legitimacy and support for its work in the authorizing environment. Moore (2000) defines this domain of public leadership as the “political management . . . required to mobilize and sustain support and legitimacy of an enterprise” (p. 199). This level of political engagement requires public managers to identify individual stakeholders and institutions and analyze the distribution of power across those groups. Armed with a deep understanding of those that authorize their organization to pursue its value, managers can develop a strategy to build the support necessary to carry out their missions.
Applying Moore’s conception of the authorizing environment to the SCPCSD revealed a broad set of actors, inside and outside government, with influence over the shape and goals of the SCPCSD. Within the government, three major institutions authorized the SCPCSD’s operations: the General Assembly, which created the SCPCSD through statute; the Governor’s office, which proposed funding for the SCPCSD in its annual budget; and the SCDE, which oversaw compliance with state and federal regulations and served as a conduit for state and federal dollars. Because SCPCSD is an agency of a representative government funded through public tax revenues, the citizenry and taxpaying public also are important members of the authorizing environment, as they influence decisions made within government bodies. The SCPCSD also must answer to a variety of nonprofit advocacy and community groups, all of which have an interest in improving South Carolina’s public education system. Finally, the SCPCSD’s charter school operators are directly affected by the strategic direction of the agency and are therefore influential stakeholders with the capacity to thwart changes not in their interest.

As the SCPCSD develops a plan for building legitimacy and support for its new public value proposition, it must consider the interests and conflicts inherent in the complex web of stakeholders and institutions in its authorizing environment, taking steps to identify and mitigate any threats that arise.

**Building Legitimacy and Support**

In this section, I examine the components of building legitimacy and support for the SCPCSD’s public value within its authorizing environment. Building legitimacy and support is an ongoing process in that it takes place alongside the core work of the organization. However, my strategic project focused primarily on building legitimacy and
support for the SCPCSD’s public value proposition within the governmental arena. Thus, the literature I draw on largely relates to how public managers can influence government institutions. This does not mean that all nongovernmental stakeholders are excluded. In fact, influencing government institutions in a representative democracy typically requires building constituent or interest-group coalitions that can exert pressure on representatives. I begin with a review of the literature on the public policy process, concentrating on how policy proposals move from concept to the decision agenda. Next, I review methods that organizations use to set their own policy agendas, which drive their priorities in shaping their authorizing environments. Last, I consider how organizations use coalitions to support their policy agendas.

The Policy Process

Public policies are the mechanisms through which values are authoritatively allocated for the society. (Schneider & Ingram, 1997)

To generate legitimacy and support for the SCPCSD’s strategy, the SCPCSD must understand how public education priorities are advanced within the political environment. Various scholars have developed frameworks for understanding the policy process. For practitioners, these theories help to identify the distinct phases of policymaking and the approaches necessary to influence the policymaking process. As I develop the SCPCSD’s policy priorities and attempt to have those priorities reflected on the agenda of the key institutions in the authorizing environment, I rely on the literature to build my understanding of the policy process and inform my approach to developing and advancing a policy agenda.

John Kingdon’s multiple streams analysis departs from earlier cyclical views of the policy process (Brewer, 1974; Lasswell, 1956). Kingdon conceives of the policy
process as continuous and taking place simultaneously in three key dimensions (Figure 1). Multiple streams analysis consists of three streams: problem, policy, and politics. Activity in each of these streams is ongoing and involves multiple different actors. Policy action occurs when the three streams come together to form what Kingdon refers to as policy windows—the often fleeting “opportunities for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems” (1995, p. 165). Implied in Kingdon’s theory are that events in these streams often occur independently, unlike the more sequential approach outlined in the policy cycle literature (Brewer, 1974; Lasswell, 1956), in which problems are identified, solutions are proposed and selected, and policy is enacted. I explore each of the streams in greater depth.
The problem stream contains the problems that require public attention. Problems often arise when conditions are deemed unacceptable or when commonly held public values are violated. Certainly, an infinite number of problems require policy solutions at any time, yet policymakers and the public can manage intense focus on only a limited set of problems. Kingdon defines this tension as a challenge of “problem load,” and its impact is that problems have to compete with one another for attention, which typically means that the problems affecting the largest number of people or appearing to be the most urgent are the ones most likely to take priority.

The policy stream contains all the policy ideas competing for attention in policy networks or subsystems. Policy networks contain the policymakers and their staff members, members of the bureaucracy, and the patchwork of interest groups around a particular area of public policy. In public education at the state level, the policy network would include legislators, Education Committee staff members, the governor and governor’s staff, state board members, the state education agency executive and staff, school districts, education nonprofits, and education advocates. Members of the policy network generate policy ideas, often in collaboration, and those ideas are vetted through venues such as research, public hearings, and conferences. Because so many policy ideas are floating around, only a few receive serious, sustained attention. Ideas gaining attention are typically those that are viewed as feasible, in line with prevailing values, and relatively inexpensive (Kingdon, 1995). One tension in the policy stream is that ideas

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8 Some scholars refer to policy networks as policy subsystems. Both are terms that mean the actors and institutions involved in developing policy for an issue within a jurisdictional area (Kingdon, 1995; Weible et al., 2012).
take much longer to germinate and be vetted by the policy networks, so problems can
crowd the problem stream, and policy networks often are forced to apply existing ideas to
new problems.

The final stream is the politics stream. The politics stream assesses the extent of
support for certain policy ideas or the motivation amongst those in formal positions to
address particular problems. The national or state mood (including public opinion), the
existence of issue-based campaigns, and the ideology and partisan affiliation of members
of the elected body all affect the political favorability of an issue (Kingdon, 1995). While
work in the policy stream goes on to initiate proposals, the likelihood that any proposal
will be selected relates to the preference for that solution among those in political power.

Moving a Proposal to the Legislative Agenda

It is also necessary to understand how a proposal passes through a policy window
onto an agenda for action. Cobb and Elder (1972) propose that typically multiple agendas
in the policymaking process funnel proposals to the decision-making body. The systemic
agenda includes “all of the issues that are commonly perceived by members of the
political community as meriting public attention and as involving matters within the
legitimate jurisdiction” (Cobb & Elder, 1972, p. 85). The issue of public education will
generally always be on a state government’s systemic agenda because of the state’s
constitutional obligation to provide public education. Being on the systemic agenda is
necessary but not sufficient for policy change to take place. Cobb and Elder argue that an
issue must also be on the institutional agenda, which contains the “set of items explicitly
up for active and serious consideration of authoritative decision-makers” (1972, p. 86).
According to Walker (1977), the institutional agenda is typically full of required items,
such as budgetary appropriations, which leave little space for “discretionary items” (1977). Given the small space for nonrecurring items in an annual political cycle, the bar for getting on the discretionary agenda (the chosen problems) is high. For a policy issue to make it onto the discretionary agenda, it must affect a large portion of the population and be a convincing and easily understood solution to a policy problem (Walker, 1977).

The discretionary agenda is important in relation to the SCPCSD’s policy work. Although the SCPCSD’s annual funding is certain to be on the institutional agenda because it is part of the annual budget appropriations process, any additional SCPCSD policy goals must earn a place on the discretionary agenda, which requires legislators to use their political capital on that policy issue.

Most scholars agree that the forces in American representative democracy tend to drive the system toward incremental change. Initiating policy change is difficult and unpredictable, and the system largely functions to thwart dramatic change. Policy windows are fleeting even on the rare occasion when Kingdon’s three streams align. Every year agendas are crowded with discretionary items, often ones that carry over from prior years. Policy issues that were close to getting traction in one year can slip out of contention with a shift in partisan political power. Part of the difficulty of initiating change is the existence of “policy monopolies” that form over time and establish a “monopoly of understanding” on the framing and acceptable solutions for specific policy issues (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, p. 6). Members of the “policy monopoly” can include interest groups, members of the bureaucracy, and elected officials. These monopolies dominate a policy area, thereby contributing to long periods of stability in how a government approaches policy in that area and preventing entry of new ideas or
approaches to that policy issue. Policy entrepreneurs seeking to drive change in this environment must have both the patience to withstand the incremental pace and the creativity to imagine pathways for advancing change in a system designed to resist it.

_Developing a Policy Agenda_

The SCPCSD’s policy agenda is the organization’s statement of the changes to the policy context required to advance its strategic goals of quality and access. The policy agenda itself and the process of creating it are used to build legitimacy and support for the new direction and public value proposition of the SCPCSD. Stoker (2006) highlights the need to engage stakeholders in defining and advancing an organization’s public value proposition, as follows:

Public value is more than a summation of the individual preferences of the users or producers of public services. The judgment of what is public value is collectively built through deliberation involving elected and appointed government officials and key stakeholders. (p. 42)

As a public institution, it is not enough just to get support for the new direction and goals of the SCPCSD; gatekeepers in the authorizing environment must feel they have played a role in shaping this new public value proposition and then authorize resources for it. A review of the literature on how organizations develop policy agendas, which are responsive to the policy opportunity landscape and its key stakeholders, informs how the SCPCSD should approach its work.

It is noteworthy that how an organization engages in the process of articulating an outward-facing policy agenda is as important as the content of the agenda. In the case of the SCPCSD, which in 2016 was engaging in the policy process for the first time with
team members new to the South Carolina policy environment, it was essential that the organization find ways to increase its legitimacy and support through the articulation of its policy priorities. Other organizations with longer histories and influence in the education policy network may not have to take as much care to engage new supporters and build coalitions because they already have a monopoly on the policy network.

First, the SCPCSD had to develop an understanding of the ecosystem within which it operates. In their advocacy coalition framework, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) underscore the importance of the policy subsystem in framing policy debates and outcomes. The subsystem is the portion of the environment where problems are defined, solutions are debated, and political influence is exchanged on a particular policy topic. Included in a policy subsystem are government officials at all levels (elected and unelected bureaucrats), interest groups, policy experts and researchers, media, and engaged citizens (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Neglecting to understand how subsystems process policy proposals and the way that power is distributed among members of the subsystem would prevent even the most logical policy proposals from moving forward.

In the complex policymaking environment of today, it is essential that public organizations and their leaders grasp the networked nature of governance and have a plan for engaging stakeholders and members of the policy subsystem in generating policy proposals (Stoker, 2006). Public managers must embrace politics as a means of “social coordination” in which “interests are brought together to achieve common purposes” (Stoker, 2006, p. 47). In Policy Design for Democracy, Schneider and Ingram outline a constructivist approach to policy development, in which citizens affected by a policy
problem engage in the design process. Engaging stakeholders in the policy design process is critical to ensure that the policy designs fit into the context in which they are to be deployed. Schneider and Ingram warn, “What may be an excellent design in one context may well serve poorly in another. Abstract judgments of public policy are likely to be off the mark, and the analysis of designs requires acute sensitivity to context” (1997, p. 3).

Applying Schneider and Ingram’s approach would require the SCPCSD to combine an understanding of its policy context with the identification and engagement of key stakeholders. The process of bringing multiple parties, including those external to an organization, into the process of setting a policy agenda presents a negotiation challenge. An organization could develop policy proposals on its own—as many often do—but the lack of broad support could harm the chance of those proposals succeeding. Alternatively, an organization that aims to develop policy proposals through a more democratic process, which engages key stakeholders, must be prepared to engage in negotiation and compromise in pursuit of common benefit.

Theory of Policy Change

As the review of the literature makes clear, advancing the strategic goals of the SCPCSD to improve the quality of South Carolina charter schools and increase access for low-income students of color required me to develop and execute a strategy to build legitimacy and support in the authorizing environment. Figure 2 lays out how I conceptualized the strategy and its intended outcomes.
Figure 2. Theory of Policy Change Diagram.

The long-term outcome driving this work was the desire to transform the charter sector in South Carolina. The SCPCSD hoped to make a low-performing, inaccessible charter sector that contributes to the achievement gap between low-income students of color and white students into a high-quality system that closes achievement gaps. As demonstrated in my assessment of the South Carolina charter policy context, the policy conditions for increasing quality and access were not present. Thus, achieving a high-quality, gap-closing charter sector would require new policy conditions that foster the creation and growth of high-quality, accessible charter schools aimed at serving low-income students of color. To create these policy conditions, the SCPCSD needed to earn legitimacy and obtain support in the authorizing environment for policy changes, which would facilitate the growth of high-quality, accessible charter schools. To obtain legitimacy and support, I proposed that the SCPCSD should employ four core strategies: deepening its knowledge of the authorizing environment, including the key interests and threats in that environment; cultivating relationships with key authorizers to build
authorizer awareness and understanding of the SCPCD’s desire to create a high-quality, accessible charter sector; developing policy priorities to foster the growth of high-quality, accessible charter schools in collaboration with key authors; and building political will among key authors for advancing the SCPCSD’s policy priorities. In the next section, I chronicle my efforts to execute these strategies in the service of building legitimacy and support for the SCPCSD’s goals of increasing charter school quality and access.
Strategic Project Description

Overview of the Strategic Project

As described in the introduction, my strategic project emerged from a need for the SCPCSD to gain political support for its new strategic priorities. My strategic project was to build the organization’s legitimacy and the support necessary to authorize the SCPCSD’s strategic focus on growing high-quality, accessible charter schools to serve students most commonly underserved in South Carolina’s public schools. At the outset of the residency, Superintendent Smalley and I recognized deficiencies in the current charter school policy environment that would impede the SCPCSD’s strategic goals. We also knew that significant policy change would be a stretch goal given the relative newness of the superintendent and his team to the South Carolina policy networks. At a minimum, we hoped that he would be able to broaden awareness of the SCPCSD and its strategic goals and increase the SCPCSD’s understanding and knowledge of the policy networks and the authorizing environment. The work unfolded in five phases.

Phase 1: Entry Planning and Assessing the Landscape

I began the work of building a strategy with an entry planning process. My entry plan served as a vehicle to gain a deeper understanding of the South Carolina education policy environment and the charter sector. I also used this time to build initial relationships within the SCPCSD and with key individuals with ties to public education and charter schools. My goal was to use each conversation to gain a better understanding of the public education landscape in South Carolina, the charter school landscape, and the policymaking process (Appendix B). I also used this time to research four key areas of interest for my strategic project: the history of public education in South Carolina and the
role of race, South Carolina’s public education system performance, South Carolina’s government structure, and the field of charter school policy.

Conversations and research during the entry period revealed a deeply fragmented education policy environment, deep skepticism of charter schools and misunderstanding about their purpose, and an overall lack of capacity and infrastructure at all levels of the education system to address persistent low performance and inequity (Appendix B). Additionally, I noted the lack of understanding or awareness of the SCPCSD and its role as a charter school authorizer. Since the SCPCSD was also structured as a school district, there existed significant confusion about its relationship to its charter schools, and the amount of direct management authority the SCPCSD had over its schools, which were independently managed and governed. Further complicating matters, most people believed the South Carolina Charter School Alliance was the same as the SCPCSD, even though in practice the SCPCSD’s interests in moving the sector toward high-quality charter schools diverged from the Alliance’s interest in preserving the status quo. If the SCPCSD was going to take a stand on policy issues related to charter school quality, it would likely face opposition from the Alliance, whose members were largely low-performing charter schools.

I concluded the Entry Planning period with a presentation to the SCPCSD leadership team on my analysis of the South Carolina charter sector, including the critical gaps standing in the way of quality and access for students and families (Appendix C). I also proposed several policy avenues we could take, given those gaps, and how they would come together as a policy agenda. The leadership team agreed that it was essential to engage with external stakeholders, such as legislators, to provide support for the
organization’s focus on improving charter school quality; to improve outcomes-based accountability; and to remove access barriers. Members of the leadership team were already experiencing pushback on key SCPCSD initiatives from charter school operators, the Alliance, legislators, and SCDE officials. The team was concerned that many of the SCPCSD’s core priorities were at risk.

**Phase 2: Forming the Team and Scoping the Work**

Following the presentation to the leadership team, I received support to form a team dedicated to advancing the policy work. The core policy team would be a small cross-functional team, which would eventually also engage other members of the organization as necessary for specific activities. The team consisted of the superintendent, the communications director, and the director of policy and analytics, and I served as the team leader (Appendix D).

