

Concurrent Session B:

Two Thumbs Up – or Down?: A Renewal Decisionmaking Simulation

Handouts

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RENEWAL SIMULATION©: TECHNOLOGY ARTS CHARTER SCHOOL

Paul Herdman, Rodel Foundation of Delaware; NACSA, October 25, 2004

In Delaware, when making charter renewal decisions, the authorizer looks to find affirmative answers to the following questions: 1) *Is the academic program a success?*; 2) *Is the organization viable?*; and 3) *Is the school faithful to the terms of its charter?*

It is January 2005, you have been selected to participate in a Blue Ribbon committee to assist the Board of Education in making its final decision on a particularly tough case. Based on the following sketch of the Technology Arts Charter School (TACS) what would you recommend? (*You obviously don't have all the data, but please do the best you can, realizing that what data you would like to have is part of the exercise.*)

TACS is an elementary school of 320 students in a high-poverty urban district. Eighty-two percent of the students are African American, 16% are white, and 2% represent other ethnic groups. Ninety-one percent of these students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. The school began in September 2000 and what follows is what you know...

Academic Success

The school's charter states that its students "will meet the highest academic standards in the core subject areas, math and reading." Your team is provided with two representative samples of data. While each only represents one glimpse of the data in a given year, they are meant to be representative of the school's performance in its third (Attachment 1) and fifth years (Attachment 2), respectively.

Attachment 1, provides a graphical representation of how well TACS students performed in the fourth grade on the math portion of the Stanford 9 Achievement Test in 2003/04. It provides a summary of how well the students in this school performed relative to the other charter schools in the district on absolute performance and growth measures. Note that at this juncture, among a mix of positive and negative comments, the TACS site visit report highlighted the importance of the school to improve its performance. However, consistent with the authorizer's approach, that office did not recommend specific remedies or offer technical assistance.

Attachment 2 provides a lens into five years of data related to TACS student performance on English language arts as of 2004/05. This graphic provides a representation of how students who started this school in first grade did over the subsequent four years. The data are partially disaggregated so that Panelists can review how the African-American and Caucasian students performed relative to the state's expectations and the overall performance of the school.

Organizational Viability

- The school is fully enrolled and has a waiting list of 27 students. A survey developed by, and submitted directly to, the state indicates that 90% of the parents prefer Technology Arts to their district option (45% response rate).
- The first principal left the school in year three, but the board has expressed confidence in the competence of their new principal. The new principal was an assistant principal in a school that had some success with implementing the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools and he plans to implement that approach here.

- A site visit report characterized the school as a “ship without a rudder.” Board participation had dwindled from 12 members to five
- Site visit reports have questioned the school’s allocation of resources. For example, the school is in a rented former office space and began renting additional dance space in 2001 to accommodate the interests of about 20 parents who expressed an interest in offering dance to their children (Table 2).
- The teachers are generally young and the teacher turnover rate is relatively high (Table 3).

Table 2: Revenues and Expenditures

	TACS	State Average
Revenues		
• Total Revenue	1,952,640	6,228,000
• Revenue Per Pupil	6,102	6,228
Expenditures (by percentage of total operating costs)		
<i>Instruction and Related Services</i> (primarily teacher salaries, but also includes curriculum materials)	27%	62.5%
<i>Professional development</i> (includes costs for teacher training and substitutes)	10%	5.9%
<i>Student Support Services</i> (includes in-school counseling and tutorials as well as after school programs)	3.7%	4.5%
<i>Student Transportation</i> (covers the cost of travel for non-walking students)	0.2%	2.7%
<i>Food Service</i> (includes expenditures for breakfast and lunch beyond Title I funds)	1.5%	2.7%
<i>Central Administration</i> (includes salaries for administrative staff and board support)	24%	3.9%
<i>Plant Maintenance and Operations</i> (includes rent, ongoing maintenance and upkeep)	35.1%	11.5%

