

A feasibility study that determines the likelihood of KIPP St. Louis opening and operating a high performing college-preparatory high school. The study's contents include: an executive summary, a competitive landscape analysis, a SWOT analysis, administrator and student interviews, and opening plan.

# KIPP St. Louis Final Report

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## Executive Summary

As a relatively young charter school network, KIPP St. Louis has done an incredibly strong job of accepting underperforming St. Louis students and pushing them to achieve above state averages by the time of 8th grade. Some of the highest-scoring KIPP 8th graders have the opportunity to attend high-performing public charter or private high schools in the St. Louis area. However, the majority move on to under-performing St. Louis public schools where resources are limited and college placement is poor. There is a clear and obvious need in the community for a KIPP high school. The issue that remains looming is determining an opening date that can quickly address glaring student need while still ensuring that the school is up to par with prior KIPP successes. After analyzing the competitive landscape, completing a SWOT analysis, interviewing leaders of other St. Louis high schools, and interviewing a sample of KIPP 8th graders, we have concluded that the Fall of 2017 is the ideal start date for the KIPP high school.

The SWOT analysis combined with interviews of KIPP 8th graders provided valuable insights on the benefits and risks of an early start date for KIPP's high school. Through our analysis, we identified that student retention and teacher recruitment could potentially be major risks if KIPP attempted to open its high school in Fall of 2016. Student interviews indicated that while there was serious interest in attending a KIPP high school by current 8th graders, the lack of sports and other extracurricular activities as well as the KIPP's highly structured environment are significant downsides. Many students, although they loved their KIPP middle school experience, are looking for more autonomy and extracurricular opportunity when they attend high school. In addition, the extremely short amount of time available under a Fall 2016 start date to recruit new teachers and elect a school leader shows that starting high school before 2017 would be a significant risk.

The competitive landscape analysis centered around gathering data on and interviewing 9 high-achieving St. Louis high schools, consisting of 6 private and 3 public schools. Our results from the analysis suggests that the most critical factors for high school success are teacher recruitment,

student involvement, and high expenditures per student. Our insights from the competitive analysis were split into two portions: advantages for KIPP and disadvantages for KIPP. The major advantages for KIPP's high school plan is that our analysis suggests a strong ability to recruit highly-educated teachers to St. Louis and suggests that KIPP's college-focused model will fit in well into the landscape of high-achieving schools. The major disadvantages for KIPP are its lack of selectivity relative to the highest-performing high schools, limited expenditures per student, and lack of available student activities. These disadvantages, particularly the lack of student activities, makes a high school start date before Fall of 2017 very risky, as student recruitment, retention, and satisfaction may be disrupted.

To conclude, the SWOT analysis as well as competitive landscape analysis both indicate that Fall of 2016 is not the ideal start date for KIPP's high school due to a variety of risk factors that could impede the first class's achievement. However, we believe that a start date in Fall 2017 could allow KIPP to mitigate these risks as well as provide opportunities to a maximum number of students. Moving forward, we encourage KIPP to begin the process of planning for the high school opening by electing a school leader, reaching out to existing KIPP and Teach For America networks to identify top teaching candidates, organizing co-op athletic and extracurricular activities in which future KIPP high school students can participate in activities at larger high schools in the area, and developing KIPP St. Louis High to provide a more autonomous culture separate and unique from the KIPP middle school experience.

