

Expanding the Supply of High-Quality Charter Schools: Innovations and Incubation—Chapters 1 and 2

Slides 1, 2, 3, and 4

PEGGIE: Good afternoon. This is Peggie Garcia and the National Charter School Resource Center. We'd like to welcome you to our September webinar—*Expanding the Supply of High-Quality Charter Schools: Innovations and Incubation*. The National Charter School Resource Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, and we are pleased to welcome two distinguished presenters with us today. Joe Ableidinger is a consultant with Public Impact. His work focuses on a variety of education policy issues, including emerging technologies in education, teacher and leader policy, and charter schools. Ethan Gray serves as the vice president of The [Mind Trust](#), where he oversees The Mind Trust's efforts to support education entrepreneurship nationwide through his work as director of the [Cities for Education Entrepreneurship Trust](#). We'll give you a little bit more information about them in a moment.

To start off the webinar, I'd like to give you a quick orientation. We do have about 200 people registered for this webinar. So in order to preserve the audio quality of the webinar, we'd like to ask as many people as possible to listen through your computer[s] and to also enter your questions through the chat, rather than having them over the phone. This will make a higher quality audio recording that we can then archive on our website. We will have questions and answers after the period is over. I do see that one person has their hand raised. We will go ahead and take questions and answers after Joe and Ethan have had a chance to deliver their presentation. Again, as I mentioned, the chat is on the left-hand side. You can enter questions for the presenters at any time during the webinar, and we'll answer them during the Q and A.

On the lower left-hand corner, there's a file share window. There are two files there, one is the slide set. If you did not receive the reminder that I sent out this morning with the slides and you'd like to print them out and take notes during the webinar, you can go ahead and just click on the file and then save to my computer and then they'll give you a screen to download it. You can go ahead and open those up. The



other file there is the incubation white paper. This paper was authored by Joe as a follow-up to a city-based conference that we held in New Orleans in May of this year. There will be three papers in the series, and this is the first that will be published of the series. We're excited to have Joe and Ethan talking to us about incubation.

I think that's about it. There is also a full screen button at the top of your window. If you'd like to make the screen bigger, you can also use the full screen button to go ahead and do that. With no further ado, I am going to go ahead and hand it over to Joe. Welcome.

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JOE: Great. Thanks, Peggie. Good afternoon everyone. Thank you all for joining us. This is Joe Ableidinger with Public Impact. Welcome to the webinar on *Expanding the Supply of High-Quality Charter Schools: Innovations and Incubation*.

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Today, Ethan and I will be discussing charter school incubation, a promising strategy for intentionally accelerating the growth of high-quality charter schools.

I'm going to start out by discussing the need for incubation, the promise of incubation, and some of the early evidence that suggests incubation pays off. Ethan will then introduce his initiative CEE-Trust and the work that CEE-Trust and its members have been doing in the area of incubation. We'll then discuss four critical focus areas for charter incubators and innovative responses to the challenges of incubation in each area. My colleague Lucy Steiner and I identified these four areas through research and through discussions with CEE-Trust members. These four areas are featured in our paper, as Peggie mentioned, the paper associated with this webinar, *Incubating High-Quality Charter Schools: Innovations and City-Based Organizations*, which you can find linked in the bottom left-hand corner of your screen. Finally, at the end of our presentation, we will discuss five major policies that policymakers can address to support charter incubation and how changes in these areas would help incubators.

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I want to begin by discussing the need for charter incubation, but first what do we mean when we say *incubation*? It's a term that we found is used inconsistently in the education field. Ethan is going to talk in a bit about the defining characteristics of incubation as that term is used by CEE-Trust members. But I thought a quick definition would be helpful here at the outset. So here goes.

“Charter school incubation is building the supply of high-quality charter schools and charter management organizations [CMOs] by recruiting, selecting, training, and supporting promising leaders as they launch new schools.”

There's a lot to unpack in there and much more to say when Ethan takes up the topic in a few minutes, but that will get us started.

Why do we need charter incubation? First of all, we know that students at the strongest charter schools achieve at high levels, equaling or surpassing the performance of traditional district schools serving similar students. But today's top charters and CMOs reach far too few students.

Here are two key statistics. First, the charter sector as a whole serves only about 4 percent of all public school students nationwide; second, in 2008, CMOs collectively served only 144,000 students. But we also know the quality of educational options in the charter sector is mixed, so the number of students with access to high-performing charter schools is even lower than these numbers suggest. If we surveyed all of you on the call today and asked you to name the top CMOs out there, I'm sure your list would include these five: Uncommon Schools, KIPP, High Tech High, Achievement First, and Green Dot. Without meaning to belittle the accomplishments of these great networks at all, I need to note that these CMOs together serve only 48,000 students. In the meantime, there are nearly half a million students on charter school waiting lists across the country, millions more in states or localities that lack access to charter schools all together. Ten states have no charter law, and 89 percent of all districts in the U.S. don't have any charter schools. So facing these supply shortages, policymakers and city leaders have turned to new strategies for increasing seats for our

neediest students in charter schools and, more importantly, seats in top-performing charter schools.