In its early meetings, the core policy team carved out an overall project plan and strategy for the work. This included identifying three key domains of work that the team would be responsible for executing over the next eight months:

1. Building relationships with a set of key “authorizers” (individuals with specific influence over both the authority and resources of the SCPCSD to advance its mission)

2. Developing a policy agenda with the aim of strengthening the charter sector (defined as increasing quality and access) and protecting the SCPCSD efforts from threats to quality and access

3. Building a coalition of diverse supporters invested in and willing to take action on behalf of the SCPCSD’s policy priorities
Table 1 summarizes each domain, its key objectives, and the anticipated activities required to achieve the objectives. The domains were to be fluid from September 2016 through May 2017, with more emphasis placed on relationship building and agenda development in the months prior to the legislative session beginning in January 2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Key Objectives</th>
<th>Anticipated Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Building</td>
<td>- Identify SCPCSD “authorizers” and build relationships.</td>
<td>- Conduct outreach and learning through face-to-face meetings with:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Discover what matters most to key authorizers and stakeholders.</td>
<td>- Government: meetings with key legislators and their staff, governor’s policy and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Generate awareness of the SCPCSD and its mission, principles, and strategic</td>
<td>budget staff, EOC staff, SCDE officials.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>priorities.</td>
<td>- Nonprofit/Advocacy: Students First SC, TFA, Charter Alliance, Palmetto Promise,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Locate champions of the SCPCSD and its mission and policy agenda.</td>
<td>Transform SC.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Business groups: Chamber of Commerce, Manufacturing Alliance, Council for</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Competitiveness.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Philanthropy</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Community/Religious</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Charter operators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Identify potential champions (political and financial).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda Development</td>
<td>- Develop a policy agenda that strengthens the existing charter sector and</td>
<td>- Partner with the Charter Alliance on revisions to the Charter Act.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>creates new possibilities.</td>
<td>- Participate in the ESSA accountability system discussions at the EOC and SCDE.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Collaborate with stakeholders and authorizers to identify policy priorities.</td>
<td>- Develop and propose a specific policy initiative to support the creation of high-</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>quality charters in high-need areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coalition-Building</td>
<td>- Identify policy partners on specific policy proposals we plan to advance in</td>
<td>- Pitch SCPCSD policy objectives, asking for input and support.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>session.</td>
<td>- Map key influencers on legislators and reach out about SCPCSD policy agenda for</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Activate a coalition of partners to support SCPCSD legislative proposals.</td>
<td>support.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Disseminate messages to key coalition members.</td>
<td>- Ask key influencers to make public statements or private “nudges” in support of</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SCPCSD’s agenda.</td>
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</table>

*Note: TFA = Teach for America; ESSA = Every Student Succeeds Act; EOC = Education Oversight Committee; SCDE = South Carolina Department of Education.*

Although it was stated differently, the core policy team’s strategy was similar to my initial theory of policy change (see Figure 2). There were two notable differences.
The first was that the team did not explicitly call out the deepening of its own knowledge of the authorizing environment, although that was implicit in the work it would be doing to get to know authorizers and build relationships. The second difference was that the team called out coalition building as a key domain of its work. I believed that coalition building would be an essential activity for building political will, but I had not stated it explicitly in my theory of policy change.

**Phase 3: Initial Relationship Building and Listening**

In September, the core policy team developed a list of key authorizers and education and policy influencers for face-to-face meetings. With input from the core policy team members, I directed the strategy regarding to whom we reached out, when we would reach out, and the key messages for the meetings. Through this engagement with authorizers, we hoped to increase our understanding of the SCPCSD’s authorizing environment and the education policy networks. We also believed that the information gathered during this effort would enable us to see whether there might be a policy window for advancing policy changes that would further the SCPCSD’s strategic goals.

From September 2016 to January 2017, we conducted more than 60 meetings with individuals. We used the meetings as an opportunity to better understand the following: general perceptions on public education in South Carolina and opportunities for improvement, perceptions of charters and the SCPCSD, relationships between the individual and other key stakeholders, and opportunities to increase awareness of the SCPCSD and our policy agenda. As we gained a better sense of our specific policy needs, we also began to use this time to gauge support for specific policy proposals. Through listening to stakeholders, I could incorporate their views and perspectives into my
formulation of a policy agenda for the SCPCSD that reflected the political and policy opportunities in the environment.

I led a brainstorming session in early September to generate perspectives from the core policy team on what we would need to put in place to advance charter school quality. The SCPCSD already had tools to hold low-performing charter schools accountable and to raise the bar for entry into the charter sector, but these measures did not address the weak pipeline of charter applicants and the fact that no high-quality applicants were seeking to open in the state’s highest-need areas (Appendix E). Unless something was done to provide support and incentives for developing high-quality charter models to serve South Carolina’s highest-need areas, it was unlikely this would happen soon.

The team recognized the importance of engaging the SCPCSD board in the policy work, although this had not been part of the core policy team’s initial strategy. Many SCPCSD board members had influential connections with South Carolina government and elected officials. Setting a policy agenda was technically the board’s responsibility, but the board did not have a policy committee and in the previous year it had not discussed policy priorities during its regular meetings. If board members were influencing policy, it happened as a result of individual initiative rather than from a coordinated board statement on policy. I hoped to leverage the board members and their connections to advance SCPCSD policy priorities in the legislature and to get the board’s public support to pursue our agenda.

I began by engaging the board in a brainstorming session in September 2016 (Appendix F). The board offered a few ideas but did not decide to pursue any specific
policy objectives. My judgment at the time was that this board was reluctant to get involved in shaping the charter sector to advance quality and access, even if it supported those goals. Most board members were not aware of the conditions necessary to ensure accountability, quality, and access in the charter sector. If we wanted the board to take positions that would advance those principles, we would need to invest in educating the board. However, the board did grant our team permission to continue to assess the policy landscape and come back to them in November with a proposal for specific policy priorities.

Having feedback from the SCPCSD board and informed by an initial analysis of the charter landscape, the core policy team determined that legislation providing resources for high-quality charter school development in the state’s high-need areas would potentially fit in an emerging policy window, given the 2014 Abbeville decision and the pressure on lawmakers to improve educational opportunities for students in poor, rural school districts (Brack, 2016; Click & Hinshaw, 2014). I led the development of a proposal later titled “Opportunity Schools,” which aimed to provide funding for the creation of a statewide charter school incubator and then provide premium per-pupil funding for incubated schools that would locate in designated high-need areas of the state. The policy team made a bet that this proposal would fit in an open policy window to address the quality of educational opportunity in low-income, rural areas of South Carolina.

The Alliance reached out to me about collaborating on revising the South Carolina Charter Act during this legislative session. The Alliance had launched failed attempts to revise the Charter Act in the past two legislative sessions. The terms of this
collaboration and the policy goals of the Alliance were not made clear at the outset. Unsurprisingly, this arrangement would later become fraught with challenges. However, at first, we viewed the work on the Charter Act as an opportunity to build a better working relationship with the Alliance and to strengthen some areas of the Charter Act to increase the SCPCSD’s oversight authority. We also believed there were some areas of mutual interest that could be addressed through the partnership on the Charter Act, including expanding charter access to transportation and facilities funding.

**Phase 4: Choosing a Direction**

In this phase, our team centered on a direction and specific priorities for the legislative session that began in January 2017 (Appendix G). At this point, our policy agenda included three areas of focus: (1) revising the Charter Act, (2) proposing a new initiative to encourage the development of high-quality charter schools that would open in the state’s highest-need areas (Opportunity Schools Initiative), and (3) ensuring that SCPCSD received its full annual appropriations request to maintain existing operations and fund student enrollment growth.

**Revising the Charter Act**

The team’s focus on the Charter Act came largely as a reaction to the Alliance’s effort to propose a full-scale revision of the act. In October 2016, we entered negotiations with the Alliance over its proposed revisions. Our intention in collaborating on the Charter Act was to strengthen oversight and accountability in the charter sector. This included addressing conflicts of interest at the charter school board level, inserting provisions to give authorizers more oversight over educational service providers, and requiring all authorizers to have an annual performance framework to monitor charter
schools’ academic, financial, and organizational performance. The Alliance already had a sponsor lined up for the bill—the Senate chair of the K–12 subcommittee. Initial conversations with the Alliance seemed to reveal quite a bit of alignment with our policy objectives. However, as negotiations developed, and as the Alliance got more input from its stakeholders, including lobbyists for virtual schools and for-profit education management organizations, a gulf developed between our interests. The Alliance continued to use the bill to roll back authorizer oversight, including the autonomy to set performance standards for charter school accountability.

We went to the SCPCSD board in November and December 2016 with updates on our work with the Alliance on the revisions to the Charter Act. I used each opportunity to continue to educate the board on the risks to our ability to set and maintain a high bar for charter school performance. At the November 2016 meeting, we informed the board of some troubling provisions in the Alliance’s proposed revisions to the Charter Act. At this point, with a proposal on the table, the board’s policy positions emerged more clearly. The board articulated its concerns about how the Alliance aimed to advantage charter applicants by inserting intermediary reviews in the charter application process and about its desire to encourage institutions of higher education to engage in charter authorizing.9 Ultimately, we saw the provisions from the Alliance as collectively aimed at lowering the bar for charter school quality and a direct reaction to SCPCSD’s efforts to set performance standards and hold schools accountable. The Alliance wanted to create

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9Institutions of higher education (IHEs) are permitted to register as charter authorizers in South Carolina, but no IHE authorizers currently operate. If an IHE were to begin authorizing, it would have to serve as the local education agency for all authorized charters. This is likely a barrier to IHEs engaging in authorizing. The Alliance wanted to encourage alternative authorizers to school districts and the SCPCSD, and thus it proposed allowing IHEs to limit the scope of their authorizing to specific types of schools, populations of students, or geographic areas. We viewed this as an escape route from SCPCSD accountability, especially for virtual schools that were most threatened by the SCPCSD performance framework.
alternative authorizing environments with lower entry and performance standards. Each time the Alliance shared bill revisions with us, we discovered new revisions that weakened SCPCSD’s position.

In December 2016, I brought these concerns directly to the board and asked them to provide explicit direction for our negotiations with the Alliance (Appendix H). The board issued a clear directive to oppose language in the Charter Act that reduced our autonomy to monitor school performance and to control the standards for charter application. We now had the cover we needed from the board to push harder on the Alliance to remove provisions that we believed weakened the charter sector. Even though the Alliance had long been the voice of the charter sector, it would find it difficult to pass a bill about the SCPCSD over the opposition of the politically appointed SCPCSD board.

In addition to discussions with the SCPCSD board, I began talks with legislators and staff on the House and Senate education committees on some concerns we had about the Alliance’s proposals and the risk that the proposals would weaken accountability measures for charters. This legislative outreach started to raise the SCPCSD profile as an authority on charter schools, a role once entirely occupied by the Alliance. We told legislators the truth about charter school performance in South Carolina and how it might be improved. For the most part, legislators appreciated the contrasting perspective we provided to the Alliance. While we did not want to kill the Alliance’s bill, as it had several provisions that we felt advanced charter school quality, it was clear that we were close to having enough legislative support to make that an option if we wanted to use it.
Opportunity Schools

In addition to the Charter Act, we knew that we needed to address the pipeline for proposed charter schools and create an ecosystem in South Carolina to foster and sustain the opening of high-quality charter schools in high-need areas. During my entry planning period, a key meeting with Governor Nikki Haley’s budget and policy staffer revealed there was an appetite for a policy intervention like the one we would go on to formalize in the Opportunity Schools proposal (Appendix I). The governor expressed interest in making an investment in high-quality charter schools as part of her 2018 executive budget and requested that we develop a proposal. We adapted the Opportunity Schools proposal and submitted it to the governor’s team. The proposal received strong support and the governor’s staff intimated it would be included in the budget after they had worked through some of the details. This victory pushed the team into pursuing Opportunity Schools during this legislative session. However, a confidentiality request from the governor’s staff made it difficult for the core policy team to vet the proposal with other stakeholder groups. While we wanted to honor the confidentiality request, we also knew that Haley was politically and structurally a weak governor and that we would need the support of key House committees to ensure the proposal’s adoption. In late November 2016, Haley’s position in the state was weakened even more significantly after her appointment to federal office.

Our Opportunity Schools proposal was designed to set the foundation for a high-quality charter school ecosystem in the state by investing in the development and launch of 20 high-quality charter schools in the state’s highest-need areas. The initial proposal consisted of two initiatives: $10.5 million ($5 million from the General Assembly and $5
million from private philanthropy) to launch a charter school incubator tasked with developing and launching 20 high-quality charter schools over 10 years and $151 million in new per-pupil funding spread over 10 years in the high-quality charter schools incubated through Opportunity Schools. The relatively large $151-million price tag came from increasing the per-pupil funding for Opportunity-Schools–incubated charters by an additional $3,000. Perhaps surprisingly, considering the cost, the governor’s team had signed on to the latter portion of the proposal, which would increase the per-pupil funding for SCPCSD-designated high-quality charter schools opening in the state’s high-need areas.

During legislative outreach meetings, we gauged support for our beliefs and principles around high-quality charter schools and their potential to provide increased educational opportunity for low-income students in South Carolina. If we sensed strong alignment, or if the legislator opened a door by asking us how we would leverage our charter-authorizing power to improve educational outcomes in the state, then we would pitch our proposal for Opportunity Schools, hoping to find a legislator to sponsor the legislation. By November 2016, we located a very interested legislator from the Jasper County area. Jasper—a poor, rural county near the affluent areas of Hilton Head Island and Beaufort—was part of the Abbeville lawsuit. This legislator also connected us with our first private investor, who was interested in contributing to the fund of private dollars that would be matched with the state’s investment in high-quality charter school development. I continued to build my relationships with House Education Committee members and a key staff member for the House Education Committee. I shared the
Opportunity Schools concept paper with these individuals and got their feedback so the concept could be adapted to legislative and political realities in the state.

By early December 2016, Opportunity Schools gained traction with members of the House Education Committee. However, it became clear that Opportunity Schools was a budgetary request rather than a statutory change. This meant that we needed to get in front of the House Ways and Means Committee. Unfortunately, we were not able to meet with the vast majority of the Ways and Means members during our fall outreach campaign. Additionally, the November election shifted the committee chair and the membership in an unfavorable direction.

*Ensuring SCPCSD Annual Appropriations*

Part of the 2006 compromise that created the SCPCSD was that the state would not force local school districts to contribute to the cost of educating students from the local district who chose to attend SCPCSD charters. Thus, the state had to make up the gap in funding through covering the local portion of the cost to educate each child.\(^{10}\) The General Assembly funded the local portion through an annual budget proviso, which required the SCPCSD superintendent to request these funds to be allocated each year. As charter school enrollment grew, so did the SCPCSD’s annual budget request. The request for the 2017–18 budget included a significant $20 million increase (up 25%) from the previous year. The transfer of four existing charter schools into SCPCSD from the Greenville County School District drove the increase in the budget request.\(^{11}\) In total, the SCPCSD requested $104 million in its budget proviso.

\(^{10}\)The General Assembly provided for 86% of the funding revenues for the SCPCSD, with the other 14% of revenues coming from federal grants (“Revenue Per Pupil Report FY 2016–2017,” 2016).

\(^{11}\)Greenville charter schools could reap an increased per pupil amount by transferring to the SCPCSD (Hyde, 2017).
In the past, SCPCSD staff were not typically concerned about the passage of the annual budget proviso. However, several factors elevated Superintendent Smalley’s and the core policy team’s concern over the 2017–18 request. First, national debates pitting charter and traditional schools against one another were filtering into South Carolina, especially after the high-profile failure of the Opportunity School District referendum in neighboring Georgia.¹² We sensed a growing sentiment that charter schools were being viewed as draining funds from traditional district-managed schools. Second, the SCPCSD’s efforts to increase accountability for low-performing charter schools through a school performance framework had raised alarms on the part of for-profit virtual school operators. Virtual school lobbying activity resulted in negative attention for the SCPCSD, causing some legislators and state agency officials to question the SCPCSD’s authority to hold schools accountable. Third, we learned that some members of the General Assembly’s Black Caucus were concerned about the accessibility of charter schools for African American students and the limited number of African American–led charter schools. Fourth, the state was anticipating a projected revenue shortfall at the same time it had to allocate funds to address a looming public employee pension crisis (Cope, 2016; Slade, 2016).