## Introduction & Problem

Poverty is profound in the St. Louis public school district. And, where poverty is found, so too, is academic struggle. The correlation between high-poverty schools and low academic achievement is both intuitive and well-documented over decades. Districts with the highest concentrations of poverty — such as East St. Louis, Venice, and Brooklyn and Cahokia school districts— perform the worst. In St. Louis Public Schools, the three highest-performing schools have the lowest poverty levels in the city. Educational theorists suggest that charter schools will induce systemic change by providing more educational choices, creating competitive market forces, and serving as examples from which other public schools can learn. As they receive more independence from state laws and regulations in comparison to traditional public schools, they will be capable to experiment with alternative curricula, pedagogical methods, and different ways of hiring and training teachers. KIPP, a successful charter school organization, takes a no-excuse approach to helping children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Through various strategies, such as high-energy teaching and longer school days, they've found success. The school provides free preschool for 4-year-olds, financed by private donors, to help boost early vocabulary and other forms of comprehension. Some additional offerings include teacher home visits, a class size limited to 15 students and extended school days. The mission of KIPP Inspire Academy is to inspire all students to develop the character and academic skills necessary to succeed in high school and college. From day one, KIPP prepares their students for college. KIPP is a place for students who want to be challenged about the world in which we live—by teachers who love to teach. It's a place where students gain both content knowledge and critical thinking skills, as well develop strength of character, grit and curiosity. KIPP is determined to take the next step towards ensuring that every student takes charge of their individual educational experience by creating a high school. The question isn't how but when. Based on the conclusions that we have drawn from our extensive data collection, we strongly recommend that KIPP should plan to open a new high school in the fall of 2017.

# Competitive Landscape Analysis

## Overview

The competitive industry analysis focused on both gathering data on a set of high-performing high schools as well as interviewing leaders from these schools. We gathered information on 9 St. Louis-area high schools: Christian Brothers College High School, Collegiate School of Medicine and Bioscience, John Burroughs High School, Metro Classical and Academic High School, St. Louis University High School, Villa Duchesne, Central Visual and Performing Arts High School, Crossroads College Preparatory School, and Chaminade College Preparatory School. We acquired data on these schools through St. Louis magazine's School Guide and Private School Handbook for 2015. The data reflects student body, financial aid, and academic information for these schools for the 2014-2015 school year.

SCHOOLS:	Christian Brothers Colleg	Collegiate School of Med and Bioscience	John Burroughs Schoo	Metro Classic and Academic	St. Louis Universit	Villa Duchesne	Central Visual and Performing Arts H	Crossroads College Prep	Chaminade College Prep
<b>BASIC INFORMATION:</b>									
Type	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Private	Public	Private	Private
Location	West County	Skinker/De-Balieviere	St. Louis County	Central West end	St. Louis City	Frontenac		Central West End	Creve Coeur
Description	All Boys	SLPS Magnet school	College Prep	SLPS Magnet school	College Prep	College Prep	SLPS Magnet school	College Prep Liberal Arts, Private	Boys College Prep
Religious Affiliation	Catholic	N/A	Independent	N/A	Catholic Jesuit	Catholic Independent - Sacred Heart networ	None	none	Catholic
<b>Student body:</b>									
School Size	801	110	410	335	1050	610	402	154	560
Percent minority students (%)	18%	52%	32%	63%	14%	9%	86%	39%	17%
Background (SLPS?)	8+ KIPP students		few from SLPS					mostly private/parochial schools, suburban public district	none from SLPS
<b>FINANCIALS:</b>							None		
Tuition (\$)	13,465	0	25,650	0	16,000	19,450	0	22,200	17,564
% Receiving Aid	35%	N/A	16%	N/A	40%	24%	None	50%	40%
<b>ACADEMICS AND RIGOR:</b>									
Acceptance Rate (%)	95%	-	16%	-	80%	undisclosed	-	75%	85%
Student/Teacher Ratio (X:1)	11	10	7	18	11	8	16	8	9
Teachers with Advanced Degrees (% 90%)	100%	100%	82%	76%	95%	70%	47%	78%	85%
Expenditure per student (\$)	16,500	14375 - district-wide number	32,730	14375 - district-wide number	18,060	21,950	14375 - district-wide number	undisclosed	20,500
Graduation Rate (%)							89.10%		
Specialty		animal and human health, plant and environmental sciences, and bioinformatics					Fine Arts		
College Matriculation (%)	99%	haven't graduated first class	100%	97%	99%	100%	95%	100%	99%
Selective vs. Open Admission	Selective	Selective	Selective	Selective			selective - audition		
Average ACT	24	haven't graduated first class	32	25	30	28	17	27	27
Notable student resources									
Unique Offerings	Honors Program	senior year internship/practicum					music, dance, etc.		
High level curriculum (AP/IB)	AP (12 courses)	AP	AP (10)	AP	AP	AP	AP	AP	AP
<b>EXTRACURRICULARS:</b>									
# Sports Teams	17	5?	21	12	19	10	0	7	
Other extracurriculars				debate, jazz band, cheerleading, etc.			mostly art-focused	performing arts	