Table 3: Staff Information

	TACS	State Average
Average Years Experience of Teachers	2.1 years	11.9 years
Turnover Rate of teachers from 2002 to 2003	55.9%	15.0%

Faithfulness to the Terms of the Charter

- In its charter, TACS promised computers in every classroom, online tutorials, mentorships with software engineers, and an intranet system among parents and teachers. However, due to unexpected facilities costs, the school has rented a facility and thus, has not been able to develop the technology infrastructure it envisioned. It has a computer center with 60 donated computers and has developed mentoring relationships with 30 Lotus employees.
- TACS was cited for not fully meeting the needs of two students with Individual Education Plans in 2003 and there have been complaints that special needs students were discouraged from applying to the school in 2002.
- TACS generally met other reporting requirements in a timely way.

Politics

- Senator Barry, a ranking Democrat in the US Senate who has secured substantial federal funding to charter schools in this state, is quoted in the TACS literature as stating that the school has become “an anchor in the community.”
- The district has reached its municipal cap, i.e., no other schools can be considered for charter status in this area until either the state law changes or one of the charters in this district becomes available. The local Urban League chapter has written a charter proposal and is hoping to apply if a charter becomes available.

- A report by the state’s attorney general provided a harsh review of authorizer capacity to effectively oversee charter schools. The *Gazette* article headline that followed the AG’s report was: “Charter Schools: Who’s Minding the Shop?”

THE LOG JAM

The authorizer wants to recommend TACS’ charter not be renewed, and the school objects. In public comments to the Board of Education:

The school argues that it is making improvements, and that by virtue of state and federal law it should not be facing sanctions as severe as charter revocation at this point. It is making headway on building a technology infrastructure and it has recruited new board members. It explains dips in performance by pointing to large influxes of new lower-performing students (upwards of 50 per year for the last three years). TACS claims its students are doing much better on the day-to-day work than the tests measure, and that when the performance of some student subgroups are measured over time, it is clear that the school has been providing significant benefit. TACS also points to (Section 1111)(b)(1) of NCLB which states that the state needs to develop *one* system of standards and assessments for all schools, and that under the state system the sanctions for not meeting AYP for two consecutive years are not nearly as severe as being shut down. Since the state only solidified its state plan in the spring of 2003, i.e., the fourth year of the school’s charter, TACS argues that perhaps some of their Title I funds should go toward providing supplemental services, but they shouldn’t lose their charter.

The authorizer argues that the school has not met the terms of its agreement. It is holding firm to the No Child Left Behind Act’s provision that states, “accountability provisions under this Act shall be overseen for charter schools in accordance with State charter school law” (NCLB, Section 1111(b)(2)(K)). In its view, this means that the authorizer has the power to develop its own accountability system and that therefore; the charter agreement is *the* defining document. The authorizer appreciates the fact that some of the trend data could be construed as promising, but argues that the overall trend is clearly negative. Similarly, the authorizer approves of alternative assessments, but state site visitors were unimpressed with the organization and quality of student portfolios. In sum, in the authorizer’s view, the school has simply not met the terms of its charter and should therefore lose it.

Hoag and Balick, a leading law firm down town, has agreed to offer their services to TAC pro bono and the school is working with one of its community-based partners to begin a campaign to challenge the recommendation.