**Phase 5: Lobbying and Legislative Action**

In late December 2016, we began preparing for our budget request hearing with the House Ways and Means Committee. Knowing we would face the House Ways and Means K–12 Subcommittee, we had intentionally connected with the education budget

¹²The Opportunity School District proposal would give the Georgia governor authority to take over the lowest-performing schools in the state and make them eligible for charter management, similar to the Achievement School District in Tennessee.
staffer on the committee in the summer. This staffer and other legislative staffers working on education had attended a series of school tours in the fall. In December, we sat down with the budget staffer to go over our budget request; we asked her to review and provide feedback on the Opportunity Schools proposal. Excited about the Opportunity Schools idea, she encouraged us to draft an Opportunity Schools budget proviso (Appendix J), which we would introduce during our Ways and Means Subcommittee budget request hearing. She also set up a key meeting with the House Ways and Means chair, with whom we had not been able to get a meeting in the fall.

While making progress with the Ways and Means Committee, we also built a strong working relationship with the House Education Committee chair and her staffer. We told her we wanted to introduce Opportunity Schools as part of our budget request, and she was supportive of it. Unfortunately, the support of the chairwoman and other Education Committee members proved to have very little influence over the Opportunity Schools’ funding approval in the Ways and Means Committee.

Meanwhile, the momentum we thought we had for passing a proviso for Opportunity Schools accelerated our conversation about hiring a lobbying firm. Several trusted advisors with deeper knowledge of the legislative process had encouraged us to consider hiring a lobbyist to help us navigate the General Assembly. To hire the lobbying firm, though, we would need to find a private donor since we were prohibited from using state funds to lobby the General Assembly. To fund the lobbyist, Superintendent Smalley raised $25,000 from a South Carolina donor. After vetting a handful of firms, we chose one with a strong bipartisan track record, deep knowledge of the General Assembly
budget process, and some experience representing charter clients. The lobbying team came on board in the first week of the legislative session.

Going into the legislative session we planned on three key potential pieces of legislative activity: the Alliance’s Charter Act, our annual operating budget proviso request of $104 million, and the $5 million Opportunity Schools proviso. In a meeting, the House Education Committee chair expressed her lack of interest in revising the Charter Act this legislative session. SCPCSD ended up agreeing with her. The SCPCSD board had weighed in on the Alliance’s Charter Act but had not voted to support the bill because the last version our team had received from the Alliance had new changes that we were uncomfortable supporting. Although we wanted to strengthen the Charter Act’s provisions on charter governance, conflicts of interest, and education service provider contracts, the lack of support from the Education Committee chair and our concerns about the Alliance’s latest additions to the bill led us to pull our support for the Alliance’s Charter Act bill. We informed the Alliance of our position, which frustrated its executive director.

With the Charter Act on pause, we focused on the Ways and Means Committee and the two budget provisos we sought: our $104 million operating budget proviso and $5 million for high-quality charter school development under Opportunity Schools. After receiving the green light from the education budget staffer on the K–12 Ways and Means Subcommittee to include Opportunity Schools during our budget hearing, we made our request at our hearing during the first week of the legislative session. The positive momentum we took into our budget hearing quickly dissipated as we hit a subcommittee largely unfavorable to charter schools.
At the hearing, two Democrats on the committee seized on our $104 million budget request to advocate for funding increases to traditional district-managed schools. The subcommittee members closely scrutinized the $5 million Opportunity Schools proviso and initially failed to understand why SCPCSD would need funding for charter school leadership development. Though we had thought members understood our purpose better as the meeting continued, by the end of the hearing it was clear that they would have needed significant prior notice to consider any new charter school spending proposal. After the hearing, our lobbyist received word that, given the constraints on the budget this year, the House Ways and Means K–12 Subcommittee chair was not interested in funding Opportunity Schools. We met with the lobbying team to discuss our strategy. The team felt strongly that the larger budget proviso request for enrollment growth would be funded but that Opportunity Schools had no path forward in the House Ways and Means Committee. We had not had enough time before the session to cultivate the support of the K–12 Subcommittee chair, who was skeptical about charter schools. In addition, our K–12 Subcommittee membership had just one “pro-charter” member and two members against charters. Given these conditions, we decided to pull the Opportunity Schools budget proviso from consideration by the Ways and Means K–12 Subcommittee.

This was a serious blow for the team because for the previous three weeks we had felt there was support for this proviso. Unfortunately, the support we had was not with those in the key decision-making seats. Although we had done significant outreach to these key decision makers before the session, we had not been able to get meetings with these members. In consultation with the lobbying team, we decided to pivot to the Senate
with the hope of introducing a revised Opportunity Schools proviso there (Appendix K). Our expectations were low, but we hoped that at least the time we had spent familiarizing key committee members with our strategy, goals, and funding needs would put us in a better position next year.
Evidence and Analysis of the Strategic Project

Evidence from the Strategic Project

From July 2016 through early January 2017, the core policy team worked to establish relationships with key legislative and government officials and to advance a strategic policy agenda. These activities were new streams of work for the SCPCSD and were not necessarily activities expected or requested of the SCPCSD. Actors in the education policy network were surprised to see charter school district representatives playing such an active role in engaging with state government officials. The policy team intended to raise awareness of the SCPCSD’s strategic priorities of charter school quality, and equity and access in the authorizing environment, to protect these principles within the existing statute and advance them by bringing additional attention or resources. To achieve these ends, the core policy team took on three domains of work: relationship building, policy agenda development, and coalition building. Next I present evidence of the major outcomes of these three domains.

Building Relationships

The core policy team had four objectives for the relationship-building portion of its work:

1. Identify SCPCSD “authorizers” and build relationships.
2. Discover what matters most to key authorizers and stakeholders.
3. Generate awareness of the SCPCSD and its mission, principles, and strategic priorities.
4. Locate champions of the SCPCSD, its mission, and its policy agenda.
Overall, the core policy team was successful in achieving the first three objectives while building the team’s own understanding of the authorizing environment and the influence networks within it. The over 60 meetings the team held from July 2016 to January 2017 with members of the SCPCSD’s authorizing environment led to greater awareness of the SCPCSD. At each meeting, we found ourselves correcting misconceptions about the SCPCSD and charters in general. We also discovered that most people we met viewed the executive director of the Charter Alliance as the sole spokesperson for charter schools. Although they welcomed our perspective and commitment to transparency about the performance of South Carolina charter schools, many people still emphasized the need for “the charter people” to be “on the same page.” In addition to raising general awareness, we also established deeper relationships with a few people that led to beneficial information exchanges, strategic advice, and political support. Several relationships had been nascent or nonexistent at the start of the legislative session. Our relationships with Democrats were generally weaker, and specifically, we had not been able to make strong inroads with members of the Black Caucus—a powerful voting bloc in the Senate. Notably, we had not been able to access members of the House Ways and Means Committee, including members of the K–12 Ways and Means Subcommittee and the Senate Finance Committee. Finally, the relationship with the state superintendent of education—who exerted strong influence in the legislature—remained tense at the outset.

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13Our strongest relationships were with the staffers for our House Education and Ways and Means Committee, the Education Committee chair, a few members of the K–12 Education Subcommittee, and the executive director of the legislative Education Oversight Committee. After January, we would build a deeper relationship with the Senate K–12 Education Subcommittee chair.
of the legislative session after a debate with her agency over control of the charter application.\textsuperscript{14}

While the SCPCSD’s relationships in the authorizing environment ranged in quality, depth, and utility, perhaps the most essential achievement was how much the team learned. Our team consisted mostly of non–South Carolinians, and all of us were South Carolina policy rookies. By January 2017, the team had significantly increased its knowledge of the key influencers, decision makers, and stakeholder groups in the authorizing environment as well as its understanding of the networks and the distribution of power among these groups. The team also built up its knowledge of the General Assembly structures, processes, and norms.

\textit{Developing a Policy Agenda}

The core policy team had two objectives for the agenda development portion of its work:

1. Develop a policy agenda that strengthens existing charter sector and creates new possibilities.
2. Collaborate with stakeholders and authorizers to identify policy priorities.

The team achieved its objective of setting policy priorities, which were informed by conversations with stakeholders in the authorizing environment, but it had not set a clear agenda in the fall, before the legislative session. Instead, the policy priorities emerged in

\textsuperscript{14}With the assistance of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), the SCPCSD had invested time and resources in revising the state’s charter application. This effort began in collaboration with the SCDE, but eventually the SCDE stopped participating. The state superintendent expressed concern that the new application created with NACSA set too high a bar for charter applicants. The SCPCSD interpreted South Carolina charter law to mean that it could develop its own charter application without SCDE’s approval. The SCDE disagreed with this position, claiming that it controlled the charter application for all authorizers in the state and that the SCPCSD should not be allowed to have its own application. The SCPCSD board eventually agreed to a compromise with the SCDE: pull the revised application and just use an addendum to the SCDE’s application. However, the turf war with the state superintendent over the charter application had left some bad feelings between the two agencies.
response to opportunities and to actions of other actors (e.g., the Alliance). The agenda follows. First, the SCPCSD wanted to ensure the General Assembly met its full budget proviso request to cover the increased student enrollment. Second, after receiving positive signals for the Opportunity Schools concept, the SCPCSD intended to pursue funding for the concept in an additional budget proviso. Third, the SCPCSD intended to oppose the Alliance’s proposed revision of the Charter Act—a shift from the early fall, when SCPCSD collaborated with the Alliance. Fourth, the policy team was committed to protecting the authority of the SCPCSD to hold schools accountable, as currently outlined in statute, including conducting annual performance evaluations and revoking charter schools for contract violations and poor performance.

By early February 2017, the policy team had a few concrete wins. The $104 million operating budget proviso request was on solid footing, making it out of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee with recommendations for full funding. On the Charter Act, the team successfully triggered concern from the House Education Committee chair about some of the Alliance’s most harmful provisions, which contributed to her decision not to push for the inclusion of the bill on the Education Committee agenda. However, this also had the impact of alienating the Alliance’s executive director. In response, she filed the revised Charter Act in the Senate with most of the SCPCSD’s preferred language removed and language included from the virtual charter schools that would diminish the SCPCSD’s authority to hold schools accountable for academic performance (Appendix L). The SCPCSD policy team then had to spend significant time during February and March 2017 negotiating with the Alliance and its Senate sponsor to remove the language that threatened its authorizing oversight.
The team did get the harmful language removed, but it also became clear the Charter Act bill was not likely to move out of the Senate Education Committee, thus creating frustration about the amount of time the team had dedicated to the bill.

Undoubtedly, the SCPCSD’s most proactive policy priority was the Opportunity Schools proposal. The early traction with the governor’s team led to the inclusion of Opportunity Schools in the governor’s executive budget. The governor requested $300,000 to provide for a premium level of per-pupil funding for high-quality, SCPCSD-authorized charter schools to be opened in high-poverty areas (Appendix M). In the cover letter to her budget, Governor Haley (2016) wrote:

Building on our past success, this budget gives many of South Carolina’s students opportunities they have never had before. . . . In the same spirit, the launch of a new charter school program will recruit high performing charters to underperforming parts of the state in order to empower parents with options and bring educational achievements to these areas.

Despite this support for Opportunity Schools, the proposal was stopped in the House Ways and Means K–12 Subcommittee. The subcommittee chair declined to support the Opportunity Schools proviso, and the policy team pulled the proviso from consideration in the House in order to focus on the Senate. At the writing of this capstone, the policy team had garnered support for a revised $1 million Opportunity Schools proviso from the Senate K–12 Finance Subcommittee and received the subcommittee’s recommendation for including the proviso in the budget (Appendix N).\footnote{Following the House Ways and Mean K–12 Subcommittee’s response to the Opportunity School proviso, we decided to ask for just the $1 million in funding that we needed to launch the initiative. Our previous ask of $5 million was for all five years of funding at once. If we got the $1 million in proviso this year, there was a chance we could renew the amount the following year.}
Building a Coalition

The core policy team had three objectives for the coalition-building portion of its work:

1. Identify policy partners on specific policy proposals we plan to advance in session.
2. Activate a coalition of partners to support SCPCSD legislative proposals.
3. Disseminate messages to key coalition members.

Coalition building remained the least developed portion of the policy team’s work. Although we had identified a handful of SCPCSD supporters, by the end of January 2017, there was no organized coalition in support of SCPCSD priorities. Additionally, we did not explicitly develop a strategy for regular communication with supporters. Last, the SCPCSD lacked working relationships with a few key stakeholder groups that could be important coalition members, including representatives from Abbeville plaintiff districts, faith communities, the Superintendents Association, the Teachers Association, the Black Caucus, and civil rights groups. Additionally, the SCPCSD’s work to institute a new annual school performance framework (SPF) had strained its relationships with its own charter school operators, many of whom feared increased accountability, and with the Alliance. The SPF tension made it difficult to leverage the operators as a coalition in support of the SCPCSD’s policy agenda. Some education reform organizations openly supported SCPCSD, but they were not organized to speak or influence on behalf of SCPCSD. These included Palmetto Promise Institute; Teach For America–South Carolina; South Carolina Future Minds; the Council of Competitiveness–TransformSC; and South CarolinaCAN.
Analysis of the Strategic Project

My efforts to influence the SCPCSD’s authorizing environment and advance the organization’s strategic priorities to increase charter sector quality and access had mixed results. Along the way there were victories and losses. In this section, I ask several key questions: Why did the project turn out the way it did? What were the root causes of the wins and losses? Why did some seemingly big wins still not generate expected impact? What pieces of strategy did we get right, and where did we miss opportunities to increase our impact? What impact did my individual leadership decisions and actions have on the progress of the work?

To answer these questions, I use two lenses. First, I analyze the impact of the external environment on the project, relying largely on Kingdon’s policy streams and a stakeholder influence map to reassess the policy landscape in light of information gathered over the last nine months. Second, I analyze the project from an organizational strategy perspective, reviewing our policy team’s approach and its capacity to generate the intended impact.

Analysis of the External Environment

As Kingdon (1995) explains, determining whether you are operating within a policy window is more of an art than a science. It is impossible to be certain that you have indeed identified a policy window. And in the event that you do have a window, it is still impossible to know whether the window is large enough to fit the policy change you are attempting to initiate. Using Kingdon’s multiple streams analysis framework in September 2016, the policy team estimated that there was a window to introduce policy that would provide resources to leverage charter schools as a method for reducing
educational inequity. However, after nine months of attempting to push policy proposals through that window, it was clear that we had overestimated the openness of the policy window. Table 2 presents key shifts in my understanding of the three streams—problem, policy, and politics—that must intersect in order to create a policy window.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stream</th>
<th>September 2016 Analysis</th>
<th>March 2017 Analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>Broad agreement exists that South Carolina’s education system is underperforming and inequitable.</td>
<td>Public and key decision makers do not agree that educational inequity is a problem. We underestimated the public’s agreement that the measurement of performance is the problem, not the performance itself. Debate on the state’s accountability system involved every member of the education policy network and overburdened policy networks with “problem load.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Policy network is fragmented. Key actors have independent theories of change for improving public education.</td>
<td>The fragmentation of policy network leads to a large volume of policy ideas that the policy networks must process each legislative session. Additionally, the legislative body has little capacity to evaluate policy proposals and thus relies on organized interest groups (e.g., teacher, administrator, and school board associations) and the state superintendent to guide policy direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Republicans control the legislative and executive branches, and the state superintendent is Republican. All favor school choice.</td>
<td>We overestimated the extent to which Republicans controlled the education agenda. Education is largely viewed as an issue of the Democrats: Democrats join with senior Republicans (often former Southern Democrats, and the most powerful legislators in the General Assembly) to drive the agenda in the interest of the traditional district “policy monopoly.” Democrats tended to be overrepresented on education legislative committees relative to other committees. The elected state superintendent (a former Democrat) is highly influential on behalf of traditional districts. Except for containing education spending and limited school choice programs, Republicans defer to the “policy monopoly” on education.</td>
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In September 2016, I believed that there was shared agreement that education inequity and underperformance was a problem, that there was no clear actor driving a specific education policy approach, and that the conservative politics of South Carolina would favor a market-based or charter solution. In March 2017, it was clear that the “policy monopoly” by the administrator, teacher, and school board associations was in
control of the education agenda. Although Republican politics made it difficult for this monopoly to advance new political wins on education funding, they were successful at warding off threats to traditional districts.