## Advantages

We split up our insights from the competitive analysis spreadsheet into two parts: Advantages for KIPP and Disadvantages for KIPP. The main advantages for KIPP are in teacher recruitment and curriculum. Recruitment advantages stem from KIPP's comparisons with Collegiate School of Medicine and Bioscience. Collegiate school was very recently opened and has a small class size, and therefore has many similarities to a potential KIPP high school. Collegiate, despite being recently opened, has 100% of its teachers with advanced degrees. Although Collegiate is a more specialized environment, the fact that all of its teachers have advanced degrees is a strong indicator that KIPP also has an excellent opportunity to recruit highly qualified teachers in a short amount of time. The second major advantage for KIPP is embedded in its curriculum, specifically its focus on college-readiness. All of the high-performing high schools in our study offer opportunities for AP and college-prep coursework, indicating that KIPP's focus on preparing its students for college will be an asset in developing a competitive curriculum and drawing interest from both students and teachers.

## Disadvantages

The second portion of insights include findings that suggest the disadvantages of KIPP. The first disadvantage is the fact that every high-performing high school in the study has selective admissions. KIPP would not have the ability to have a selective high school, and therefore would be significantly disadvantaged in its performance. This insight creates an issue of how to properly measure school performance to take into account schools with selective versus open admissions. In addition to being selective, several of the other schools in the survey are private and have significantly more resources than KIPP would have. The private schools on the list spend significantly more per student and have a much lower teacher to student ratio than the public schools, factors that may relate strongly to academic performance.

One of the most significant disadvantages for KIPP will be the lack of activities offered. All of the other schools on the spreadsheet other than Central VPA offer sports as an activity. Central VPA, a performing arts-focused school, can get by without offering athletic activities; but KIPP's potential high school would likely have many students who expect athletics in their high school.

## Interviews

For the school interviews that we conducted, we created questions for the school's leaders which focused on determining the biggest factors for their success as well as their points of view on a KIPP high school. The list of questions was as follows:

What is the biggest driver in why students decide to go to your school (college acceptance rates, activities, sports, location, etc.)?

When students come from the St. Louis public school district, why and how do they come?

Are extracurriculars often the biggest draw for students from inner city schools notably KIPP schools?

Do you in any way see the opening of a KIPP Public Charter High School as a potential problem for your school?

What student profile do you target/accept?

Do you see a specific need for any specific or niche schools?

- What niches do you see a demand for at your school (technology, performing arts, etc.)?

Do you foresee any problems for the new KIPP schools?

What do you see as the main factors for attracting experienced high school teachers and staff?



What are some reasons you've found that high-performing students from other middle schools may not transition well when moving to your school?

- Experience with KIPP alumni specifically

How has enrollment size changed at your school recently?

- How do you expect it to change in the future?
- Are there plans to increase enrollment size?