The most common strategy these days seems to be trying to entice high-performing CMOs to expand. That's an important strategy, one that incubators are helping pursue with some success. But there are many challenges to CMO expansion and no guarantee at all that CMOs will be able to replicate their success at larger scales or when they move to new cities or states. Even putting aside all of these challenges, most CMOs have shown little appetite for major growth. One recent survey found that only 5 of today's CMOs aim to open 30 or more schools by 2025, and around half will open 10 or fewer schools in the same time frame.

On top of the limitations of charter growth, we face a critical shortage of high-quality school leaders, or promising candidates to lead new schools. Projections suggest that this is only going to get worse. The bottom line here is that there are currently too few paths to school leadership and insufficient supports for top candidates for school leadership positions.

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Charter incubation can address both of these needs. As Ethan will discuss in a few minutes, CEE-Trust members that are engaging in incubation focus on selecting only prospective school leaders that show exceptional promise; then they invest substantial resources in the individuals they select. Through this strict upfront screening and their targeted investments, incubators attract an elite core of promising leaders and give them the training and tools they need to succeed. This process of intentionally building the supply of promising leaders is one way incubators aim to accelerate charter sector growth, but they also focus on creating more hospitable environments for new charter schools. Incubators help new schools open and thrive by helping establish school leaders in the communities where they will open their schools and also by advocating for policies that they believe will help boost these leaders' chances of success.

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Our early evidence suggests that established incubators within the CEE-Trust network have accelerated charter sector growth in their

localities. This has happened in three main ways. First, through their targeted screening and support of school leaders, incubators have achieved strong results in their incubated schools. [New Schools for New Orleans](#), for instance, incubated the highest performing high school and the highest performing elementary school in the New Orleans Recovery School District. Second, established incubators have created more positive settings for charter schools among community members and policymakers. Incubators in New Orleans and Tennessee worked closely with local and state officials to establish strong policy environments for charter schools. New Schools for New Orleans also secured a major grant under the federal [Investing in Innovation Fund](#) to support further incubation in New Orleans and Tennessee. Third (it's really a subissue under creating hospitable environments), established incubators have helped recruit proven charter school models to new cities and regions. By itself, this strategy will not dramatically increase the number of high-quality seats available; but by offering a ready supply of school leaders and by working to strengthen policy environments, incubators can provide a soft landing in their cities for networks based elsewhere. This can both encourage those CMOs to expand their growth aspirations and make them more successful when they confront the challenges of growth.

The [Tennessee Charter School Incubator](#), partnering with Charter School Growth Fund, plans to open 40 new charter schools in the next 5 years, half by scaling up proven CMOs. New Schools for New Orleans recently helped recruit California's [Rocketship](#) to expand to New Orleans. We have to stress, though, that in spite of the early successes of established incubators, it is still way too early to draw definite conclusions.

First of all, there are few established incubators. Most of the evidence we have from within the CEE-Trust network comes from just two established incubators: New Schools for New Orleans and the Tennessee Charter School Incubator. Because of this, there is limited data permitting us to draw conclusions or to make predictions about future incubation efforts. Nevertheless, as we've surveyed the field, we've seen incredibly strong interest in incubation, from education reformers to policymakers to private funders. I'm now going to turn it over to Ethan to talk about CEE-Trust, the charter incubation working group, and defining characteristics of CEE-Trust charter incubators. Ethan?

PEGGIE: Hi Joe, this is Peggie. I'm sorry to jump in, but it seems like there's a little bit of confusion among the people who are watching the webinar about what incubation is. So if you could read your definition again, that you read at the top of the webinar, and maybe elaborate a little bit and then switch back to Ethan.

JOE: Okay. Great. The definition that we're using—and we know that incubation is a term that's used inconsistently across the field—so some of the definitions that we've heard have been essentially coextensive with charter support organizations or may or may not include CMOs.

The definition we've arrived at in talking with the CEE-Trust incubation working group members is building the supply of high-quality charter schools and charter management organizations by recruiting, selecting, training, and supporting promising leaders as they launch new schools. I think some of the definitional issues will become clear as Ethan goes through the next couple slides and talks about the defining characteristics of incubators, as defined by the CEE-Trust working group.

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ETHAN: Great. Well thanks, Joe, and thanks everyone for joining us today. Launched in June of 2010, CEE-Trust, which is short for the Cities for Education Entrepreneurship Trust, is a growing network of 18 city-based, nonprofits, foundations, and mayors' offices that support education, innovation, and reform. Our current members are listed here on the slide. CEE-Trust's goal is to accelerate the growth of high-impact entrepreneurial education solutions in member cities, leveraging the resources and connections of city-based organizations and leaders to drive change.

CEE-Trust was founded by The Mind Trust, an Indianapolis-based nonprofit that has built and invested in a portfolio of the nation's best established and emerging entrepreneurial organizations. The Mind Trust has brought to Indianapolis groups like Teach for America (TFA) and College Summit, and we've helped incubate new groups, like Teach Plus and Summer Advantage USA.

CEE-Trust was founded on The Mind's Trust belief that city-based organizations have tremendous potential to create a fertile climate for

education innovation and are an undertapped resource in the education reform space. They often share more than the desire to improve education in their cities; they also share a deep understanding of their local civic, political, business, and philanthropic sectors. By leveraging these connections with key stakeholders, city-based organizations can be powerful advocates for education entrepreneurs looking for opportunities to launch or expand.