Figure 3 shows a stakeholder influence map that illustrates the influence of key actors and their relationships with each other in the charter school policy environment (Mayers & Vermeulen, 2005). The map shows the strides SCPCSD made in increasing its influence over charter school policy from July 2016 to March 2017, but it also shows that SCPCSD remains disconnected from other influential actors in the policy environment, including the three professional associations that formed the “policy monopoly” and that were closely allied with the SCDE. As stated previously, the SCPCSD’s closest relationships were with staff members of the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) and the House Education and Budget committees, and a few members of the House and Senate. The organization’s isolation from powerful influencers in the policy environment may not have hindered the SCPCSD’s ability to play defense on harmful policy proposals driven by the Alliance and virtual schools, but they did obstruct its ability to achieve new policy change that required the allocation of new funding (e.g., Opportunity Schools). After all, any request for new funding would force charter schools to compete with traditional school districts for resources.
Figure 3. South Carolina Education Policy Environment: Stakeholder Influence Map.

In South Carolina, the “policy monopoly” clearly communicated the two main threats to the traditional public school system: standards-based accountability and proliferation of charter schools. The accountability system debate with the EOC heightened concern over the threat to district-managed schools, which increased legislators’ sensitivity to acting in a way that could be perceived as going against the “policy monopoly”. Additionally, few, if any, tangible political benefits (even for Republicans) came from challenging the coalition of interest groups that formed the “policy monopoly” since they represented teachers, principals, and superintendents from every jurisdiction in the state. Even if there had been broad agreement that the public education system’s underperformance and inequity were problems, it was apparent that only policy solutions favored by all sides would succeed in addressing the problem. This political reality is most amenable to incremental change (e.g., pilots, limited programs,
small increases) or marginal change (e.g., investing in facilities, buses, or other infrastructure outside the instructional core).

This context affected our Opportunity Schools proposal. Republican legislators with whom we shared the proposal received it well. However, when we presented it to the Ways and Means K–12 Subcommittee, we faced opposition to the proposal and to charter schools in general. The belief that charter schools were a threat to traditional districts appeared to be well established. Even if legislators believed the Opportunity Schools initiative was a promising approach to increasing educational opportunity, they were not willing to engage in battle with the education “policy monopoly,” especially since there was no organized group of constituents that could provide political cover for the legislators. This retrospective understanding of the policy environment and its complexity has deep implications for an analysis of strategies used this year and for the development of an effective strategy the core policy team might pursue in the future.

Analysis of Policy Team Strategy

The policy team’s three-prong strategy was to build relationships; develop a policy agenda to advance charter school quality, equity, and access; and build a supportive coalition. Analyzing the evidence reveals flaws in both the execution and content of the strategy. Although we may have overestimated the policy window, the team’s approach and its capacity contributed to its misunderstanding of the environment and limited its influence.

The policy team successfully built relationships with key members of the authorizing environment but did not achieve the depth and breadth of relationships necessary to carry the SCPCSD’s policy proposal through what the team viewed as an
emerging policy window to address educational inequity in South Carolina. As a team of outsiders to South Carolina, and first-timers at influencing the South Carolina education policy environment, we lacked access to some of the key authorizers. Most notably, we had very few relationships with members of the Senate Finance and House Ways and Means Committees. Unsurprisingly, given our newness to the South Carolina policy networks, we also lacked depth in many of our relationships. Relationship depth would have increased the chance that our contacts might expend political capital on our behalf. By February 2017, only a handful of people would have done that for us. Hiring the lobbying team was a key decision; it helped us to improve our access to authorizers and in some cases allowed us to leverage their deeper relationships with key people. However, we were still far from the depth and breadth of relationships needed to advance a new proposal like Opportunity Schools in the policy environment.

Besides lacking the relationships, we also lacked deep understanding of the primary body we wanted to influence. Our policy agenda drove us to focus on the legislature. Even getting Opportunity Schools into the governor’s proposed budget made no difference unless we could convince the House and Senate budget committees to support it. Our team lacked core knowledge of the legislature’s hierarchies, rituals, norms, structures, and personalities. For example, the rigid power hierarchies of the House and Senate meant that having relationships or influence with committee members mattered very little relative to having a relationship with the committee chair. Our lobbying team informed me that introducing Opportunity Schools to the Ways and Means K–12 subcommittee without getting the Subcommittee chair’s signoff first was a violation of House norms, and had likely closed any possibility that the Subcommittee
chair would favor the proposal. We learned later that groups were expected to spend the late summer and fall before the legislative session lobbying on behalf of their proposals, especially if the proposal was a new request. Far from following this sequence, our team had simply been trying to get initial access to legislators to build awareness of the SCPCSD and its needs in order to advance high-quality charters.

The two key factors discussed above—depth of relationships and operational knowledge of the policy network—impaired our team’s capacity to execute the strategy it had designed. In a few years or with a shifting of the team’s membership to include more people with deep knowledge of and relationships within the policy networks, the team might significantly improve its execution of the strategy. The barriers that impeded the SCPCSD team this year could diminish as the team increased its knowledge of the workings of the education policy network and increased its influence over key actors in the network. Additionally, the team could continue to hire specific capacity, such as the lobbying firm, to address its knowledge gaps. However, digging a bit deeper, I found flaws in the team’s approach that, if not corrected, could present the risk of falling into a similar trap even if the team acquired greater capacity to navigate the policy environment.

The core flaw in the team’s strategy was overinvestment in its own solution instead of building a coalition to solve the problem of educational inequity and low-quality charter schools. At first the team centered its work around broad goals of advancing principles of charter school quality, equity, and access, but quickly we began to treat the work as technical, concrete objectives to achieve (e.g., passing the Opportunity Schools and annual budget provisos, defeating the Alliance’s Charter Act). The strategy and work the team undertook served defined ends in the interest of the
SCPCSD. The team became overly focused on the ends ("What can we get passed this session?") as opposed to the means ("Who are we engaging to join our cause?"). Given this, it is not surprising that the third prong of the team’s strategy—building coalitions—never really took off. It is challenging to build a coalition around a proposal unless people are invested in the solution and included in the process, but as Figure 3 illustrates, the SCPCSD needed to increase its influence by finding partners and allies. Moreover, South Carolina’s political environment is one where legislators are averse to challenging tradition and any changes must have the support of a broad coalition, so we need even broader stakeholder support than we had imagined. With our energy focused on specific pieces of legislation, we had little capacity left to design and execute a broader strategy to engage our many stakeholders about the need to shift the charter sector toward quality, access, and equity.

The team’s inclination to focus on specific objectives was a rational response to the environment. Early traction with the governor’s team and a handful of legislators, as well as knowledge of the need to dramatically improve the quality of the charter school applicant pipeline, pushed the team to invest in the Opportunity Schools proposal. Seizing on the perceived momentum of the Opportunity School proposal seemed logical when the alternative was engaging in a nebulous and unpredictable conversation with stakeholders about the role of charter schools in addressing education inequity in South Carolina.

However, the team fell into the classic trap of attempting to push a technical solution on what was clearly an adaptive problem in the system. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) argue that the most common error leaders make is the failure to distinguish
between adaptive and technical challenges. Technical challenges “may be very complex and critically important” but they have “known solutions that can be implemented with current know how” as opposed to adaptive challenges, which “can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Public policy is an articulation of society’s values, thus advancing a policy solution that speaks to values currently undermined in the system requires a plan to reshape what the system values. Opportunity Schools is intended to increase educational equity in South Carolina’s most underserved areas, but we had little indication that the authorizing environment valued greater educational equity. In fact, successful education policy proposals in the state’s recent history were not centered around equity, but rather were widely targeted instructional and operational programs. When the legislature was forced to address educational equity, it typically responded with a study committee instead of a proposal. Thus, we found ourselves committed to pushing a solution that advanced a set of values opposed to the dominant values in the system. Had we not defined success primarily as the achievement of concrete policy objectives, we might have allowed ourselves to wade into the more ambiguous waters of adapting or changing values in the authorizing environment.
Implications

Public schools by their very nature operate in and are a product of our political environment. The obvious implications are that our school systems reflect the values of the populace they serve and any significant change to the public system requires a shift in values. The debate over values and their prioritization takes place within our democratic institutions and processes. Those who want to change how the public school system operates must also have the capacity to build the requisite political force necessary to change the values in the system governing the schools. However, creating that political force is complex, unquantifiable work that often seems like a distraction from the equally complex task of operating quality public schools. In its efforts to influence the South Carolina charter school policy environment, the SCPCSD learned firsthand the challenges of taking on political work. As the SCPCSD sought to elevate the values of quality, access, and equity in the charter sector, it discovered that these were not values strongly held in the South Carolina charter sector nor in the South Carolina public education system as a whole. The organization found itself in the position of launching a policy proposal imbued with a set of values not yet broadly shared in its authorizing environment. Thus, while the idea received solid traction, the substantive political support necessary to codify the proposal into policy never materialized.

Implications for Site

There is ample evidence that the SCPCSD must influence its education policy environment. As a statewide district and entity created and funded by the General Assembly, the SCPCSD must find a way to shape the policy environment to ensure its future existence and foster its strategic goals. Superintendent Smalley correctly
recognized the strategic need to engage in the policy environment to expand quality, access, and equity in the South Carolina charter sector. From July 2016 to March 2017, it became evident that the SCPCSD’s efforts to promote quality by holding schools accountable and raising the bar for entry into the charter sector would provoke significant backlash in the authorizing environment. During this period, we saw key actors mobilize to thwart our efforts, going as far as launching personal attacks and proposing legislation to remove the SCPCSD’s authority to oversee its schools. The work we did in the past 10 months to influence the policy environment reveals several implications for future work in this critical area.

Tactically, the team’s increased knowledge about how to influence policy networks and the specifics of the policymaking cycle in South Carolina will serve SCPCSD well in future legislative sessions. The team’s emerging relationships from this legislative session provide a foundation to build on between this session and next. In the off-session, the team should prioritize getting legislators out to see charter schools that are working well to increase educational opportunity for low-income students. At a minimum, this would include charter schools in South Carolina, but the SCPCSD should also consider partnering with the Palmetto Promise Institute, South CarolinaCAN, Excel in Ed, and the Alliance—groups that have the capacity and legal status to fund a legislator trip—to send a group of legislators to see high-performing charter schools serving low-income students of color in other states. Putting legislators in contact with the schools, leaders, teachers, parents, and students will help to build a personal connection between the legislator and the concept of charter schools. It will also change the messenger from always being the SCPCSD, which at times carries baggage that can
obstruct efforts to persuade. The SCPCSD can target key legislators with the help of its lobbying firm to ensure that the team is investing in legislators with the power to push forward policy change or those with a strong desire to improve outcomes for underserved students.

In addition to legislative outreach, the SCPCSD needs to find a way to start a conversation about charter school quality in South Carolina. It cannot do this only by defending its application and accountability practices. The SCPCSD can use its convening power and authority as the largest oversight body for charter schools to bring together key stakeholders to delve into current problems of the charter school movement in South Carolina and determine how to chart a path forward. The SCPCSD could commission a study from researchers at Clemson University or the University of South Carolina to analyze the performance of the charter school sector and highlight its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. In addition, the SCPCSD should partner with the SCDE or EOC to issue an RFP for a national organization with expertise in creating high-quality charter school sectors (e.g., Public Impact, Bellwether, Excel in Ed, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the Center for Reinventing Public Education) to make policy recommendations for how South Carolina can improve quality and access in its charter school sector. These pieces of research, from both local and national organizations, could be used to convene a dialogue about the state of charter schools in South Carolina, the role they could play in improving educational outcomes in the state, and the policy changes necessary to enable their increased impact.

Strategically, the SCPCSD should reflect on the goals for its policy work. Is the goal of this body of work to increase resources for charter schools or to shift perceptions
of the role charter schools should play in improving educational opportunity for South Carolina students? Given the challenges the SCPCSD policy team faced this year, the amount of misunderstanding of the purpose of charter schools, and the low quality of the current charter sector, it seems appropriate to focus on the foundational work of shifting perceptions of charter schools. At this moment, the authorizing environment is not amenable to initiatives framed as increasing educational equity or opportunity by expanding charter schools. For those who are most concerned about increasing educational opportunity for low-income students of color, charter schools have been too closely associated with white flight in South Carolina for them to support a charter strategy. Those who support charter schools as a way to increase school choice have little interest in supporting a charter school focused on improving outcomes for students of color or low-income students. These dynamics put the SCPCSD in a difficult middle ground between two opposing groups, both important to the organization’s cause: supporters of increasing educational equity for low-income students who are skeptical of charter schools and school choice supporters who are supportive of charter schools but skeptical of narrowly defining charter school growth.

Frustration with the system as it currently exists is a powerful motivator for the SCPCSD team. The downside of frustration is a tendency to erect barriers between the organization and the “opposition” (e.g., SCDE, SCASA, charter operators, the Alliance). This tendency impedes political action, and sometimes it has isolated the SCPCSD from the decision-makers it wanted to influence. As a team that is new to South Carolina and its education policy network, the SCPCSD needs relationships with key actors, such as the SCDE, SCASA, the Alliance, and charter operators. Regular systems of engaging
other perspectives and collaborating need to be part of the SCPCSD’s daily work, not just when it is seeking support on an initiative. Superintendent Smalley should set up recurring meetings with the state superintendent and the head of SCASA and should form an operator leadership advisory group.

To build a broader coalition for change, the SCPCSD should move its frame for policy influence away from a specific solution—increasing the number of high-quality charter schools serving underserved students—to a shared problem in the education policy environment that will invite potential allies to the table. One way to do this is to invite stakeholders to consider a problem such as how to improve educational opportunity for rural students, how to increase school leaders’ capacity to serve high-need students, or how to improve college readiness of students from low-income backgrounds. These are problems that would appeal to a wider array of stakeholders in the education policy environment. Engaging these stakeholders could take a variety of forms, from convening a working group to hosting a summit where outside experts come in to build shared knowledge and facilitate strategy development for advancing critical policy changes. Ultimately, the goal for the SCPCSD in these efforts would be to improve its relationships with key influencers, to ensure charter schools are part of conversations related to educational improvement, and to encourage buy-in to policy change efforts that would lead to improved educational opportunity for low-income students of color.

One of the biggest issues the SCPCSD faces in South Carolina’s education environment is the persistently low expectations for what is possible for low-income students of color. It can seem like a waste of time to engage with people in the system who have this mind-set. Why would the SCPCSD spend time and energy to bring
together a group of stakeholders who seem to think student outcomes will never change? This is the challenge the SCPCSD must wade into, and it must do it by finding subversive ways to make people grapple with the truth—that charter and traditional schools in South Carolina are systematically failing low-income black and brown children—and give them hope that change is possible through their collective action. There is no established strategy for this work; it requires commitment, patience, and new systems and structures that create proximity with the individuals and groups the SCPCSD wants to influence.

**Implications for Self**

Looking back on my theory of action, I see that I sought a project that would require advancing policy through the political arena, but I found myself relying on old habits and ways of working that did not always fit the scope of the project. I looked at it as a project to be managed instead of the building of a series of relationships and a base of support. Too quickly I moved myself and my team to a specific policy solution instead of seeing this as a longer process of engaging multiple perspectives around the needs in our sector. As an outsider in the policy network, I had limited awareness of the critical perspectives that I was missing in my approach to the work, which impeded my ability to see how disregarding those perspectives might limit our team’s chance of success. I allowed timing and the perceived pressures of the site to push my focus entirely toward getting buy-in to a predetermined solution instead of engaging in a co-creation process to surface multiple avenues for potential action. Given the lack of readiness in the authorizing environment to engage in a conversation about charter school quality, and educational equity in general, I believe I pushed too quickly to get our policy solution passed. I should have pushed for a longer view of the project—not to get something done
this session, but rather to look at the whole two-year session as the frame for action, with the first year of the session focused on softening the ground, building relationships, and building the SCPCSD policy team’s capacity.