For school success, the most common answers we received suggest that academic success depended on teaching staff strength and support as well as student involvement. The majority of the interviewees stated that they admired KIPP's current success, and many were supportive of the need for a KIPP high school. However, another common view was that KIPP's heavily structured middle school environment may not be appropriate in a high school setting. Other high-performing schools seemed to believe that student involvement and enthusiasm was heavily dependent on academic freedom and leadership. This finding represents a particularly interesting challenge for KIPP: how to incrementally add high school grades to the existing KIPP St. Louis system while creating a separate culture for the KIPP high school. In order to keep a high student retention and allow KIPP students to enter a high school environment which will be very academically different from their middle school experience, we recommend that KIPP establishes a culture featuring academic freedom and student autonomy. This means allowing more student say in the curriculum, permitting free movement between classes, and creating school organizations and activities which allow KIPP high school students to learn the intangibles of leadership. The concerns about creating a less structured environment for the KIPP high school suggests that an early opening of the high school may not give enough time to create this separate culture. Pushing forward into a strategic plan, the findings from school interviews as well as the data analysis of the 9-school sample were all considered in the strategic recommendations for KIPP's high school opening.

## Final Insights

The lack of activities and concerns about resources are the most significant arguments against an early opening of a KIPP high school. If KIPP planned to open a high school in Fall 2016, they would have only 8 months to elect and train a school leader, recruit experienced teachers, and coordinate activities for their students. Through our research on high school opening plans and our meetings with Kelly regarding current resources, it seems extremely unlikely that these key items could be effectively accomplished in such a short period of time. With an extra 12 months, KIPP could properly prepare to open a high school by focusing on key factors of advanced-degree teacher recruitment, generous per-student expenditures, and extensive extra-curricular and athletic opportunities. Our competitive landscape analysis suggests that a start date in the Fall of 2017 would be optimal for KIPP. This start date would provide KIPP the necessary time to recruit highly qualified teachers, gather additional resources and funding, and set up co-op extracurricular programs with larger St. Louis high schools.

# SWOT Analysis

## Strengths

KIPP St. Louis has a multitude of strengths, stemming both from its heralded reputation, and from its current success in St. Louis. One of KIPP's principal strengths lies in its strong brand, both locally and nationwide, which has been built on its history of successfully cultivating high achieving students at its 4 schools in St. Louis and its many other schools throughout the country. Additionally, KIPP St. Louis has a reliable base of funding and can rely on the aid, support, and resources of its reputable national organization to help it succeed in its goal of creating a high school. KIPP's reputation is not only highly regarded within the communities it serves, but also among other schools—the administrators of which almost all responded positively when the prospect of a KIPP high school was mentioned.

KIPP St. Louis middle schools have helped earn this well-deserved reputation, as they have successfully improved the academic performance of students who otherwise may not have had access to high quality education. Students at schools run by KIPP dramatically outperformed other local public schools in standardized testing and core subjects. Additionally—an important factor when considering whether to open a KIPP high school—on a national level in regions with KIPP schools, students at KIPP high schools traditionally graduate high school at higher rates, have greater matriculation rates to college, and complete college at superior rates than students from non-KIPP high schools.

An integral component of KIPP's success stems from its staff and style of teaching. KIPP's teaching staff is incredibly motivated and willing to put in extra effort to ensure that their students succeed. In turn, KIPP's method of guiding students step by step through work, academics, and testing helps guarantee that students complete work while understanding the material.

Moreover, another advantage of KIPP is its ability to use its middle school as a feeder program; nationally, 60-75% of KIPP 8<sup>th</sup> graders stay with KIPP when moving to 9<sup>th</sup> grade (when they have the ability to do so). Similarly on a local level, when discussing the prospect of a KIPP high school with students from a KIPP middle school, the majority indicated that they would like to attend such a high school.