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CEE-Trust's members were invited to the network because they share certain key characteristics. They all have track records of investing in innovation and leading reform in their cities. They all believe that education entrepreneurship is a key lever for driving systemic change. CEE-Trust strives to help members accelerate the pace of change by designing collaborations between cities, identifying and documenting best practices, hosting events, and producing analysis of cutting edge issues.

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Over the past year, sensing a common need in their cities and realizing the promise of charter school incubation, several CEE-Trust members came together to form the charter incubation working group. The working group's members include established incubators and newer groups as well. Members include The Mind's Trust; Innovative Schools in Wilmington, Delaware; Get Smart Schools in Denver; the Skillman Foundation in Detroit; New Schools for New Orleans; the Tennessee Charter School Incubator; Charter School Partners in Minnesota; Rhode Island Merrill Academies; the Teaching Trust in Dallas; and the mayors' offices of Nashville and St. Louis. Together, these groups are sharing lessons learned, discussing key challenges, and exploring partnership opportunities to accelerate the pace of change.

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While each incubator has its own unique approach, all share a primary focus on leadership cultivation and the desire to intentionally build the charter market in their community. With deep experience in new starts, incubators target time and resources as [Inaudible] to recruiting, selecting, and supporting high potential new school leaders as they design and build their new charter schools or CMOs. CEE-Trust

working group members also elevate the profile of charters in their cities. By giving visibility to the importance of incubating top flight new schools, incubators are held publicly accountable for ensuring that schools affiliated with their programs are of high quality. And with deep community ties, incubators are well positioned to draw additional resources to support the work of new school leaders and help them develop stronger connections within the community. Joe?

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JOE: Thanks, Ethan. Earlier this summer, the National Charter School Resource Center commissioned us at Public Impact to document the activities of CEE-Trust members and examine their innovations related to incubating high-quality charter schools.

Through our research and contacts with leaders of these organizations, we were able to distill four critical focus areas for city-based charter incubators. You can see them listed here on this slide—four specific ways that incubators aim to intentionally accelerate the growth of charter markets in their cities. I'm going to walk through the lessons learned under each focus area briefly and then pause on each one for Ethan to present examples of how these focus areas have played out for CEE-Trust members.

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Incubation primarily aims to attract and develop effective leaders to open and successfully operate new high-quality charter schools. All incubators invest significant resources in recruiting exceptional talent through selective processes. Some handle this in-house, while others partner with talent-building organizations like [Building Excellent Schools](#) or [4.0 Schools](#). Some incubators look locally for talent, while others search regionally or nationally.

After recruitment, the philosophies of incubators divide. Some invest significant resources in training, supporting, and monitoring their leaders, while others give their selected leaders fairly free reign, letting them figure out for themselves what supports they need. The point here is, depending on their approach, incubators will find some of the activities we've listed here and on the other slides more desirable than others—though what we're presenting is really a series of menus, not checklists.

Looking at the first bullet, as I just noted, some incubators directed their recruiting toward effective teachers and instructional leaders in existing charter schools in their cities or to those in programmatic leadership roles within their cities' district schools. Some incubators even look to those outside of education with proven track records of success managing people and systems. For cities without deep local talent pools, incubation might focus, at least initially, on regional or national recruitment to meet their talent needs. The typical leadership development program, even one run by an incubator, focuses on individual school leaders. However, one innovative approach being tried by some CEE-Trust members and their partners is to recruit teams of school leaders instead.

Finally, for this slide, early experiences with incubation suggest that training and planning periods should be both opportunities to develop leaders but also a way to continue the vetting process. Incubators should consider moving candidates who fall shy of their expectations out of programs before they open new schools, where their shortcomings may get in the way of student learning. Now I'll turn it over to Ethan.

ETHAN: Thanks, Joe. One thing that has become clear through our CEE-Trust charter incubation working group is that different markets have different needs and different opportunities. [Charter School Partners in Minnesota](#), for example, has made a strategic decision to focus on local recruitment and plans to launch a "come back to Minnesota campaign" to reach national talent with roots in the state. The Tennessee Charter School Incubator will initially look to national pools and talent-building organizations to meet its recruitment goals, although it hopes to shift its focus eventually to growing local talent within its portfolio of schools as they develop.

As Joe noted, some incubators are also supporting leadership teams, not just individual leaders. 4.0 Schools, a key strategic partner of CEE-Trust members and New Schools for New Orleans and the Tennessee Charter School Incubator, will train each selected school leader to hire three members of a leadership team and will then train and support the teams and prepare them to open schools. The Mind's Trust is launching a new charter school incubator, and it will provide significant resources to leadership teams as they launch or expand CMOs in Indianapolis.

In terms of continuing leadership evaluation, 4.0 Schools, in its work with the Tennessee Charter School Incubator, will incorporate into its training model rigorous reviews following candidates' residency periods. It anticipates that 10 percent to 20 percent of candidates will actually not be invited to continue after these reviews of their performance. The Mind's Trust will also hold its incubated leadership teams accountable for achieving operational benchmarks over the incubation period. Joe?