Students in South Carolina have suffered so long under the existing system that it seems wrong to undertake any action that does not lead to fast-paced change. Compromising with the existing “policy monopoly” seems like giving in to a system that for generations has deprived students of their right to educational opportunity. However, if I want to continue do work that advances educational equity in the political environment, I need to reframe my choices as a leader to open possibilities for engaging others. What if I viewed collaboration and compromise not as giving in but as part of a learning process whereby I gain more intimate knowledge about a necessary perspective in order to bring about change?

I want to model the openness to diverse perspectives in my leadership so I can build teams that hold multiple perspectives on the work. In my residency, I realized midway through that our policy team was missing the critical perspectives of those most affected by the lack of high-quality educational options. I pushed this concern aside, feeling like I had few options for addressing it, and convinced myself that the merit of our ideas and the obvious need for change would prevail. Thus, I avoided doing the work of building the team’s capacity and focusing the team on gaining a deeper understanding of the perspectives, values, and needs of stakeholders in the authorizing environment. Discounting the core work of building a team led me to overinvest in a solution without first diagnosing the problem and then building a team around that problem to engage in developing a solution. This was not the first time, nor will it be the last time, that I find
myself driven by the need for expedient achievement. I need to recognize when I am pulled in to pushing progress forward for the sake of achievement and build in systems to pause and gain greater perspective.

Finally, this residency brought into focus the importance of place and identity. As a leader, you want to believe that you can go anywhere and your talents will be valued and leveraged, but that is far from reality. Beginning with my first assignment as a 22-year-old teacher in Louisburg, North Carolina, and continuing through this residency, my curiosity and thirst for learning has drawn me to many places far different from where I spent the first two decades of life. The disequilibrium I have experienced with each move has heightened the pace of my learning and allowed me to see my own perspective more clearly, but my outsider status can also hamper my ability to exercise leadership.

In South Carolina, I learned that my identity as a strong, intelligent, and vocal female leader amplified my outsider status. I received subtle signals at my residency site and from the many people I interacted with in the education policy environment that my leadership style did not conform with what is expected of women in the South. This made me feel the need to assert my authority over my project, which probably further reinforced the perception of me as overbearing or controlling. Rather than sharing my struggle, I allowed my frustration to fester, to the point where I gave in and somewhat diminished my role in the project.

When you operate as an outsider attempting to provoke change in a public institution you lack identity affiliation with people within the institution or system. The only way to overcome this barrier is to be patient and to embed yourself in the community over time or to find a proxy to increase your access to the community. At this
point in my journey, the time feels right to go back home, to do the work of adapting values to focus on equity and progress in a community like the one I grew up in, a community where my very identity will not isolate me from those with whom I need to form relationships. Certainly there are public school systems more in need than those in my home in New England. Yet, if you believe that change must come from within, you know that there is no substitute for those with deep connections to a community or a place engaging their peers in an adaptive process to recognize problems, shift values, and build solutions.

**Implications for Sector**

The gulf that divides policymaking from practice is highly problematic. The education sector lacks strong systems in which practitioners can solve problems and design policy alongside policymakers. People with intimate knowledge of problems in public education are not connected to those with the power to draw attention and resources to solutions. Complex problems such as persistent, systemwide educational inequity require a broad stakeholder group with multiple perspectives on the problem engaging for an extended period in diagnosing problems and proposing solutions. However, policymaking cycles and institutional hierarchies are not set up to facilitate that type of engagement.

In South Carolina, and in many states, government institutions hold significant power to authorize and direct resources toward policy change. Unfortunately, they also lack the capacity and flexibility to design solutions that will address the most pressing problems facing public education systems. An underutilized authority of government institutions is their power to convene broad stakeholder groups and to task and fund those
groups to engage in policy design. In some ways, government does this type of convening work already when it forms a task force or study committee, usually bringing together policymakers, researchers/experts, practitioners, and users (e.g., parents and students). However, as is certainly evident in South Carolina, those groups rarely generate policy recommendations that are ready to implement. What if the legislature, governor’s office, or state education agency applied a research and design approach to its task forces? This would require funding stakeholder groups to tackle pressing policy and performance challenges in the public education system by designing and testing solutions on a smaller scale, conducting short-cycle evaluations, and then creating recommendations for scaling what works. Rather than have most policy driven by state-level interest groups, we need to create and fund structures so those with intimate knowledge and those with expertise can systematically test and vet policy solutions that policymakers can then authorize.

The approach of building capacity at the state or local level is a fundamentally different approach than the dominant reform strategy of the past 10 years, which has relied heavily on outside capacity. Teach For America (TFA) normalized this outsider-driven approach to reform in public education, recruiting novice teachers from across the country to serve two years in the highest-need classrooms. When many of those teachers left their placement classroom—myself included—they looked for the next opportunity to get involved in education reform. TFA would help them go anywhere as it was part of their mission to ensure alumni stayed involved. Quickly, it was not only TFA taking the approach of recruiting people and plopping them down in new locales to deliver big changes—even the EdLD residency takes this approach. In addition, hundreds of education intermediary organizations—many started by former TFAers—began to house
experts to deploy in support of public education change efforts through consulting arrangements with states and districts.

Certainly new ideas and expertise and outside agitation are key ingredients in change. However, the largely outsider-driven reform strategy, where capacity exists primarily outside the public education system, is bound to fail in public education. Public schools are at their core democratic institutions that reflect the values of the society they serve. Outsiders, be they individuals or organizations, lack a deep understanding of the values undergirding the system or knowledge of how those values came into being. Outsiders can often obtain the local connections or expertise necessary to start advancing a change initiative, but the initiatives tend to falter during implementation because the deep-seated governing values, norms, or relationships in the system have not been fully considered.

The response to the growth of the charter sector exemplifies this phenomenon. Communities still see charter schools as outsiders, even though they serve local students and local people serve on their boards. Only in a few cities, such as Washington, DC, and Denver, CO, have charters been more closely integrated into the public education system. That integration took place only after a number of years had passed and city and school leaders joined the larger community to work on creating a multisector system and the infrastructure needed to sustain it. Critically, for the charter initiative to take root, the community and its leaders had to engage in democratic discussion and deliberation, coming to consensus on the type of public education system it wanted to build. Too often, in our haste to initiate change, whether it be launching a charter school network, implementing a blended learning model, or creating a new teacher-training program, we
forget to consider the political strategy needed to ensure the local environment is willing
to adopt and sustain the change.

We ignore the political realm at our peril. After all, every year more than $500
billion in education spending flow through state and local governments combined (Public
School Revenue Sources, 2016). The backlash against President Trump’s nominee for
Secretary of Education, herself a proponent of privatization of education through voucher
and for-profit charter schools, demonstrates that a vocal and large number of Americans
value the public nature of education. We should seize on this momentum and engage
local communities and states in a conversation about whether current education policies
and spending priorities are truly creating the schools they want for their communities.
Conclusion

*But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?*  
(Madison, 1788)

The need to create new schools and opportunities where students can thrive, which Albert Shanker spoke of in 1988, still rings true today. Those opportunities may come through the creation of charter schools, the transformation of traditional district schools, or in new ways that we cannot yet imagine. However, creation, transformation, and innovation do not happen without the broad support of the community surrounding the students. That support comes through the work of democratic engagement with stakeholders, a process that can be messy, unpredictable, and frustrating. As education leaders, we may be tempted to eschew the political side of change, but if we do that, we risk endangering our efforts. If we believe that our schools are pillars of our democracy, then it is the most important work we can do to ensure that the democracy understands the needs of the schools that it depends on for educating its future citizens.

The stakes are high. Today, our public education systems perpetuate the very inequity in society they are supposed to protect against. This is evident in South Carolina—a state that has never truly wrestled with the historic oppression of African Americans. It’s no surprise that a state whose education system prepares just one in fifty African American high school juniors adequately for college also has significant and persistent gaps in every other measure of opportunity and well-being between whites and African Americans. After the horrific, racially motivated shooting of nine African American parishioners at the Emmanuel A.M.E. Church in downtown Charleston, President Obama (2015) urged South Carolinians, and the nation, to see “the way past
injustices continue to shape the present.” To answer President Obama’s call requires building the capacity to see how injustice is woven into the fabric of our communities and design a pathway toward its unraveling. The starting point for this work is in our education systems; because when we deny people access to an education that opens opportunity and that uplifts, we deny access to freedom. When we deny our citizens access to the tools they need to be free, our democratic experiment—built on the enlightened participation of all people—falls apart. The work ahead is building an education system that values and nurtures the brilliance of every child. Only then, will we have an education system worthy of our democracy.
References


S.C. Const. art. XI § 3


Appendices

Appendix A: SCPCSD Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCPCSD Student Demographics</th>
<th>Percent of Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced Price Lunch Status (2016-17)</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poverty Index (2015-16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race or ethnicity (2016-17)</td>
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<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<th>2015-16 State Assessment Results</th>
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<th>% of students meeting or exceeding standards</th>
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<td>SC READY 3-8 Assessments</td>
<td>SC Ready English</td>
<td>SC Ready Math</td>
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<td>SCPCSD</td>
<td>48%</td>
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<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCPCSD African American Students</td>
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<td>SCPCSD White Students</td>
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<td>Percentage Pt. Difference</td>
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<td>South Carolina African American Students</td>
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<td>South Carolina White Students</td>
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<td>Percentage Pt. Difference</td>
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<td>South Carolina</td>
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<th>4-year Cohort Graduation Rate</th>
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<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>83%</td>
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Appendix B: Entry Planning Questions and Research Insights

Entry Planning Questions and Insights

Entry Plan Questions

1. **Big Picture – Education:** What do you view as the key challenges for public education in South Carolina? Why does South Carolina have these challenges?

2. **Charter Schools:** What do you view is the role of the charter sector in South Carolina? What is your impression of charter schools in our state? What do you think might need to change about how charter schools work?

3. **SCPCSD:** What do you think the SCPCSD needs to be great at? What’s the most important role the SCPCSD can play? How is the SCPCSD viewed right now? What are the perceptions of Superintendent Smalley and the SCPCSD board’s direction?

4. **SC Education Policy:** How does state government typically address educational performance and equity challenges? Who drives the education policy agenda in the state? Who has the most influence over setting education priorities? What is the current focus of education policy?

5. **Big Picture – Policy:** How does policy change typically take place in South Carolina? How do the different branches of government work toward policy change? Are there important nuances for how the policy process typically unfolds that are important to understand?

Entry Plan Insights

Overall education system insights:

- Historical oppression and lack of access for African Americans to educational opportunities on par with whites (Abbeville County School District v. The State of South Carolina, 2014; Anderson, 1988; Baker, 2006; Estes, 2015; Parker and Hawes, 2015).

- Agreement that education is a problem in the state, but lack of agreement and coordination on what to do, especially in poor, rural areas (Davis, 2015; Johnson, 2014; M. Barton, Personal Communication, July 26, 2016; P. McNair, Personal Communication, August 16, 2016; E. Heatwole, Personal Communication, November 3, 2016).

- Strong legislature and weak governor with little control over state education agency that has an elected state superintendent, creates a fragmented education policy environment (M. Barton, Personal Communication, July 26, 2016; P. McNair, Personal Communication, August 16, 2016).

- Low capacity at state, district, and school levels to transform educational quality at scale (Johnson, 2014; Click and Hinshaw, 2014; Parker and Hawes, 2015).
• School funding system does little to address inequity (Abbeville County School District v. The State of South Carolina, 2014; Brack, 2016; Click and Hinshaw, 2014; Davis, 2015)

• Increasing focus on growing high-skilled manufacturing jobs in the state through attracting large companies (e.g., Boeing, Volvo, BMW, Michelin) has also increased concerns about the state’s workforce preparedness (Binette, P., 2016; Carnevale, et al., 2013; “Statehouse Report,” 2016).

Charter school specific insights:

• Charter schools not viewed as high-quality options, and in many cases have been used as a mechanism of white flight.

• Charter school applicants are largely unprepared and far from demonstrating capacity of what it takes to open and operate a high-quality charter.

• South Carolina charter school funding and talent environment would not be attractive to existing high-quality, out-of-state charter management organizations (low per pupil, no facilities funding, no transportation funding, few dense population centers).

• Charter school operators do not seek to open and serve the areas of the state’s highest need—poor, rural areas are especially underserved by charters.

• Charter schools, including virtual charter schools, are viewed favorably by South Carolina Republicans as a tool of school choice. Democrats are more skeptical, pointing to the racial disproportionality in enrollment at many charters.
Appendix C: Policy Plan Draft For Leadership Team Feedback, August 2017

Leadership Team Discussion Guide

- **Ideal world + our reality**: In an ideal world, what would SCPSCD’s value to South Carolina? What would our role be in creating that value? What are your key takeaways about the gap between the ideal and our reality? What does that mean for where we should focus this year, and over the next 5 years?

- **Charter Sector Analysis (slides 10-14)**: What questions do you have about this analysis? Are there any critical gaps missing from the analysis? What supporting documentation could strengthen the analysis?

- **Policy avenues (slides 15-16)**: These slides provide a broad overview of how gaps might be addressed in the short- and long-term. Is there anything missing here that should be on table as important policy change to strengthen environment for high-quality charters? Do you agree or disagree with the current short-term/long-term classification of policy changes?

- **2017 Policy Agenda v.1 (slides 17-20)**: Big picture. Do the “propose, strengthen, protect” agenda items broadly capture the most critical policy priorities given the critical gaps identified in our sector? Specifics: when you look at the specific policy actions proposed, what excites you? What concerns you? What are you the most unclear about?

- **Plan for Advancement (slides 21-22)**: Are there any key buckets of work missing from Slide 21? Are there critical activities missing from the high-level plan offered on slides 21 & 22? Do you have questions about any of the activities listed or the timing proposed?

- **Threats (slide 23)**: Are the threats accurately characterized? Would you add any threats?

- **Overall**: What else would you like to see included in this deck? Who do you think is the audience for this type of deck? What does this team want to be involved with as this work moves forward?
SCPCSD Policy Plan v.1.0

Leadership Team Review
August 23, 2016

Table of Contents

1. SC Charter Sector Conditions Analysis
2. Potential Policy Avenues (Short- & Long-Term)
4. Plan for Policy Advancement
5. Threats to Policy Advancement
In an **ideal world**, what is SCPCSD’s value to South Carolina?

- xxx

**Ideal world**: no funding limitations, no barriers to growth...

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**What makes a strong charter sector?**

**School-Level Factors**

- **PEOPLE**
- **TIME**
- **RESOURCES**

**Sector-Level Factors**

- **STRONG AUTHORIZING**
- **AUTONOMY**
- **ACCESS**
- **ACCOUNTABILITY**
## What makes a strong charter sector?

### School-Level Factors

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<tr>
<th>PEOPLE</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>RESOURCES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teams of excellent, committed educators</td>
<td>Time to flesh out the charter’s vision, test the</td>
<td>Financial and human resources to make the</td>
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<tr>
<td>with an understanding of a need in their</td>
<td>school model, learn &amp; get feedback from experts,</td>
<td>vision and plan for the school a reality</td>
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<td>community and a vision for addressing it</td>
<td>build relationships with the community, and develop</td>
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<td>a strong application</td>
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### Sector-Level Factors

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<th>AUTONOMY</th>
<th>ACCESS</th>
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<td>High standards for charter authorization</td>
<td>Freedom and flexibility for educators to operate</td>
<td>Open and unencumbered access for all</td>
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<td>so only the best ideas/plans that clearly</td>
<td>their schools in the best interest of their</td>
<td>students to attend the school of their</td>
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<td>show they will provide better opportunities</td>
<td>students and communities, including making</td>
<td>choice and information for parents on</td>
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<td>than what exists in the traditional system</td>
<td>adjustments as they learn what works</td>
<td>school performance to inform their</td>
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<tr>
<td>get to open and serve students</td>
<td></td>
<td>choices</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACCOUNTABILITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clear performance standards to which all</td>
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<td>schools must meet for the life of their</td>
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<td>charter contracts in order to ensure the</td>
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<tr>
<td>charter sector provides superior options</td>
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<td>to the traditional system</td>
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</table>
## How does SC currently address school-level factors?