## Weaknesses

While it certainly has its strengths, KIPP St. Louis also has a number of weaknesses where starting a high school is concerned. First and foremost one of the issues it faces is the time necessary to start a school in the immediate future. The year is already halfway through which gives KIPP a very short turnaround time should they wish to start a school immediately. In turn, the short time frame causes a number of other issues internally, in terms of culture and staff. In regards to culture, the time constraint makes it hard to establish a true sense of school culture, a very important part of any school, which in turn can negatively affect the experience and performance of students who attend the school. The time constraint also makes hiring experienced teachers a challenge for two reasons. First, it leaves little room for error in regards to recruitment; finding teachers who are a good fit takes time, and should a target candidate decline at a late date it could leave KIPP scrambling to fill a vacancy with little time. Additionally, as with recruitment, the time frame leaves little time for teacher training. The time frame is also important to consider, as KIPP doesn't have as much experience with high schools as it does with middle and elementary schools nationally (and locally), and to ensure that they succeed in this area, they may want to take more time with the project.

Another weakness KIPP may face is that its style of "handholding" may not be suitable for a high school environment, as students traditionally are allowed higher levels of autonomy in high school. This leads to the risk of students performing at a lower level, as there is a higher level of individual accountability that is inherent in a high school system. In fact, when discussing struggles students from KIPP middle schools have faced when transitioning to high school with administrators from other schools, an oft-cited issue is students from KIPP performing poorly as they suddenly no longer

have anyone to ensure that they complete their work, study for tests, and have to rely solely on their personal initiative to complete projects.

## Opportunities

Looking at the situation KIPP faces in St. Louis, there are a number of opportunities that KIPP can capitalize on in order to reach its goal. Firstly, there is a general lack of distinguished public, college preparatory high schools in the St. Louis area that KIPP would be serving. KIPP's high school would operate in an area where high schools traditionally see a large dropout rate. Furthermore, many of the schools that exist there currently do not provide the curriculum or level of instruction that a KIPP school typically brings with it. This can manifest itself in a number of ways; more specifically, students may not receive high quality college advice and they may not reach their full potential academically. KIPP provides a strong alternative system that fosters student development and growth. More importantly, many students who do not get accepted into the high performing high schools in the area (such as metro) generally have no good options to choose from and end up going to lower performing local public schools. Additionally, a number of KIPP middle school graduates who are accepted into the high-performing Metro High School struggle to adjust and see a corresponding drop in academic performance. These students also represent a potential source of students for the high school.

## Threats

In order for KIPP to successfully open a high school, there are a number of threats it must carefully navigate through going forward. Initially, the limited time frame presents a challenge to the foundation of a school, as many students already know where they are going to be attending high school, or are amidst the selection process during the year. The short turnaround required to start a school next year and the small advance notice that students will receive about the school could potentially cause an issue, as it may be hard to actually fill out the student body on such short notice.

Another threat to the success of a KIPP run high school in St. Louis is the retention of its high performing students; nationally students from the top quartile in KIPP's middle schools are the least likely to attend a KIPP high school. Additionally, in regards to student retention, other schools have extensive extracurricular activities. A number of students at KIPP St. Louis middle schools expressed that they wished KIPP had more extracurricular options, especially in relation to sports. Other schools' established extracurricular and sports could draw students away from a KIPP sponsored school.

Finally, other schools are already established and have students from ninth grade to twelfth grade. This diverse student body can draw students away from a KIPP high school for a number of reasons. Firstly, the students may be simply drawn to schools by the fact that older siblings or older peers attend the schools. Secondly, having older peers at a school can mean more senior leadership and increased guidance for younger students. This can manifest itself in seniors leading sports teams, clubs, or advising younger students on what classes to take or how to study.

## Mitigating Weaknesses with Strengths

There are several ways that KIPP can utilize its strengths in brand, performance, and staff to mitigate its weaknesses regarding experience and teaching style.

KIPP can use its powerful brand name and resources to attract experienced and qualified high school teachers. By offering a competitive salary and the support of a nationally recognized organizations, teachers have an incentive to join KIPP despite its relative lack of experience in the high school landscape.

In addition, KIPP can give teachers more input and power over general curriculum and programming. By allowing experienced teachers to have more influence over how the school is run, truly passionate teachers have an even larger incentive to come to KIPP, as they will be able to directly help students who may otherwise underperform.