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JOE: Thanks, Ethan. The next focus area we discovered involved incubators' strategic partnerships. Incubators can pool resources and share strategies and tools with others—other incubators, other charter support organizations, and operators. They may be able to realize cost savings or recruit the most sought after experts for training by holding joint training sessions.

Many incubation programs are small, with only a few leaders trained each year. These programs stand to benefit substantially through partnership with other incubators. Each incubator needs to look at its internal capacity and also to potential external partners to decide how best to prepare charter leaders to open schools and to succeed in operations. Key factors in deciding what to do in-house versus through partnerships include internal staff expertise and workload and offerings and quality of potential external partners.

One of the greatest challenges for all new school leaders is the recruitment of high-quality teachers. Networking with external partners can open access to crucial teacher talent pipelines. Ethan, over to you.

ETHAN: Thanks, Joe. This is an emerging field, and, as such, we found that incubators are pretty eager to learn and share from one another. As the incubator with the most experience, New Schools for New Orleans has been a real leader in sharing its core strategies and lessons learned. [Get Smart Schools](#), affiliated with CEE-Trust member the [Donnell-Kay Foundation](#) in Denver, has designated its selection materials and rubrics as open source and made them available for others' use.

The working group is also looking for ways to partner in order to realize some cost savings. One idea we've been bouncing around is the

creation of a collaborative that would partner with the most sought after experts and hold joint training sessions. At the end of the day, incubators have to determine which supports they can provide to leaders in-house and which they contract with outside vendors to provide.

[Innovative Schools](#) in Delaware, for example, engages school model partners, like [Big Picture Learning](#), [EdWorks](#), the [New Tech Network](#), and [Expeditionary Learning](#), to provide some training and support to future leaders. As we noted earlier, the Tennessee Charter School Incubator is partnering with talent-building organizations—Building Excellent Schools and 4.0 Schools—to lead the recruitment and selection of their new charter leaders.

Some working group members, including Charter School Partners, Get Smart Schools, and the [Teaching Trust](#), have developed partnerships with local universities to provide training or degree programs tailored for future leaders, and several group members partner with external nonprofits for targeted training, such as the [High Bar](#) for school governance training and the [Achievement Network](#) for data-oriented strategies. In terms of recruitment, teacher recruitment, several working group members, including the Mind’s Trust, Innovative Schools, and New Schools for New Orleans, partner with [Teach for America](#), the [New Teacher Project](#) [TNTP], and other groups that link them with a pipeline of promising local or national teacher talent. Joe?

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JOE: City-based incubators are often uniquely positioned to champion school leaders in local communities. Local contacts are essential for building strong charter school boards and for preparing board members and school leaders for effective community engagement. Early experiences by incubators suggest that incubators should facilitate the introduction of leaders to local communities as early as possible, well in advance of school opening, to networking with community-based organizations and local leaders. Incubators can also facilitate the inclusion of communities in the vetting process for new schools opening in their neighborhoods, paving the way for strong, long-term relations.

The third point in this focus area is that incubators succeed by partnering with community-based organizations, which also allows incubators to place leaders in residencies and other immersive training experiences in the communities where they will eventually work.
Ethan?

ETHAN: In many instances, we think that the local connections incubators can broker on behalf of new school leaders is actually more valuable than the funding they provide. For example, incubators help school leaders build exceptional boards. New Schools for New Orleans, the Tennessee Charter [School] Incubator, Charter School Partners, and others use their local networks to recruit mission-aligned board members and then match them with charter founders, allowing charter founders to begin their work with strong governance in place and a built-in network of community leaders as visible champions.

Incubators can also help integrate the new school into the community. For example, in 2011, New Schools for New Orleans is partnering with the [Recovery School District](#) in Louisiana to launch a pilot community input process whereby communities will develop visions for school excellence, interview potential operators, and make recommendations to the district on which charter operators they think could best serve their communities.

Incubators also partner with other community-based organizations and schools, allowing the incubators to place leaders in residencies and other immersive training experiences within the communities where those leaders will work. For example, Charter School Partners will place fellows in school-based residencies where they will serve as school improvement coordinators in struggling schools, with discrete goals and specific tasks for improving student achievement under the guidance of existing school leaders. Joe?

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JOE: Finally, advocacy, our fourth focus area. Advocacy is not incubators' core focus, but by virtue of their local connections, incubators are often well positioned to advocate on charter issues, and they have a vested interest in ensuring strong charter environments for their incubated leaders. Some incubators work with operators, charter advocates, support organizations, and authorizers to advocate for supportive

policies. Incubators can also build and sustain relationships outside the charter sector with local district leaders and policymakers to advocate on issues of common concern. Incubators can also advocate for public and private support of incubation. Also, as more data points become available, incubators can publicize school-level and citywide victories, helping educate policymakers and funders on incubation and its impact. Ethan, back to you.

ETHAN: Thanks, Joe. Incubators are working to build coalitions among operators, authorizers, districts, and other stakeholders. Three working group members—Innovative Schools, the [Skillman Foundation](#), and Get Smart Schools—actually prepare school leaders to take on leadership positions in district and charter schools. Their partnerships with districts, charter operators, and authorizers position these organizations to facilitate joint advocacy efforts on issues of common concern.