Guiding Questions

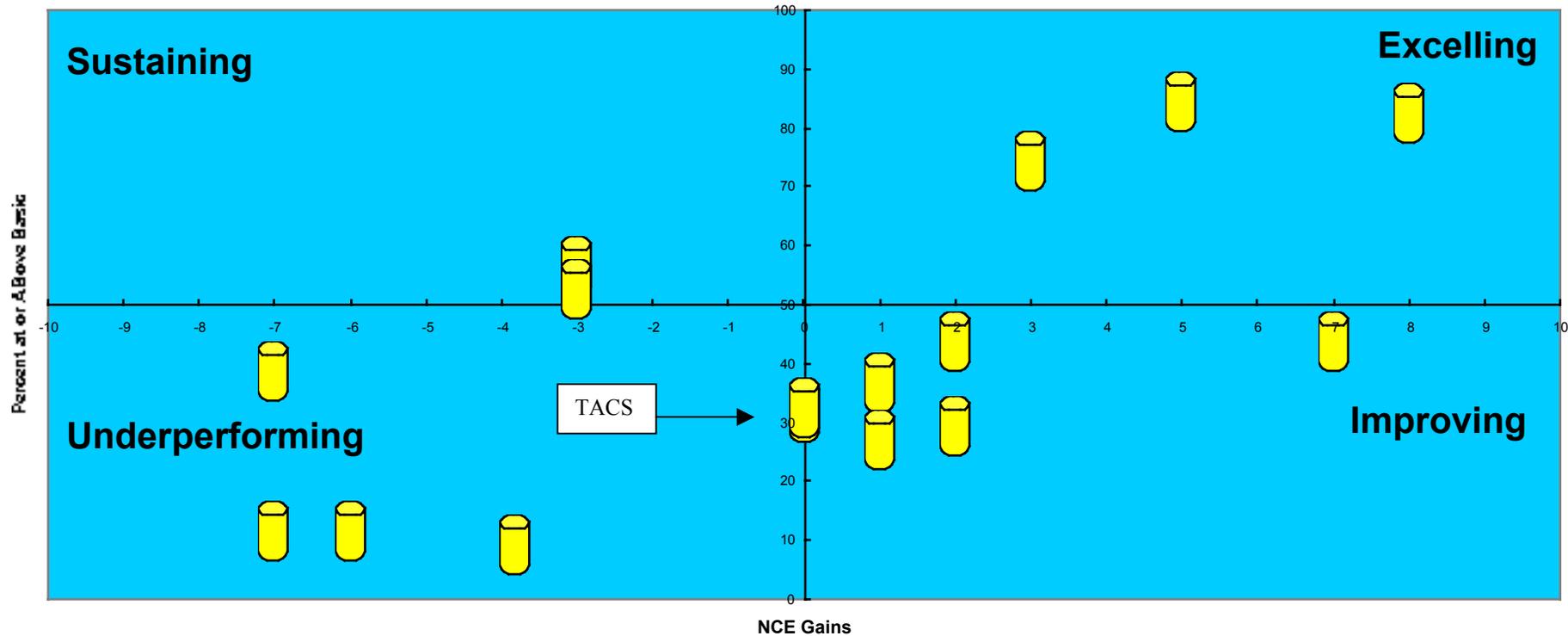
With a partner or a small group, you will be asked to discuss the following:

- 1) How would you score this school (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest) on each of the three criteria?
- 2) What would you recommend that the Board do? Your options are: renewal, revocation/non-renewal, or probation. Be prepared to make your case and offer concrete next steps.
- 3) What could the authorizer have done better at the outset, i.e., the contracting phase in 2000 or along the way, e.g., the third-year review (2002/03), to have improved this school's chances for success or at least made the charter renewal process easier?

TACS Attachment 1

Math Performance. This graphic summarizes the math performance of fourth grade TACS students as compared to the other charter schools in the district. On the vertical axis, the absolute performance of the students in each of the schools is represented via the percent of students at or above “basic” on the state test. On the horizontal axis, gains from the previous academic year are represented through normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores.

Optimally, a school would be in the upper right corner of this grid, i.e., have high absolute performance and be making gains over time.



TACS Attachment 2

English Language Arts Performance. This graphic summarizes the ELA performance of a cohort of TACS students from first to fifth grade. The solid black brackets represent the state expectations for proficiency in each grade. The **RED** (top) line represents the performance of white TACS students. The **PINK** (center) line represents the average performance for the grade overall of TACS. The solid **BLUE** (bottom) line represents the performance of black TACS students.