Furthermore, teachers can have valuable input on how to balance the traditional “hand-holding” model of KIPP middle schools with the expected autonomy that a high school offers. Because KIPP is a college-focused program, it is imperative that students motivate themselves without constant check-ups. Thus, teachers would play a large role in tapering off the rigid structure that is present in high schools—from 9<sup>th</sup> grade to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, students should feel much more autonomous in their actions.

## Mitigating Threats with Strengths

KIPP can also use its strengths as an organization to help quell external threats, such as the established private and magnet schools that have extensive extracurricular activities and diverse student bodies.

KIPP can introduce leadership initiatives, whether it be through clubs or other activities, that promotes leadership to the new class of freshmen. For the first couple of years, these programs can fill the gap left by a lack of upperclassmen that students can look up to. After the first two classes of students become upperclassmen, incoming freshmen will finally have role models and leaders that they can also call peers.

In addition, by maximizing cross-usage of resources between the high school and existing KIPP schools, the logistical start-up phase for the high school can be vastly shortened. This gives KIPP additional time to plan for extracurricular activities and ways to engage students that can rival those of other schools without having to take as many resources. By providing more activities for students, KIPP can increase demand for its high school, especially among high-achieving students who may otherwise choose to attend different schools.

## Mitigating Weaknesses with Opportunities

The largest opportunities lie in the fact that there is a distinct lack of strong public schools in the St Louis City area that adequately prepares students for college. Furthermore, KIPP students that do not gain admittance into high performing private schools generally do not have a good alternative.

Because of the demand for a high quality school that is both intensive yet open to the public, many of the inherent weaknesses that KIPP may face are slightly alleviated.

While it may take up to 9 months for KIPP to be ready to launch KIPP 9<sup>th</sup> grade, there does not seem to be many competitors that will somehow fill the void in public high schools in that time. The demand for an intensive public high school will remain relatively similar, and does not look to be reduced in the coming years. This suggests that KIPP can afford to take more time to plan out exactly what to include in the new high school, especially with regards to activities and community engagement. The urgency stems from the students themselves, not from impending competition—to meet this need, KIPP can compromise extensive planning with quick movement, ensuring that a well thought-out 9<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum comes out in a reasonable amount of time.

## Mitigating Threats with Opportunities

KIPP can take advantage of the opportunities in the public school landscape to significantly lessen the external risks that were previously mentioned.

While many KIPP students find success in high performing private schools, some students struggle and ultimately drop out. Reasons for dropping out vary, but many times they can be attributed the absence of structure in the new school.

KIPP has a couple of key audiences to focus on to ensure that as many 8<sup>th</sup> graders decide to come back to KIPP rather than go to different schools. The first group is the students and family of KIPP



students that do not have plans to attend (or did not receive admission to) competitive private schools. By pushing academic opportunities to parents and students, KIPP can ensure an existing pipeline of students who would otherwise attend underperforming schools.

In order to incentivize high performing 8<sup>th</sup> graders to stay in the KIPP system, KIPP should market extensive programming and enrichment opportunities beyond simply academics, such as either sports or other activities, which rival those of other schools. Because the high achieving students are already motivated academically, many seek challenges that are either related to their career choices or external interests, and catering to those may help to incentivize these students to stay within the system.

## Opening Plan

As a preface to reading this plan, the organization of the required tasks is not in sequential order, but grouped roughly according to functional area. Besides hiring a principal, which is the first and foremost task that needs to be completed, many of the functional areas can be worked on concurrently. It is the tasks within the functional areas that are organized more or less chronologically. It is our opinion that we do not now and will never know as much about opening a high school or a school in general as KIPP St. Louis currently does. Therefore, this list is provided simply as a reference to jog memories or to provide suggestions.