In addition, incubators can help publicize victories. New Schools for New Orleans supports a variety of communication strategies that draw attention to the successful schools in their portfolio. Building citywide supporter networks also may help incubators with their advocacy efforts and help to communicate with policymakers, community members, and the media about charters and effective charter policies and initiatives. Supporter networks also can publicize the strengths of their city's policy environments as a way to actually attract more promising leaders and school leader teams. Joe.

JOE: Thanks, Ethan. Peggie, at this point, we'd like to pause and see if there are any questions that came in before the webinar started or that have come in over the chat line while we've been presenting. Maybe we'll take time for just one or two questions before continuing our presentation and save the rest for the end.

PEGGIE: That sounds great. I will shoot you one that has come in during the webinar and then one that came in earlier. Rashida is asking, and Ethan addressed this to some extent, if you could talk a little bit more about how incubation programs are cultivating locally grown teacher core members.

JOE: Okay, great. That's a great question. I'd love to have Ethan weigh in on this as well, but primarily the incubators that we've talked to are

dealing with the teacher question through partnerships. A number of CEE-Trust's incubators are working with TFA and working with the New Teacher Project. The truth is because a lot of incubators are new and just getting started that a lot of them are having their first school leader class enter their programs now, and they haven't fully developed their answer to this question yet, but when they do, the partnerships that we've highlighted—partnerships with other organizations locally and then with national groups, like TFA and TNTP—are going to be crucial as they move ahead and staff their schools. Do you have anything to add to that Ethan?

ETHAN: Yeah, Rashida, I just saw your excellent comment here again about partnerships with HBCUs [Historically Black Colleges and Universities]. I think that's a terrific idea. In addition to partnering with existing alternative certification programs like TFA and TNTP, I think incubators have a goal over the long run of building a culture in their communities of excellence and that these schools will become talent magnets. I think that, over time, if incubators work and are able to start a significant number of high-quality great schools, these schools are going to be providing increasing training opportunities for teachers and are going to develop additional partnerships with organizations within the community. There's a cultural component to their work as well, building a culture of excellence and quality in areas where school populations may have been underserved previously.

PEGGIE: Rashida, thank you for the clarification. We do use a lot of acronyms in education and sometimes we don't know all of the acronyms. So thank you for clarifying that. I have one more question that came in earlier for both of you. "If we would like to accelerate the growth of the charter market in our city, what does it take to launch a new incubator?"

JOE: That's a great question, too. We've highlighted a couple of the crucial points here in the first part of the presentation—local connections and public visibility being two that leap to mind. One thing that we'd like to stress—and it'll come up in the next set of slides—is that starting an incubator contrasted with other reform strategies takes minimal resources. I don't want to diminish it; it's still a large investment. But when we compare it to other ways to improve our schools, it's a very viable strategy for those with a certain amount of resources to invest that doesn't cause it to rise to the level of a full turnaround effort or

some of the other major change strategies that are out there today. Ethan, anything to add to that one?

ETHAN: Nope, I think that was right on. Thanks.

JOE: Peggie, should we go ahead and go through the last ones and save the rest of the questions until the end?

PEGGIE: That sounds good; go ahead.

END OF CHAPTER 1; START OF CHAPTER 2

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JOE: All right. We're going to shift gears a bit. I'm going to talk briefly about five areas where policy change can support incubation. What you see on this slide is not an exhaustive list of supportive policies. We've specifically excluded many policies where the interests of incubators are coextensive with those of charter schools more broadly. You can see all five of them listed here, and I'm going to flip through separate slides and discuss each in turn.

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[The] first policy change that could support incubation is the elimination of charter caps, coupled with enforcing strict accountability of the wide range of authorizers. I want to be clear that we're not advocating at all for a "wild west" charter sector without any screenings or accountability. Actually, our view is very much to the contrary. We believe strongly in quality controls and keeping the focus on student outcomes. But on the issue of caps, caps made a lot more sense in the early years of the charter sector, but we now have a much better sense of how charter schools work and a much better sense of how to conduct effective authorizing and oversight—thanks in no small part to the work of many of you on the call today.

In this environment, policymakers can expand access while safeguarding quality—even without charter caps—by empowering a range of authorizers and holding them accountable for results. We could have a whole other webinar on charter caps, but the key question for us today is, "How would the elimination of a charter cap help incubators?"

We think that, first of all, cities and states that define their charter sectors by quality are more attractive places to start schools because perspective operators are not constrained by limits on their initial start-ups or on their ability to expand if they're successful. Eliminating caps is not a politically viable option in every state. We realize that, and some education policy experts therefore have promoted an alternative: smart caps. Smart caps would remove charter caps but only for charter networks that consistently demonstrate excellent results; for all others, caps would remain in place. These smart caps can help define a state's charter sector based on quality, and in doing so, they can attract promising leaders.

Policymakers dedicated to incubation might also consider a new kind of smart cap, under which incubators whose leaders consistently demonstrate excellence in their schools are granted exemptions from caps. Then these exemptions would apply to their future leaders' charter applications. No state has done this yet, but as incubators establish themselves and earn the confidence of their city and state leaders, this type of policy initiative may become possible.