### School-Level Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>How SC addresses need</th>
<th>Critical gaps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PEOPLE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mechanism for recruiting and growing charter school developers/leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Organization or system for hiring &amp; building great school developers/leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Funded time to develop the school model, connect with other school leaders/designers, build a founding board and school design team</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Formalized funding for pre-app charter school design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESOURCES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Funding to cover costs of high-quality, equitable program that meets needs of all students</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Adequate per-pupil funding (e.g., weighting, facilities, and transportation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accessible facility and transportation for students</td>
<td>• Post-approval planning grants, no formal pre-application funding</td>
<td>• Updated, practice-based teacher training and professional development in high-need areas to attract top teacher talent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong pool of educator talent</td>
<td>• Per pupil funding $X</td>
<td>• Board member recruitment/development and board best practice training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community support</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Committing engagement in school redesign/renovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Board commitment</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## How does SC currently address sector-level factors?

### Sector-Level Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>How SC addresses need</th>
<th>Critical gaps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRONG AUTHORIZING</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High-standard for school authorization, aligned with national best practice</td>
<td>• SCPCSD Model Charter School App</td>
<td>• Single SC Model Charter School App for all charters in state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fast-track process for proven operators opening in high-need areas</td>
<td>• SCPCSD fast-track replication?</td>
<td>• Variable charter terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUTONOMY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Freedom and flexibility for schools over time, talent, budget, &amp; program</td>
<td>• Charter law autonomy protections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACCESS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear, statewide regulations on open enrollment/access &amp; monitoring to ensure school compliance</td>
<td>• Charter law open lottery requirement, anti-discrimination provisions, less than 20% racial composition difference from home district</td>
<td>• School quality information system for parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Easily accessible information for families on school options</td>
<td>• Charter law open lottery requirement, anti-discrimination provisions, less than 20% racial composition difference from home district</td>
<td>• Unified SCPCSD charter enrollment process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unfair charter enrollment process</td>
<td>• Charter law open lottery requirement, anti-discrimination provisions, less than 20% racial composition difference from home district</td>
<td>• Lower the 20% racial comp. difference requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACCOUNTABILITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transparent &amp; rigorous accountability framework for academics, operations, &amp; finance</td>
<td>• SCPCSD SPF and Performance Compact</td>
<td>• SCPCSD execution of SPF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Annual performance monitoring process</td>
<td>• Charter law: automatic closure provision</td>
<td>• States school accountability “a plus” = no school ratings to initiate closure of lowest performing schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Automatic school closure provision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### How might we use policy to address these gaps?

#### School-Level Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEOPLE</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>RESOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short Term</strong></td>
<td><strong>Funding (with private match) for recruitment and support of high-potential charter school operators committed to serving high-need SC communities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Funded (public + private match) &amp; 6 month pre-application runway for charter development teams</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Long Term</strong></td>
<td><strong>State and private funding for &quot;Great Schools SC&quot; a statewide center focused on creating high-quality, innovative autonomous schools in SC's highest-need communities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Funding adequacy &amp; equity study, revised education funding formula</strong> <strong>&quot;Great Schools SC&quot; funds community school design teams</strong> <strong>Robust eco-system of education nonprofits supporting autonomous schools with access to state, local &amp; private funding</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Sector-Level Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRONG AUTHORIZING</th>
<th>AUTONOMY</th>
<th>ACCESS</th>
<th>ACCOUNTABILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short Term</strong></td>
<td><strong>Charter school law</strong> <strong>Provision for variable charter terms</strong> <strong>Authorizer authority to do a fast-track application for proven operators serving high-need areas</strong></td>
<td><strong>Audit programmatic requirements that limit charter school autonomy &amp; recommend charter law changes</strong> <strong>Create new avenues for school autonomy through &quot;innovation schools&quot; or &quot;micro-schools&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unified SCPCSD enrollment system</strong> <strong>Funding for design/build of parent-facing school quality information system</strong> <strong>Assess racial impact of charters on neighborhood schools &amp; recommend change to 20% provision</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Long Term</strong></td>
<td><strong>SCDE capacity to monitor and hold authorizers accountable for performance</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
What could a policy agenda look like for 2017?

School-Level Factors

Propose

Strengthen

Protect

Sector-Level Factors

SC Opportunity Schools: A partnership amongst SCPCSD, OCDE and local communities to develop and launch high-quality charter schools in SC’s highest-need areas. Provides the following:
- Competitive funding for school development teams for use in pre-application runway period (3 x $100,000 grants)
- Per pupil funding for authorized “Opportunity Schools” ($10,000-$12,000 per pupil)
- Facility access at same rent as district school
- Launch funding for 1-2 proven operators expanding in Opportunity community ($500,000 per school)
- Funding for “school support orgs” (e.g., Teacher talent partners, wraparound supports, school governance support) signing onto MOUs with specific Opportunity Schools
- 100% private match to total public contribution (for launch)
- Launch funding for a non-profit, “Opportunity School Center”, which raises matching dollars, manages public grant funds for pre-application, recruits and supports school developer teams, solicits opportunity school proposals from communities, and recruits school support org partners ($500,000)

SCPCSD common application and enrollment deadlines
SCPCSD beta of school profiles/school finder on website
Engage where possible in supporting EOC State Accountability Framework development
What could a policy agenda look like for 2017?

**Sector-Level Factors**

**Strengthen**
- Revise the charter school law to include:
  - Provision for variable charter terms
  - Authorize authority to do a fast-track application for proven operators serving high-need areas
  - Increased authority oversight over Educational Service Providers (ESPs)
  - SCDE + SCPSS阿根廷 agrees to model charter school app

**Protect**
- Protect:
  - SCPSS autonomy from SCDE infringement (e.g., model app)
  - The PPR/Performance Compact from backlash
  - Charter school autonomy as outlined in current charter law
  - Limit number of authorizers, focus on authorizer quality

---

What will it take to advance this agenda?

**Policy Development**

**Key Internal Activities:**
- Conduct research on inform processes and assess policy impact
- Refine policy agenda

**Key External Activities:**
- Share with key stakeholders & solicit feedback
- Refine policy agenda

**Relationships**

**Key Activities:**
- Identify key influencers and create an influence map
- Develop strong working relationships w/key decisionmakers & their teams (GA, SCDE, EOC)
- Identify and build relationships with potential community partners for Opportunity Schools
- Identify potential school replication operators and build relationships
- Identify potential school support partners that would sign on to legislative agenda

**Awareness & Communication**

**Key Activities:**
- Educate public & key decisionmakers/influencers about the SCPSS (our charge, goals, and priorities) and the opportunity for charters
- Communicate a compelling problem definition and solution set that aids groundwork for our policy agenda
- Share our agenda with our charter school operators and solicit their input and interest in being partners

**Board Development**

**Key Activities:**
- Build capacity of our board to be stewards of this agenda and our mission

**Advocacy**

**Key Activities:**
- Plan & develop the specific advocacy approach (strategy, tactics, key targets) and access need for additional capacity to execute
- Do: Conduct advocacy activities
What is the 6-month timeline for this work?

**August - September**
- Policy development
- Research, assess impact, get feedback and refine proposals
- Launch Policy working groups
- SCPSCD operators, DC education policy influencers/advocates
- Relationships
  - Identify stakeholders and influencers (government, policy, media, philanthropy, business, community)
  - Deepen immediate (level 1) relationships, establish level 2 relationships
- Awareness
  - Access current "brand awareness" with stakeholder audit
  - Develop key comms materials and messages
- Board
  - Discuss policy objectives and get board’s feedback

**October - November**
- Policy development
  - Round 2 policy proposal feedback and refinement
  - Access proposal feasibility and prioritize proposals
- Awareness
  - Create policy proposal specific comms materials/messages
  - Develop a comms plan for legislative activities
  - Execute comms plan
- Relationships
  - Refine influence/stakeholder map
  - Deepen level 2 relationships
- Board
  - Share updated policy proposals with the board
  - Ask for advocacy support
- Advocacy
  - Draft an Advocacy plan & get input from key stakeholders

**December - January**
- Policy development
  - Ongoing proposal/refinement through working groups and discussions with legislators/staff
- Awareness
  - Refine comms materials/messages
  - Execute comms plan
- Relationships
  - Refine influence/stakeholder map, identify key relationship targets for session
  - Get commitments from 3-5 influential, external champions for our policy agenda
- Board
  - Share advocacy plan with board
- Advocacy
  - Ongoing refinement of advocacy plan
  - Execute pre-session advocacy plan activities

---

What are the potential threats to success?

- **Team capacity** SCPSCD team is taking on a large body of work and going through a change-management process. Unclear how much of team time/capacity it takes to do policy work well (e.g., do we need a lobbyist? How much of comms capacity will be absorbed?)

- **Shifting SCPSCD Role in SC Education Sector** SCPSCD, in the past, played a passive role in education sector. Actively pursuing a policy agenda, and broader changes focused on accountability & quality in this environment is new for stakeholders and will likely generate backlash.

- **Turf** SC’s fragmented education policy landscape means there is a vacuum of a clear theory of change for public education, thus when we put forth a comprehensive vision and plan we will likely be displacing the many stakeholders and institutions that currently claim to be working on solutions.

- **Legislature** General Assembly is unpredictable especially when it gets into session, and given this is our first rodeo pushing an agenda, we might not have the influence in the GA to move something forward.

- **Election year** Given it is an election year where down-ballot races are likely to be impacted (even in SC), there could be new faces in the GA that could shake up dynamics.

- **SCDE capacity** SCDE is a key partner we will need, but its capacity to advance a change agenda is limited and it is resistant to getting any additional legislative mandates. Also, our relationship with SCDE is strained.
## Appendix D: Core Policy Team Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Policy Team</th>
<th>Relevant Skills, Knowledge, &amp; Experience</th>
<th>Primary Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kerry Donahue, Director of Strategy and EdLD Resident</strong></td>
<td>Project management Strategy Team leadership Policy development External affairs High-quality charter eco-system</td>
<td>Design policy influence strategy Manage policy team and project Develop policy proposals to advance SCPCSD goals Engage with key political and policy stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elliot Smalley, Superintendent</strong></td>
<td>Communications and vision-setting Strategy Project management Public engagement and influence Team leadership Managing systems of autonomous schools</td>
<td>Advisory/mentor role for Kerry Strategy and communications input Public face engaging legislators and influencers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Director of Policy and Analytics</strong></td>
<td>Data analysis Charter school policy Authorization policy High-quality charter school incubation Policy strategy</td>
<td>Support development of policy proposals, including review of existing Charter Law Support with legislative strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Director of Communications</strong></td>
<td>Communications Messaging Outreach and organizing Coalition-building Pro-charter school campaigns</td>
<td>Manage outreach to government officials, civic leaders, and education influencers Support with development of key messages Support with development and execution of advocacy strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: SCPCSD Charter Location Analysis

Analysis of Charter Location Preferences:

- Schools clustering in SC’s population centers – Greenville, Charleston, & Columbia
- 4 schools of 35 located in Abbeville plaintiff districts (high-need rural areas)
- 2 schools of 35 serving high-poverty urban population (only 1 will be open in 2017-18)
Appendix F: September Policy Brainstorm with SCPCSD Board

Policy Planning
Board Input Session
September 8, 2016

AGENDA: 4 Questions

1. Why policy?
2. What are the policy gaps?
3. What solutions or proposals could address the current gaps?
4. What are the next steps?
Why does policy matter to SCPCSD?

We create the conditions for school operators to thrive.

What are the gaps in our policy context?

- **Pipeline**
  - Support (time, money, talent) for school development
  - Process for engaging talented SC educators in charter school design

- **Resources**
  - Funding for facilities
  - Adequate per pupil funding to serve high-need students

- **Access**
  - Transportation to schools
  - Parent-friendly information about school options
  - Open and streamlined enrollment processes

- **Transparency**
  - Assessment data availability and timeliness
  - Extent of authorizer authority to monitor use of public funds
Brainstorm
What conditions or policies are necessary for SCPCSD to meet its goal of becoming a model authorizer that manages a portfolio of high-quality charter schools serving all SC students?

Proposed next steps:
• Staff reviews board input
• Drafts an agenda based on input from board and stakeholders
• Returns to board with policy agenda in Oct.
Board notes-Brainstorm

• Kathleen: Not been able to take advantage to millions and millions of dollars in foundation funding. Would like to leverage foundation
  • High quality EMOs/CMOs

• Laban: proviso funding. Not permanent, high risk to out of state

• Don: funding to follow the child
  • Transportation: no transportation, choice really isn’t choice

• Linzie: Researching into foundations, certain kind of track record, Joe smith’s foundation
  • Buildings: access to buildings, funding for upgrades

Appendix
Appendix G: Draft SCPCSD Policy Priorities Fall 2016

2017 Legislative Agenda Summary

<Draft>

**Overall goal:** Create a policy environment that supports the SCPCSD’s strategic priorities, including

1. Ensuring high-quality charter schools can open and thrive
2. Increasing access to high-quality charter schools for South Carolina students and families, especially those most in need of educational options

**Key Pillars**

1. Charter school law that protects autonomy and ensures accountability for student outcomes.
   
   a. *High-Quality Authorizing*
      
      i. Annual Performance Framework for Authorizers
      ii. Protecting against “sponsor shopping” and the financial incentives for sponsors to authorize charter schools that they don’t have capacity to oversee/monitor effectively.
      iii. Transparent annual public reporting of data from sponsors on each charter school’s performance and access and equity, including achievement by demographics and student enrollment demographics
   
   b. *Charter School Governance*
      
      i. Reducing opportunities for mismanagement and malfeasance through clarifying board member conflicts of interest and ensuring oversight of Education Service Provider Contracts (ESP)
      ii. Increasing transparency in the charter board election process
      iii. Reducing limitations on the potential pool of quality board members through adjusting the 100% SC resident requirement
   
   c. *Rigorous, Efficient and Transparent Charter Application Process*
      
      i. Clear timeline outlines from Charter Application to Charter Decision and the timeframe a sponsor has to make its decision before the charter is considered approved. (We recommend a 120-day period starting on March 1st).
      ii. Expectation that applications are thorough and complete upon submission, thus the process should not include intermediary reviews by the authorizing team prior to the capacity interview or public hearing. There is an appeals process and applicants can always reapply the following year.
   
   d. *Protecting Charter Autonomy*
      
      i. Continue to ensure that the strong charter autonomy protections in the existing statute remain

2. Remove barriers to access for students.
   
   a. *Transportation*
      
      i. Grant charter schools the ability to access state transportation funding, especially those schools that are in areas where students have limited access
   
   b. *Facilities*
i. Allow charter schools to access unused public school facilities at no cost

ii. Provide funding for facilities so schools can locate in areas where students are the most in need, even when there is not a facility readily available. (We recommend increasing contribution to the facility revolving loan fund, allowing for credit enhancements, and support adding per pupil funding for facilities).