Initially the high school must decide the organizational structure of the administration hierarchy and determine how many positions the school administration will consist of in its various departments. Next the school will have to hire a superintendent and principal as well as other major administrative positions (Dean, President, AD, Counselors etc.). Once the administrative board is in place, in combination with the courses the school plans to offer its students, the school will be able to surmise the list and number of teachers required to execute their curriculum. In addition, the school must consider the amount of teachers they would like to hire on a full-time and part-time basis, which

would be heavily influenced by the expected course offerings. Afterwards the school can confidently proceed to the determination of compensation schemes for each position and ensure that these values are legally reviewed. The school can then officially begin the interview process with candidates that are handpicked by the principal and other administrators. Offers to potential teachers can be given after they pass the background tests. The school can then initiate its training schedules and workshops necessary for teachers to complete prior to the beginning of the academic school year. Hired teachers can then be provided with the necessary course planning information as well as the annual review processes assessing teacher performance.

KIPP then must prioritize creating the foundation of the educational program in accordance with the policies and procedures that govern the daily activities of the high school. Initially the school must define the abstract and concrete goals that the school hopes to collectively achieve. KIPP will also begin to determine the academic calendar. Next, the school must establish a grading scale and school hours and based on the schools that they will draw their incoming freshman class from KIPP must collect and analyze baseline data to set testing goals. In addition, the KIPP must find a way to explain the similarities and differences between AP and State curriculum standards versus its own standards as well as address the assistance plans they will present towards struggling students. Furthermore, the school must invest time in specifying transportation procedures. The school must also work to determine disciplinary guidelines involving academic probation, suspension, and expulsion. The KIPP administrative board must finish by writing a handbook of rules and policies addressing all the needs and school requirements listed above.

In addition, the school must file for official documentation following the creation of the academic and administrative board. There is significant documentation that goes into the making of a school. The school must file for documents including but not limited to: Charter Documentation, Certificate of Occupancy, Transportation Agreement, Food Service Agreement, Adopted Policies and procedure, Immunization Records, Facilities Inspections, Documentation of private and public grants, and the fulfill district and state requirements as well. It should be noted that if moving into the same building as KIPP Inspire, many of these documentation procedures could be avoided.

Once the school earns recognition from these departments in support with their documentation, they must also schedule board meetings, create personnel files, and draft a Continuous School Improvement Plan.

KIPP must prepare their financial expectations as well. Initially they must budget for the first 5 years and present their projections to the board and other stakeholders to earn extra fundraising to include extra expenses, as well as getting insights about what they may be doing correctly and what areas may need improvement. Next, KIPP should make sure that they meet acceptable accounting standards of fiscal management including filing all legally required forms. Finally, the school should revisit the budget periodically and schedule annual audits based on the variability in each academic year's financial forecast.

Once the school has allocated its financial resources in order of priority and significance, the school can determine its potential facilities, equipment and school layout. For example KIPP should contact the city for permits needed for building, paving and parking. Simultaneously, the board should organize appointments with scheduled inspections in the areas of building, health and fire safety. As stated before, moving into an existing building will allow KIPP to skip over many if not all of these steps. Moreover, the school should test the effectiveness of its utilities and hire janitors, maintenance workers, and contractors for the general upkeep of the school. Most significantly, to ensure that the KIPP high school is a safe and healthy educational environment for its students and staff the school should provide emergency training to all personnel, schedule fire drills with the fire department and develop emergency response plans in the events of intruders and natural disasters. The school should also consider hiring nurse and wellness personnel to facilitate a healthy academic atmosphere.

Next the school has to determine its admission process by determining the ideal student profile and the admission requirements that come along with it, involving but not limited to an interview, test scores, grades, and letters of recommendation. Subsequently the school can come to conclusions on deadlines for applications, acceptance, and commitment. More importantly, the school must get its

name out by scheduling in appointments with a multitude of middle schools and educational and community groups in the district. Prior to these meetings the school should create and invest in promotional material that they can print and distribute during the meetings as well as other public locations across the district.