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Our second policy area, which relates to the first, is strong accountability for authorizers. Policymakers can support incubators by holding authorizers accountable for approving, monitoring, and—if necessary—closing charter schools. Closing low-performing charters needs to be more than an aspiration, and authorizer accountability will be a key factor in making it so. In at least one state, closed schools still count against authorizer caps. This type of policy may discourage closure of failing schools, and other states should think carefully before implementing a similar policy.

Holding authorizers accountable can help incubators in at least two ways. First and most obviously, it can open room under existing state charter caps; second, it can further help define a charter sector based on quality, and in doing so, help attract promising school leaders.

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Policymakers should work to reduce funding disparities between charters and district schools for operations and facilities. This will allow

charters, including incubated charters, to optimize their operational efficiency and improve their performance.

More relevant just to incubators and incubated charters, policymakers can allocate public funding to support incubation, which could provide sustainable support while still allowing careful monitoring of incubators' results. Of all the ways we're going to talk about that policymakers and education leaders can help accelerate the growth of the charter sector, allocating public funding to incubation may be the most direct and impactful. I'll return to this point in a few minutes at the close of the presentation when I discuss the argument for choosing incubation over other reform alternatives.

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Policymakers can grant charters exemptions or waivers from restrictive laws. In some of these areas like staffing, where autonomy is most crucial, policymakers might even restrict the ability of authorizers to infringe on leaders' autonomies. Why would this help incubators? A 2010 report, authored by my Public Impact colleagues Dana Brinson and Jacob Rosh, surveyed 26 states and graded them on the autonomies they granted to charter operators. Their report detailed large variation in the levels and types of autonomies granted to school leaders.

To us, this suggests that states can set themselves apart for their peers by granting charter schools significant autonomies, potentially attracting more promising candidates for charter leadership positions by doing so. But, of course, the lifting of restrictions on charter autonomy must be coupled with strong accountability for results, which, like many of the policy changes we've proposed here, can help create a charter sector defined by quality.

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Finally, states can streamline approval and governance policies for proven incubators. Some authorizers have already begun creating distinct processes for operators proposing to replicate successful school models. Some states have introduced streamlined policies that allow proven operators to open multiple schools without having to gain approval each time.

State policymakers might consider a similar policy for incubators with exceptional track records. Incubators focus intensely on selecting and developing promising school leaders, so a policy initiative could shift some of the responsibility for scrutiny of prospective leaders or for plans for recruiting and developing leaders from authorizers to incubators. This could give authorizers additional time and resources to focus more intently on the school model and other aspects of charter applications.

States might also consider allowing boards to oversee multiple schools under a single charter or to hold multiple charters, potentially making it easier to recruit exceptional board members for new schools, especially in more developed charter markets.

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I'd like to close with a brief preview of another related paper that we're really excited about. CEE-Trust and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute recently enlisted Public Impact to take a look at policy changes to support incubation—some which I just discussed—and also to explore strategies for shifting public funds to incubation.

Of course, incubation may also be a compelling strategy to a range of funders, including government but also to private funders. But the focus in this upcoming paper will be on public funding. Here's our core observation from that paper. Many of today's leading strategies for creating higher quality learning options for students are expensive and risky. By comparison, incubation is relatively inexpensive and helps alleviate key risks of new starts.

Unpacking this just briefly, let's look first at the relative costs of incubation compared with other reform strategies. Incubation costs may range from \$200,000 to \$500,000 per incubated school. This amount provides salaries for leaders or teams, it funds fellowships, and it allows incubators to coordinate a variety of training and supports for new leaders. By contrast, grants under the federal school improvement grant program are up to \$6 million for one school over three years; an average total grant under that program is \$2.59 million per school. Moreover, incubation is a onetime investment in a leader who may go on to have a career's worth of success, sustained in the process by

public funds. Turnarounds and other improvement strategies will involve often ongoing costs to sustain or redirect them over time.

That's a quick look at costs. Turning to the benefits, incubation alleviates major risks of new starts. Many risks of new starts hinge on leadership. As we've discussed, incubation focuses intently on this one variable, screening and supporting only the highest potential leaders, helping them become great.

We know from our research that turnarounds and other popular reform strategies are risky ventures. Without wading too much into that research, many turnarounds and other existing reform efforts fail to improve student performance, though prospects are better for the most well-designed and executed turnarounds. Unfortunately, too few districts are willing to pursue dramatic reforms or to engage in the rapid retry that they need in the event of failure. Without a willingness to do these things, it's likely the success rates for turnarounds and other reforms will continue, by and large, to disappoint.

I'm now going to throw it back to Ethan for some closing thoughts on how CEE-Trust's members have approached this choice between incubation and other reforms. Ethan?

ETHAN: Thanks, Joe. CEE-Trust members have explored and tried a variety of reform options, and some are engaged in other reform efforts along with incubation. In fact, most are, but our members have arrived at the working group after carefully analyzing all the available alternatives, and all of our charter incubation working group members are united in their conviction that incubation is an exceedingly promising strategy for accelerating the growth of the charter markets and reaching more students with excellence.

CEE-Trust is excited to partner with the Fordham Institute and Public Impact on our upcoming policy brief. Through recent conversations with charter school supporters across the country, it's become clear that there is growing interest in charter school incubation, especially in these uncertain economic times when communities are seeking cost-effective reforms.