3. **Fostering conditions to develop high-quality charter schools.**
   a. Make funding available for educators and school developers to design charter schools serving critical needs or areas of the state.
   b. Ensure per pupil funding is compelling for charter schools serving students in areas where high-quality school options are the most limited.
High-Quality Charter Sector Principles

ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT
- Establishes clear accountability for charter school performance, using multiple measures to assess academic, financial and organizational health
- Establishes clear roles in oversight of charter schools, and prevents loopholes to avoid outcomes-based accountability
- Protects student and family rights in being able to access and attend charter schools
- Eliminates opportunities for mismanagement and abuse of public education dollars

ENTRY
- Sets rigorous bar for awarding charter contracts that ensures a high-level of quality from the outset

AUTONOMY
- Protects autonomy of charter school operators to manage staff and budgets, and make programmatic decisions in the interests of students and the community

GROWTH
- Identifies the highest performers and finds ways for them to serve more students through expansion and replication

Positive Changes in Proposed Alliance Charter Act Revisions

Staff recommends support of the following:

- **Charter Enrollment Lotteries**: Gives the sponsor oversight over charter school lotteries
- **Neighborhood Enrollment Priority**: For charter schools that receive a public school building, they may give enrollment priority to students in the public school’s attendance zone.
- **Charter School Governance**: Requirement for additional board member training, clarification of board conflicts of interest, and anti-nepotism provision.
- **Education Service Providers**: Defines ESPs, gives authorizer oversight of ESP financial records, and allows authorizer to review ESP track record in application process.
- **Charter Application Process**: Delineation of the Application timeline beginning on March 1 and allowing for 120 days for the application hearing, and right of the SCPCSD to create an application addendum and manage the application process.
- **Charter School Replication Process**: Codifies the process for replication of a charter school to a new campus.
- **Conditional approval**: Ability to withdraw conditional approval if the charter school does not meet conditions.
- **Facility Credit Enhancement**: provision allowing for the use of monies in the revolving loan fund for credit enhancement.
### Threats to Authorizer Best Practices and Standards in Proposed Alliance Charter Act revisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Concerns</th>
<th>Staff Rec.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Higher Education Institution (HEI) authorizing | New section (pg. 1) 59-40-115 (sponsor transfer, pg. 28) | Overall: The purpose for allowing HEI’s to authorize only mission-, population-, or region-specific charters is not clear, especially when HEIs have the authority to approve charters already that would serve a specific mission, region, and, in some cases, student population. If the intent is to support HEI authorizing, then we should address the issues at the root of why HEI’s do not currently authorize: LEA responsibilities, lack of capacity, & inability to limit the number of schools they may have to approve in a year.  
Specific Issues:  
- Does not provide for financing for developing HEI capacity to authorize  
- SC State Board oversight of authorizers with no capacity to oversee or training in authorizer oversight  
- Authorizers with a small number of schools, typically are the weakest oversight bodies  
- No limits on charter transfers to these HEIs, or restrictions when charters transfer to avoid their current sponsor’s accountability | Staff recommends opposing the inclusion of this language in the Charter Act revisions. |
| Charter Application | 59-40-150 A (pg. 33) | Overall: The proposed language gives the State Department control over the charter application for the state versus setting standards or a template for the application with SCDE approval. This infringes on our ability to control our application and design an application that suits our purposes as a statewide charter district. The SCDE is not a charter school authorizer, thus their control of the application is misplaced.  
Specific Issues:  
- Sponsor can create | Staff recommends opposing new language that gives the SCDE control over developing the charter application and evaluation criteria for all sponsors. |
| Authorizer Performance Monitoring Authority (SPF) | **Overall:** The current language in the bill needs to make it clear that sponsors should have an outcomes-based performance monitoring system that monitors academic, financial and organizational performance. While the academic portions of this system will be aligned with state accountability requirements, that should be the floor and not the ceiling for a performance system or for charter school goals.

**Specific Issues:**
- The language giving the state department authority to set a template for an accountability report that is separate from how the state department currently oversees school accountability infringes on our authority as a sponsor to have a performance framework for our own purpose.
- The requirement saying data cannot be duplicative is unnecessarily burdensome on authorizers. In practice we do our best to reduce this, but codifying into law is unfair and difficult to monitor.
- The language stating that schools set annual performance goals for sponsor approval is not in line with best practice. We communicate performance expectations to all schools with our Performance Framework which is also aligned with state accountability, and then schools should internally set goals aligned with that framework as well as work toward their charter-specific goals which are part of their... | Staff recommends that we oppose all language that could be interpreted to take away the ability of the SCPCSD to have its own accountability and oversight system. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amendment Requests</th>
<th>59-40-60 C (pg. 13)</th>
<th>We are concerned about the automatic approval of amendments for failure of sponsor to act.</th>
<th>Staff recommends opposing this language.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charter Revocation</td>
<td>59-40-110 C (pg. 25)</td>
<td>Reasonable opportunity to correct: We are concerned about what this means in the case of persistently low academic performance, which would take longer than the period between initial notice of revocation and the revocation decision.</td>
<td>Staff recommends clarifying language to ensure that sponsor action to cite performance problems prior to initiating revocation counts as part of the “opportunity to correct” time frame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Categorical Fund Reporting</td>
<td>59-40-140 D (Pg. 30)</td>
<td>We are not sure as of yet whether this presents additional burdensome reporting in addition to the reporting our Federal programs staff already has.</td>
<td>Staff needs to gain a better understanding of the impact of this language on our Federal Programs team.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SCPCSD Additional Policy Proposals NOT Included in Alliance Bill**

- **Charter School Board Governance**: Flexibility on the SC Residency Requirement to allow for those with a business interest in the state to serve on a charter board
- **Sponsor Performance Framework**: Require all charter sponsors to have a performance framework aligned with national charter school authorizing best practices that monitors charter goals, and academic, financial and organizational performance on an annual basis.
- **Sponsor transfers**: Any sponsor signing off on the transfer of a sponsor must be required to share data with the receiving sponsor on the school’s performance, schools that are non-renewed should have a cooling off period before they are allowed to apply to another sponsor.

**Summary of SCPCSD Staff Legislative Recommendations:**

- **Higher Education Institution Authorizing**: Oppose the inclusion of this language until it can be further studied to ensure it addresses the true needs of HEIs in charter authorizing, and ensures a high-quality authorizing environment for charter schools.
- **Charter Application**: Clarify in statute that the South Carolina Public Charter School District can have its own application aligned with SCDE standards.
- **Authorizer Performance Monitoring Authority (SPF)**: Rework language to protect authority of the sponsor to have an outcomes-based performance system which
includes academic, financial and organizational performance standards set by the sponsor.

- **Charter School Board Governance**: Flexibility on the SC Residency requirement to allow for those with a business interest in the state to serve on a charter board.

- **Sponsor Performance Framework**: Require all charter sponsors to have a performance framework aligned with national charter school authorizing best practices that monitors charter goals, and academic, financial and organizational performance on an annual basis.

- **Sponsor Transfers**: Any sponsor signing off on the transfer of a sponsor must be required to share data with the receiving sponsor on the school’s performance, schools that are non-renewed should have a 3-year cooling off period before they are allowed to apply to another sponsor.

- **Amendment Requests**: Oppose automatic approval language.

- **Charter Revocation**: Clarify the language to ensure that sponsor action to cite performance problems prior to initiating revocation counts as part of the “opportunity to correct” time frame.

- **Federal Categorical Fund Reporting**: Gain a better understanding of the intention and impact of this language on our Federal Programs team.
Appendix I: Opportunity Schools Concept Paper

SOUTH CAROLINA OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS
Empowered educators. Innovative schools. Catalyzing opportunity where it is needed most.

Over the next 10 years, SC Opportunity Schools will create 20 high-quality charter schools that will provide best-in-class educational opportunities to South Carolina students and will serve as beacons for what is possible for South Carolina’s public education system, even in the most historically underserved areas of our state.

THE CHALLENGE

How can South Carolina leverage its charter school law—the primary method for increasing educational choice—and the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD) to increase the number of high-quality choices for students in our state with the fewest educational options?

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION CONTEXT

The General Assembly has invested significantly in school choice and innovation as reform strategies since the creation of the charter school law in 1996 and the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD) in 2006. The SCPCSD provides a unique opportunity to leverage charter school authorization as a tool to create high-quality, innovative schools in the areas of South Carolina where quality options are needed most. This serves an explicit purpose of the charter school law: “creating new, innovative, and more flexible ways of educating children within the public school system, with the goal of closing achievement gaps between low performing student groups and high performing student groups” (S.C. Code of Laws Title 59 Chapter 40, 2012).

Quality choices are desperately needed in our state—especially in rural communities and for African-American, Hispanic, and low-income families. Consider this recent data:

- **ACT:** 14% of all South Carolina students met the college-ready benchmark on the ACT, and only 5% of African-American students met this benchmark.
- **NAEP:** On the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 73% of South Carolina eighth graders and 67% of fourth graders were below proficient in reading. On the 2015 math NAEP, 74% of South Carolina eighth graders and 64% of fourth graders were below proficient. On the 2015 NAEP, only 15% of black fourth graders and 11% of black eighth graders were proficient in reading and 16% of black fourth graders and 8% of black eighth graders were proficient in math.

In certain areas of South Carolina, data reveal an even starker lack of educational opportunity. The South Carolina Supreme Court highlighted this in their recent *Abbeville* decision in favor of the plaintiff districts. In 2014-15, in the nine rural plaintiff school districts...
serving nearly 14,000 students, more than two-thirds of students attended at-risk or below-average schools. In five of the nine districts, 100% of students were forced to attend an at-risk or below-average school. These students had no chance of attending even an average-performing school.

This lack of choice and opportunity is not limited to rural districts. In South Carolina’s largest school districts, thousands of students are forced to attend low-performing schools. Combined, Charleston, Richland 1, and Greenville have nearly 18,000 students in the lowest-performing schools in the state, which accounts for 26% of all students trapped in our lowest-performing schools.

Proven educators and leaders, when given the power to open and run charter schools, can dramatically improve these outcomes. Nationally, urban charter schools have performed significantly better than traditional schools, especially for underserved students. In Louisiana, Tennessee, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Colorado, and Washington, DC there is significant evidence that charter schools add many extra days of learning to students most in need (CREDO, 2015; Angrist et al., 2011; Angrist et al., 2013; Abdulkadiroglu et al., 2014). In these places, setting a high bar for charter authorization and providing financial, operational, and programmatic support to talented educators to develop strong schools—specifically for the highest-need students—were essential factors in ensuring quality across charter schools. Through investing in South Carolina educators to develop and launch high-quality, innovative schools across our state we can immediately build these same conditions for success in our state’s rural and underserved communities.

THE PROPOSAL

The South Carolina Opportunity Schools Initiative will create new options for families by leveraging the authorizing power of the SCPCSD to open high-quality charter schools in our state’s most “choice limited” geographic areas.

Over the next 10 years, SC Opportunity Schools will launch 20 high-quality not-for-profit charter schools that will provide best-in-class educational opportunities to South Carolina students and will serve as beacons for what is possible for South Carolina’s public education system. Opportunity Schools will achieve this through a two-pronged approach of (1) investing in the recruitment and development of charter school leaders to

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16 Florence 4, Hampton 2, Allendale, Lee, Jasper, McCormick, Bamberg 2, Barnwell 19, and Orangeburg 3
17 Florence 4, Hampton 2, Allendale, Lee, and Jasper
design and launch high-quality charter schools in South Carolina’s highest-need communities, and (2) providing these new high-quality charter schools with adequate resources to sustainably fund their operations and academic programs.

1. **Developing High-Quality Schools**: SCPCSD proposes the creation of a $10.5 million charter school development fund to create and launch 20 high-quality, innovative charter schools in South Carolina’s highest-need communities. The General Assembly would provide $5 million in funding, which would be matched with $5.5 million in private philanthropic funding. The $10.5 million would be spent over the next 10 years toward the development, design, and launch of 20 high-quality, SCPCSD-authorized charter schools serving approximately 10,000 South Carolina students.\(^{18}\) Funding would support four primary activities: (1) recruiting and developing talented educators and leaders to design and launch new charter schools; (2) supporting the replication or expansion of existing high-quality South Carolina charter schools; (3) recruiting proven charter school operators from other states to expand in South Carolina; (4) sharing high-leverage best practices with district and charter schools through sponsoring school visits, trainings for teachers and leaders, leadership mentoring, and curriculum sharing. Florida, Tennessee and Nevada created similar funds dedicated expanding the number of quality charter schools serving students in need of quality options.\(^{19}\)

2. **Supporting High-Quality Schools**: In order to ensure that the high-quality charter schools created through the Opportunity Schools program have adequate resources to fund their programs and operations, and serve a high-need student population, Opportunity Schools should receive per pupil funding on par with similar schools in their geographic area. We estimate that this will require an additional $3,000 per pupil on top of the current SCPCSD $8,780 per pupil funding. Given our estimates for the creation and launch of Opportunity Schools, we estimate this would cost the state $300,000 in Year 1 (2017-18), $1,500,000 in Year 2 (2018-19) and $3,900,000 in Year 3 (2019-20). The cost increase is tied to the enrollment growth at each of the newly created schools and thus would be phased in over time as schools reach full enrollment. A table below displays the three-, five-, and ten-year cost estimates, and the estimated funding model. These resources are all-inclusive, covering facilities and transportation needs in addition to educational programs. In order to maintain eligibility for the funding, schools

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\(^{18}\) Pending SCPCSD board approval of charter applications.

\(^{19}\) Florida and Tennessee both partnered with the national funder, the Charter School Growth Fund, which supports high-quality charter management organizations (CMOs) across the United States. Florida’s Department of Education combined $20 million in Federal Race to the Top Funds with $10 million of private investment to create 30 new charter schools. For more information about FL: [http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7568/urlt/0073617-growth.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7568/urlt/0073617-growth.pdf).

Tennessee combined $10 million in Race to the Top Funding with $20 million in private philanthropy to create a fund dedicated to the incubation and replication of high-quality charter schools. This included the creation of a charter school incubator which leveraged $12 million dollars toward the launch of 15 new charter school, and the launch of a $18 million CMO growth fund which invested in the expansion of 7 CMOs creating 37 schools across Tennessee. For information about TN: [http://chartergrowthfund.org/tennessee-report](http://chartergrowthfund.org/tennessee-report).

In 2015, Nevada’s legislature appropriated $10 million over two years to a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing and recruiting high-quality charter schools to serve students in Clark County, NV. For more information about NV’s Senate Bill 491: [http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/78th2015/Bills/SB/SB491_EN.pdf](http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/78th2015/Bills/SB/SB491_EN.pdf).
would have to maintain high performance as determined by the South Carolina’s school accountability system and the SCPCSD school performance framework. We believe this additional targeted per pupil funding will incentivize strong performance and the opening schools in SC’s highest-need communities, and will make South Carolina an attractive place for high-quality charter management organizations to expand.

OPERATIONALIZING OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS

*High-quality charter school development:* SCPCSD will establish an affiliated 501c(3) nonprofit (structurally similar to a school district education foundation—Greenville County Schools Foundation) with the specific mission of recruiting and incubating high-quality charter schools for South Carolina’s highest-need communities. The nonprofit would raise the $5.5 million in private philanthropy to support the Opportunity Schools initiative. The $5 million from the General Assembly for the Opportunity Schools initiative would be appropriated to the SCPCSD for the development of high-quality charter schools. Members of the Education Oversight Committee and the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) would serve on a strategic advisory council for the nonprofit along with philanthropic investors, and other community leaders. The nonprofit would design a program to recruit high-potential charter school leaders, and then would support these leaders to engage communities, and design new charter schools or replicate existing charter schools. Prospective charter school leaders seeking to launch new charter schools would participate in nationally recognized charter start-up training program (*Building Excellent Schools, 4.0 Schools, Transcend*) or would work with the nonprofit to design a school start-up training program specific to their needs. There are organizations across the country that have engaged in similar charter school development and replication work, and the nonprofit would look to these organizations for support in designing its programs and services to support the creation of high-quality charter schools (*Tennessee Charter School Center, New Schools for Baton Rouge, The Mind Trust, Opportunity 180, Charter School Growth Fund, NewSchools Venture Fund*). The SCDE Office of Transformation and the EOC would play a key role in identifying communities that would benefit from having an Opportunity School. Once identified, the nonprofit would help in matching prospective charter school leaders with identified communities, such that the community could be engaged during the school design process.

*Opportunity Schools Budget - High-Quality Charter School Development*
Support for high-quality charter schools: Opportunity Schools legislation should outline specific criteria for eligibility for the additional $3,000 in per pupil funding for high-quality charter schools authorized to open in the state’s highest need communities. This funding should only go to proven schools or leaders with strong track records of generating exceptional educational outcomes for low-income communities. Additionally, Opportunity Schools funding eligibility would be contingent on a charter school serving a student population in which at least 70% of students are considered economically disadvantaged. The SCPCSD would be responsible for creating an Opportunity Schools funding application, which schools would apply for following their authorization. SCPCSD would develop funding guidelines aligned with the criteria set forth in the legislation to ensure that funds are going toward advancing high-quality charter school access for students in high-need communities in South Carolina. Annually, the SCPCSD would report to the EOC and the SCDE on the progress of the Opportunity Schools initiative, including the number of schools established, students served, and the academic performance of each school.