KIPP must also ensure that the parents at home are equally involved with the success of the students as the teachers at school. Therefore, the school must allow the parents easy access to their student's performance in the classroom by compiling email and contact lists, determine how student progress will be reported to parents, and set how parents will bring issues to administration/teachers. The school must construct a way for parents to be involved with school and should encourage frequent check-ins with parents outside of the scheduled parent/teacher conferences.

## Final Recommendation

When initially given this project, Kelly expressed that he wanted to look at three opening dates: The Falls of 2016, 2017, and 2018. The idea of opening in 2016 initially blew us away. Opening a high school in less than one year seemed like a momentous undertaking. The more Kelly spoke about the possibility, the more realistic it sounded: they can move into the existing KIPP Inspire academy, which is extremely underutilized, and save themselves the time and effort of finding and converting a new location. A leadership search was already somewhat underway, and conversations have been started with a potential principal. And finally, KIPP already has a student base that it could, in theory, easily convert to high school students by keeping them within the system.

While opening a high school in less than one year, and at the time of writing, in 8 months, still seems like a challenge, it could be done. The question is at what cost?

After determining that there is a need for a high school and determining that KIPP is the organization that is best suited to fill the need, we evaluated the upcoming three years individually for opening a high school.

While opening a high school in 2016 is feasible, the mantra “if you can’t do it right, it’s not worth doing at all” applies. Though KIPP has ideas for administration, a building, and students in mind, our opinion is that a 2016 opening could not allow time for unexpected roadblocks and would also force them to rush some decisions that they could improve with more time. There are certainly arguments for opening in 2016, and these are arguments that align with KIPP’s mission. Opening in 2016 would allow KIPP to serve an additional class of students and keep them within the KIPP system, preventing them from falling into the SLPS system. This is a class of potentially 100+ students that KIPP could push on the track of attending college. Kelly was also interested in using the political landscape surrounding Ferguson to KIPP’s advantage to attempt to secure additional grants and funding for the school.

Despite these benefits, we believe the costs of pushing to open in 2016 outweigh the benefits. Through our research into high school openings, 1.5 years is a common time frame, and one year is approaching the minimum time frame needed to accomplish all school-opening tasks. In addition, this one year time frame is more often used by established organizations with a history of opening high schools, such as Chicago’s Noble Schools. There are a few areas that we feel would be especially negatively affected by the opening in 2016. These are the hiring process, the student recruiting process, the building of extracurricular programs, and the cost-effectiveness.

Mentioned first was the hiring of teachers. The hiring of teachers is contingent upon several things. A principal would need to be hired first, so that they can oversee the hiring of teachers and select the people who will be working directly under him or her for the foreseeable future. An attendance number would need to be set, and a list of course offerings would need to be determined so that a list of teaching needs could be compiled, and a full-time/part-time delineation could be made before the hiring process would begin and job postings went up. This would all likely take a few months and we feel that KIPP would be left scrambling and would not have the time to really attract the best teachers to this new high school.

The second drawback mentioned was attracting students. Through our interviews with current KIPP 8th graders, we learned that some of the proactive students were nearing commitment with high schools already. With a KIPP high school that could open next year, but has not been announced, we fear not being able to secure a class size that is up to expectations, forcing a difficult decision: Accept students below KIPP standards or run below goals and create financial issues.

While speaking with current KIPP students as well as St. Louis school administrators, a common theme in recruiting students was a school's extracurricular offerings. Our opinion is that KIPP, between low class sizes and a limited time frame, will not be able to come up with many extracurricular activities to offer the students, and even fewer to offer when the students will be making the decision.

To conclude, the urgent need for a new high school to create opportunity for KIPP students as well as the significant challenges and risks associated with a Fall 2016 start date leads us to recommend that KIPP begin its first high school class in the Fall of 2017. With over a year and a half of planning time, KIPP would be able to mitigate the risks of their high school plan as well as effectively recruit a school leader, experienced teachers, and students in order to ensure that the first class of KIPP high school students will be put in a position to succeed.