Members of the CEE-Trust incubation working group also think that there is an opportunity here to fundamentally reframe the conversation nationally and emphasize the fact that incubating great new schools is

not only cost-effective; it's a public good worthy of public support. The communities in which CEE-Trust–affiliated incubators are operating are often in desperate need for high-quality school options. Our hope is that through conversations like this, and projects like the upcoming policy brief with Fordham and Public Impact, we can draw attention to the valuable service that incubators are providing around the country and the opportunity they represent for improving public education.

In closing, Joe and I would like to offer a special thanks to Peggie Garcia, AIR [American Institutes for Research], and the National Charter School Resource Center. Thank you all so much for your time, and we look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Slides 26, 27, and 28

PEGGIE: Well, thank you very much to Joe from Public Impact and Ethan from The Mind Trust and CEE-Trust. This has been, I think, very informative. So now we'd like to open it up for questions. We have a couple that came in that I will go ahead and shoot to the presenters right now, and then it looks like we've got a couple more coming in through the queue that we will move to in a moment.

So one of the first questions that came in through the registration page was, "With all of the new incubators on the market, how are incubators differentiating themselves?"

ETHAN: That's a great question. I think as the listeners heard through the course of the presentation, the incubators within the CEE-Trust network all have slightly different areas of focus, although each are sort of united in this focus on finding and supporting great talent. Some markets are looking to national talent groups to help them find aspiring school leaders; some have deep talent pipelines that they have been cultivating. In New Orleans, for example, now that they are five years into their work, they have a pretty deep bench of talent to pull from, and existing schools can help source leaders for new schools.

I think one other important distinction is between what existing charter management organizations are doing to grow their leadership pipeline and what incubators are focused on. CMOs are largely focused on promoting from within or attracting top talent from outside, but then expanding the work of their particular school model so [KIPP](#) will help support new leaders who are going to incubate new KIPP schools.

Charter school incubators in the CEE-Trust network are a little bit more model agnostic, if you will. They're focused on finding great leaders who have a vision for a new school model and that can be a no excuses school, it could be an expeditionary learning school, [or] it could be a new blended learning school. The point is to attract outstanding talent and empower that talent to innovate in public education. There are far too few opportunities for people to do that.

So, incubators are creating opportunities for this kind of model agnostic new school environment to take root in member communities. We think that CMO growth is an incredibly important component of charter growth overall, but as Joe mentioned several times over the course of the webinar, we think incubators are going to play an increasingly important role in both diversifying the charter market and creating opportunities for additional leaders to emerge. Joe, do you have any thoughts you want to add there?

JOE: I think that was a great answer to that question. So we can move on.

PEGGIE: One more that came in over the registration page, and then we'll switch to the queue in the chat. "How can an organization or a group change the focus of the charter school debate in a particularly local area from school choice for the sake of school choice to creating high-quality charter schools where the traditional public school options are not performing well for all kids?"

JOE: That's great—I love that question. I'm really glad someone asked it. I've really come to see incubation and what the incubators and the CEE-Trust working group are doing as being a key part of changing that focus. Incubators are focused—as we stressed a lot during the presentation—on quality in selecting leaders and then really pushing quality as a focus as those leaders open and run their schools. That accountability point that Ethan mentioned early on is key for incubators as well. They're defining their success by the success of their leaders.

A lot of the policy changes that we talked about that can support incubation—you might have noticed a common theme in there—were about redefining a charter sector based on quality, so the policy changes to support incubation as well. We have this question or this idea in mind because we think increasing the focus on quality is something that will attract more promising leaders to education. If

you're deciding where to go and you are a promising leader candidate, there are a lot of things that are going to weigh in the balance for you—geography, your personal ties to an area—but I think the policy environments really do make a difference in promising leaders deciding where to go, where they're going to have the best training as a future leader, and then where they're going to have the environment they need to open their school, and, if they're successful, if it's part of their plan, to expand. Anything to add to that Ethan?

ETHAN: Just one thought, and that is that this is a topic of conversation that's come up a couple of times in the charter incubation working group where folks have sort of recognized that although we have a lot to learn from one another and there are certainly going to be really important opportunities to collaborate, in some ways folks are competing for talent, and I think what all of our incubators are trying to do is to create the dynamics locally that are going to be really attractive to new leaders. So if you're an aspiring charter leader, you should look really seriously at New Orleans, Minnesota, Denver, Indianapolis, and the other cities where there are strong incubators in place because you can know that there's going to be a supportive environment and a group of leaders that are looking for opportunities to help you succeed.

PEGGIE: Great. So we have a number of questions from Rashida. I think the first one about local models Ethan at least touched on that, but let's go to your second question on the commitment of charter school incubators to train community members, such as parents, to serve on charter school boards. "You all have defined incubation relatively narrowly, but can you talk a little bit about how the organizations in the CEE-Trust are working with community members to develop high-quality boards for charter schools?"

Ethan: The advantage of an incubator that's focused on a geographic area is that it has deep community ties. If it's going to be successful, it has to leverage those ties to help new school leaders be successful. We think that early evidence from New Orleans and Tennessee is a pretty good indication of how incubators can add value to these schools by linking school leaders to the communities.