Opportunity Schools Budget - High-Quality Charter School Support

In order to estimate the annual cost of the additional $3,000 in per pupil funding, we had to project the number of students served in newly launched charter schools, under the Opportunity Schools program. To make these projections we assume that there are 20 schools launched, each serving 500 students, and that those schools open over a period of 6 years (2017-2023). We assume that schools open with 100 students in a single grade and add 100 students per grade annually until each school reaches 500 students. In year 10, all 20 schools are fully enrolled with 10,000 students.
The table below displays the costs incurred from the $3,000 in supplemental per pupil funding for the 20 high-quality charter schools meeting the Opportunity Schools eligibility criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunity Schools: Student Enrollment Projections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Start Charter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-State Charter Replication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of State CMO Expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total student enrollment projections</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. By Year 6 all 20 schools will have been created and opened, but schools will continue to grow to full enrollment
2. This model assumes slow growth where each school starts with 100 students and adds 100 students per grade a year until reaching 500 students in the school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunity Schools: High-Quality School Support Funding Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Per pupil Cost Assumptions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current SCPSD Revenue per pupil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity Schools Supplemental Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total state-incurred cost</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net new state-incurred cost</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The "Total state-incurred cost" represents the annual cost of each $3,000 per pupil in supplemental Opportunity Schools funding
2. "Net New State Incurred Cost" represents just the cost of the $3,000 supplemental Opp Schools funding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunity Schools: Cumulative Net New Costs Incurred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue Source</th>
<th>SCPSD (Brick &amp; Mortar)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State (EFA + EIA)</td>
<td>$4,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>$ -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proviso</td>
<td>$3,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>$1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Total Revenue Per Pupil</td>
<td>$8,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity School Supplemental Funding</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Opportunity School Per Pupil</td>
<td>$11,780</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J: Opportunity Schools Budget Proviso for House Ways and Means K-12 Subcommittee 1.09.17

1A.XX (XXX:XXX: Opportunity Schools Initiative)

The Opportunity Schools Initiative is a program of the South Carolina Public Charter School District intended to be a public-private partnership to recruit, develop and expand high-quality charter schools serving high-need areas of South Carolina, including the Plaintiff school districts in the Abbeville vs. State of South Carolina lawsuit. As used in this proviso a “high-need area” is defined as a plaintiff district in the Abbeville lawsuit or any school attendance zone with a poverty index of 70% or greater. A dedicated office within the South Carolina Public Charter School District or an affiliated non-profit corporation shall be created to support the Opportunity Schools Initiative.

From the funds appropriated pursuant to ____________, the ____________ is directed to transfer a one-time, nonrecurring amount of $5,000,000 to the South Carolina Public Charter School District for the purpose of implementing the Opportunity Schools Initiative. Amounts not expended during the current fiscal year may be carried forward to future years for purposes of implementing the Opportunity Schools Initiative. These funds may be used for no other purpose. The South Carolina Public Charter School District shall use its best efforts to obtain private donations in the amount of $5,000,000 to further support the Opportunity Schools Initiative.

Charter schools approved by the South Carolina Public Charter School District to open in high-need areas are eligible to receive up to $3,000 in additional per pupil funding, which may be used for instructional support, facilities and transportation costs. The amount of additional funding, if any, to be provided shall be at the discretion of the South Carolina Public School District. In order to receive additional per pupil funding, schools must be located in a high-need area, serve a student population with a poverty index of 70% or greater, must not be in default of its charter or contract with the South Carolina Public School District, and must not be identified in the state’s education accountability system as performing below average. The South Carolina Public Charter School District will develop an application process for schools to apply for the Opportunity Schools per pupil funding in line with the eligibility criteria in this proviso. Beginning in 2018, schools will be eligible to apply for the additional Opportunity Schools per pupil funding. This funding is available for up to 20 schools.

The Opportunity Schools Initiative will have an advisory committee, which will include an appointee from the Education Oversight Committee and an appointee from the State Department of Education, as well as members from business, philanthropy, and leaders from high-need areas. The South Carolina Public Charter School District will report to the advisory committee on an semi-annual basis, and will report to the Education Oversight Committee on an annual basis.
1A.XX (Opportunity Schools Pilot Initiative)

The Opportunity Schools Pilot Initiative is a program of the South Carolina Public Charter School District intended to be a public-private partnership to recruit, develop and expand high-quality charter schools specifically serving high-need areas of South Carolina, including the Plaintiff school districts in the Abbeville vs. State of South Carolina lawsuit. As used in this proviso a “high-need area” is defined as a plaintiff district in the Abbeville lawsuit or any school attendance zone with a poverty index of 75% or greater. A dedicated office within the South Carolina Public Charter School District or an affiliated non-profit corporation shall be created to support the Opportunity Schools Initiative.

From the funds appropriated pursuant to ____________, the ____________ is directed to transfer an amount of $1,000,000 to the South Carolina Public Charter School District for the purpose of implementing the Opportunity Schools Pilot Initiative. Amounts not expended during the current fiscal year may be carried forward to future years for purposes of implementing the Opportunity Schools Initiative. These funds may be used for no other purpose. The South Carolina Public Charter School District is required to obtain a 1:1 match in private donations up to $1,000,000 in order to access state funding to support the Opportunity Schools Pilot Initiative. Funds will go toward the development of up to 5 public charter schools in high-need areas.

The South Carolina Public Charter School District will create an application and evaluation process for individuals or groups with a demonstrated track-record of serving students in high-need communities to apply for the Opportunity Schools charter school development funding. In order to meet the criteria for opening an Opportunity School, existing charter operators must have a record of success with high-need, high-poverty students, and are not eligible if their existing charter school is in corrective action status within the South Carolina Public Charter School District or any other charter school sponsor. Individuals or groups seeking to apply for the Opportunity Schools funding that do not currently operate a charter school must demonstrate success in improving academic achievement for high-need, high-poverty students.

All applications approved by the South Carolina Public School District for the Opportunity Schools Initiative must be certified by the Education Oversight Committee as meeting the criteria setforth in the Opportunity Schools Initiative.

The South Carolina Public Charter School District will report to the Education Oversight Committee on an annual basis on the status of the Opportunity Schools Initiative.
South Carolina Opportunity Schools

As a solution to our state’s greatest education challenges, South Carolina Opportunity Schools will invest in great educators to open schools where they are needed most.

OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS PILOT OVERVIEW

Opportunity Schools is a pilot initiative to develop high-quality, innovative charter schools and replicate existing high-quality schools in communities where there is need for great school options. The initiative combines private and public funding to recruit, train, and support leaders to open up to 6 high-quality charter schools in high-need areas, including the Abbeville Plaintiff Districts, over the next 3 years. This initiative represents a unique partnership between the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD), the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) and the Department of Education. Launching the Opportunity Schools pilot will require an initial investment of $1 million from the General Assembly.

Funding would support four key activities:

1. Growing capacity of South Carolina’s existing high-quality, single-site charter schools to replicate or expand to serve more students and communities
2. Recruiting and training talented leaders to develop and launch new high-quality charter schools uniquely designed with community input and to meet specific community needs
3. Recruiting proven charter school operators to open schools South Carolina and supporting them to adapt their school models to local needs
4. Sharing knowledge and effective practices across charter and district schools on leveraging autonomy, talent management, and instructional practices to improve outcomes for high-need students

WHAT DIFFERENTIATES OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS?

A Results-based Approach to Charter School Growth: While at full-scale Opportunity Schools has the potential to create up to 20 schools, the SCPCSD recommends starting this as a pilot initiative and then evaluating whether to take it to scale. The initial pilot would provide funding for the development of 6 high-quality, innovative charter schools opening in high-need communities.

Catalytic Investment of Public Dollars: The Opportunity Schools fund will be constructed to catalyze private investment in South Carolina’s education system in historically underfunded communities. Every public dollar in the fund will require a private matching dollar to unlock the public funding. This system of 1-to-1 matching is mutually beneficial: private funders are guaranteed their resources go to an initiative the public values and is willing to scale, and the public is guaranteed its dollars will only go toward an effort where private dollars can also be leveraged to reduce taxpayer burden.

Collaboration of Key Stakeholders on Education Innovation and Improvement: Opportunity Schools is designed to bring together key stakeholders from South Carolina’s key state- and community-level entities. While the initiative would be run out of the SCPCSD, it would be overseen by an advisory committee which would include Department of Education officials, higher-education leaders, community leaders from Abbeville Plaintiff Districts, business leaders, and charter school leaders. The advisory committee would monitor progress of the initiative, and would guide the selection of communities for Opportunity Schools to ensure the development of a charter school would be in line with local community goals.
SUSTAINING AND INVESTING IN SUCCESS
To incentivize the growth of high-quality charter school operators to open schools specifically in areas of high-need, the General Assembly should provide for increased per pupil funding that would put charter school funding closer to parity with district-managed schools. Schools developed through the Opportunity Schools program, authorized by the SCPCSD, and maintaining good ratings on the state’s accountability system, should be eligible to receive up to an additional $3,000 in per pupil funding. Only charter schools serving a 75% low-income student population would be eligible for this additional funding. Funds would support South Carolina’s efforts to extend educational choice in high-need areas, and support charter school operators to fund transportation, facilities, and extended instructional programing.
Appendix L: Virtual Charter Schools Proposed Revisions to Charter Act

SECTION 1. Section 59-40-110, as last amended by Act 288 of 2014, of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

Section 59-40-110. (C)(1) A charter must be revoked or not renewed by the sponsor if it determines that the charter school:

(1) (a) committed a material violation of the conditions, standards, performance expectations, or procedures provided for in the charter application or charter school contract, or both;

(2) (b) failed to meet the academic performance standards and expectations as defined in the charter application or charter school contract, or both;

(3) (c) failed to maintain its books and records according to generally accepted accounting principles or failed to create an appropriate system of internal control, or both; or

(4) (d) violated any provision of law from which the charter school was not specifically exempted.

(C)(2) For purposes of this subsection, a charter school meeting the academic performance standards of the South Carolina Department of Education shall be considered meeting the performance standards of its sponsor.

SCPCSD Analysis:

- New language in (C)(2) references “performance standards of the SC Department of Education” that do not exist. South Carolina does not currently have an accountability system, and the one proposed by the EOC does not include a clear standard that a school either meets or doesn’t meet which would be necessary for this language to function.
- Charter schools are supposed to be held accountable to goals that they set in their contracts. This would render the goals in charter contracts meaningless if the only thing that matters are they meet a standard of the State Department.
Appendix M: Opportunity Schools Proposal in Governor’s Executive Budget 2017-18

State of South Carolina
Office of the Governor

NIEKI R. HALEY
GOVERNOR

1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia 29001

January 10, 2017

To the People of South Carolina and Members of the General Assembly,

Today I submit the FY 2017–18 Executive Budget that builds upon our successes of the past six years and charts a path forward for the continued success of the people of South Carolina. Once again our state faced a challenging year, but as always, the citizens of South Carolina met the challenges before them with great resolve and compassion for one another. I could not be more proud of our public servants and citizens in their response to these challenges.

Over the past four years, we have made education a focus of my administration. By adding weighted per-pupil funding for students in poverty, we provided additional state dollars for students that need it most and began the process of improving educational services to long neglected areas of the state. We also vastly improved education and technology funding across the board for all of South Carolina’s students. When I took office in 2010, average per-pupil funding was only $11,372 compared to an average of $13,095 that this budget provides to local school districts so that they will have the necessary resources to provide a first class education to our students. Funding alone is not enough though, especially if it is not paired with strong systems of accountability. To that end we enacted the Read to Succeed Act to ensure that all third graders can read before moving on to the next grade and to provide reading coaches and summer reading camps to improve literacy of those that need extra help.

Building on our past success, this budget gives many of South Carolina’s students opportunities that they have never had before. By providing capital funding for career centers and additional recruitment incentives for the highly qualified professionals that staff them, this budget ensures that every student in South Carolina will have access to first class career training so they can immediately enter a high wage and in-demand career upon graduation. In the same spirit, the launch of the new charter school program will recruit high performing charters to underperforming parts of the state in order to empower parents with options and bring educational achievement to these areas.
efforts of these charters can be replicated to provide exceptional education opportunities to new areas of the state.

The “Opportunity Schools” program launched in the FY 2017–18 Executive Budget is a five year plan to charter 20 high quality non-profit charter schools in our state that will grow their enrollment to over 8,000 over the next 10 years in order to provide world class education to students in the most historically underserved areas of our state. The impact of this innovative program has the potential to disrupt the current cycle of below-par education in certain areas by creating success stories that begin to transform expectations and challenge preconceived notions about students’ achievement in certain areas of the state.

Because charter schools do not have access to additional funding sources to pay for facilities and transportation, schools that are established as Opportunity Schools will be eligible to receive funding bonuses of up to $3,000 per student that will bring them to parity with, but not exceed, per pupil funding of traditional schools in their local district. This increased funding level will allow for the recruitment and replication of the charter schools with the highest levels of achievement in our state and across the nation to serve some of the state’s neediest areas. The Opportunity Schools will need time to grow their enrollment, therefore the FY 2017–18 Executive Budget proposes $300,000 in funding for a first year enrollment of 100 students in the Opportunity Schools program. The Opportunity Schools initiative sends a message to the children of South Carolina that we recognize their serious needs and makes a serious commitment to addressing the challenges of these underserved areas.
1A.84  Opportunity Schools

Establish This proviso will create a program within the South Carolina Public Charter School District which will provide funding bonuses to Opportunity Schools that bring their schools to parity with, but does not exceed, per student funding in the local school district. The Opportunity Schools program will provide additional resources to charter schools operating within the geographic area of high poverty areas in order to increase student achievement in historically underperforming areas and expand school choice.

Appendix N: SC Senate Finance K-12 Subcommittee Recommendation for Opportunity Schools March 23, 2017

1A.oep CONFORM TO FUNDING (Opportunity School Pilot Initiative) SFC SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: CONFORM to funding recommendation / ADD new proviso......................

1A.oep (SDE-EIA: Opportunity Schools Pilot Initiative) The Opportunity Schools Pilot Initiative is a program of the South Carolina Public Charter School District intended to be a public-private partnership to recruit, develop and expand high-quality charter schools specifically serving high-need areas of South Carolina, including the Plaintiff school districts in the Abbeville vs. State of South Carolina lawsuit. As used in this proviso a “high-need area” is defined as a plaintiff district in the Abbeville lawsuit or any school attendance zone with a poverty index of 75% or greater. A dedicated office within the South Carolina Public Charter School District or an affiliated non-profit corporation shall be created to support the Opportunity Schools Initiative.

From the funds appropriated pursuant to ________ the ________ is directed to transfer an amount of $1,000,000 to the South Carolina Public Charter School District for the purpose of implementing the Opportunity Schools Pilot Initiative. Amounts not expended during the current fiscal year may be carried forward for purposes of implementing the Opportunity

3

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE K-12 EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE PROVISO RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FY 2017-18 PACKAGE #2

Schools Initiative. These funds may be used for no other purpose. The South Carolina Public Charter School District is required to obtain a 1:1 match in private donations, up to $1,000,000, in order to access state funding to support the Opportunity Schools Pilot Initiative. Funds shall go toward the development of up to five public charter schools in high-need areas.

The South Carolina Public Charter School District shall create an application and evaluation process for individuals or groups with a demonstrated track-record of serving students in high-need communities to apply for the Opportunity Schools charter school development funding. In order to meet the criteria for opening an Opportunity School, existing charter operators must have a record of success with high-need, high-poverty students, and are not eligible if their existing charter school is in corrective action status within the South Carolina Public Charter School District or any other charter school sponsor. Individuals or groups seeking to apply for the Opportunity Schools funding that do not currently operate a charter school must demonstrate success in improving academic achievement for high-need, high-poverty students. All applications approved by the South Carolina Public Charter School District for the Opportunity Schools Initiative must be certified by the Education Oversight Committee as meeting the criteria set forth in the Opportunity Schools Initiative.

The South Carolina Public Charter School District shall report to the Education Oversight Committee on an annual basis on the status of the Opportunity Schools Initiative.


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