As we noted during the webinar, incubators will work with their new school leaders to find the board members, and that involves going out into the parent community, into the business community, [and] into the

civic community to find folks who have the skills, the interest, the background, and the ability to support these new school leaders as they're starting up. Overall, we're really optimistic about the role that incubators can play in helping empower community members to get more involved in schools and to actually even have a path to start new schools themselves. Incubation is all about creating a new pipeline for starting excellent schools, so we think that it's a terrific vehicle for empowering community members.

JOE: I think I would just add to that, that in talking with the CEE-Trust members, the established incubators in New Orleans and Tennessee that are already doing this have proven to be a really great resource for the emerging incubators, those who are looking to start or starting their incubation programs. It's on everybody's mind, how to do it—and there are few who have done it in depth—but all the organizations in the working group have these community ties and connections. It's just a question of how to put the programmatic details around it to turn those connections into strong boards for the schools that they incubate or that they prepare leaders to open.

PEGGIE: Great. We have a couple people who work with charter schools in nonurban areas or in rural areas, I think most of the CEE-Trust members work with incubating in urban areas, but “I was wondering if you had any thoughts about some strategies for incubation in states that have more rural areas or might have charter schools that are more spread out throughout the state?”

JOE: That's a great question. One thing that we've seen for the incubators, emerging incubators that we're talking with in the CEE-Trust working group, whether they are in a city with an established charter network, or, I'm sorry, an established charter sector or one that's really smaller and more emerging, all of the organizations that want to start incubators are looking to tackle a common set of issues around how you design your application process, how you actually go through this selective screening process and have a competitive application process for your leaders, and, once they come on board, how you train them. Some of these things are going to be specific to locality, but there are a lot of tools that are out there among the established incubators and those starting up. We found in our conversations that they're more than happy to share those tools with new incubators who are starting, so that not everybody needs to invent the wheel. I think a

lot of these, like the selection rubrics and processes around choosing a leader, there are going to be some specifics that vary location to location, but the core of the application process is something where I think any incubator in any location can benefit from the tools that have been developed by others. The community of incubators now seems very open to sharing those resources with others looking to do what they are doing.

PEGGIE: Joe, Andrew was asking how you access those resources. “Could you mention the organizations that have been involved with making those open source?”

JOE: Sure, and Ethan you might want to jump in and I might not hit them all, but Get Smart Schools is an organization that has been very open source with a lot of their resources, so I would go to their website, and they will either have resources or links to connect you to other resources. Tennessee and New Orleans, the established incubators, are other great places to go to find your way to toolkits. I think the New Teacher Project has a toolkit that has been useful to some in evaluating their new leaders. I’m not sure, others, Ethan, that are leaping to mind? I’m going to flip through here and see if I can find any other examples.

Slide 27

ETHAN: You know what, I think one thing that I would just suggest—I’m flipping back a slide here to show my contact info. If folks are interested in learning more about these programs, or about the work that they’re doing, or where they can find more resources, please feel free to get in touch with me at CEE-Trust. We’re really excited to be able to link folks with the terrific people in our network, and the folks in our network are very generous and eager to share what they’ve learned and to learn from all of you out there in the field too. It’s a very collaborative space. If anybody has additional questions about resources and sharing information, feel free to get in touch with us.

Slide 28

JOE: I did find, there were just two particular resources that were flagged by a lot of the existing incubators: TNTP, the New Teacher Project’s School Leaders Toolbox is what it’s called, so that should be available through the New Teacher Project. Then the National Alliance for Public

Charter Schools has a resource called [Supporting New Charter School Development Playbook](#) that a lot of the leaders of established and emerging incubators have found useful.

PEGGIE: Thank you. That's very helpful. It looks like we've got a couple participants also entering some contact information and additional ideas, so thank you for sharing that. Joe or Ethan, will you be attending the NACSA [National Association of Charter School Authorizers] conference at the end of October?

JOE: I unfortunately will not. I will be on baby duty here in Raleigh, North Carolina, and unable to attend, but for all of you on the call, I do look forward to meeting you at a future NACSA or other related event. I, like Ethan, would invite you to contact me after the webinar if there's any way that I can help you or if you have any comments on the webinar or the paper associated with it or the forthcoming CEE-Trust and Fordham Institute paper.

Slides 29 and 30

ETHAN: Unfortunately, the NACSA conference also conflicts with something for me, so I won't be there either, but I'm sure there are going to be a number of great folks there to speak with, and I will be out at a bunch of other conferences this year. Again, just to echo what we said earlier, please feel free to get in touch with us directly. We're eager to connect with other folks in the field who are interested in this topic.

PEGGIE: Great. Well this has really been a wonderful opportunity for all of us to learn more about incubation and the really innovative things that are going on with CEE-Trust members. I would like to thank Joe and Ethan for their presentation and to thank all of the participants for joining us today.

The webinar will be archived at the website that you're seeing on the screen, www.charterschoolcenter.org/webinar. We should have it up and available by Monday at the latest. I'm going to send you all to a survey in a moment so you can give us some feedback. We would really appreciate any feedback you have and recommendations for topics for future webinars so that we can make sure that we're meeting the needs of the charter school community. Enjoy the rest of your afternoon and thank-you.