

## **Sponsor Statement SY2017 Confluence Academies**

Confluence Charter Schools is the oldest and largest charter network in Missouri, serving the entire pre-Kindergarten through high school spectrum. Confluence serves PK-6 at Aspire, PK-6 at Old North, PK-8 at South City, and 7-12 at Confluence Preparatory Academy (CPA). Last year, with the hiring of a new CEO, Confluence central office and the schools underwent a significant period of organizational change. As a result, this year began with new principals at the Old North and Aspire Campuses, and Elite middle school (housed at CPA). There were also changes in central office administration and operations in all the school buildings.

There have been some positive outcomes, most importantly, the network seems to be settling on, and committing to, quality curriculum and a stable assessment plan. Teacher retention has improved and academic performance has edged up, slightly. The current APR shows an incremental increase, but it is not yet meeting performance goals.

The OCSO struggles to understand the larger mission and vision of the network and has seen too many changes at the micro level, without consideration of the larger competitive environment of the school. Confluence Academies, today, faces significantly greater competitive challenges than it did when first entering the choice marketplace. There are more charter school options, and St. Louis Public Schools continues to improve and upgrade signature and magnet schools that have taken students from Confluence Schools. Without paying significant attention to why the Confluence schools exist, especially at the high school level, where offerings are significantly more expensive, and offering compelling alternatives to existing schools, there is no competitive advantage.

However, in working towards a merger of the Grand Center Arts Academy and Confluence LEAs, the board and the new administration have an opportunity to address many of these issues with a new plan. The OCSO will spend this year working with Confluence Academies staff and board to put forth a strong renewal plan for the merged LEA.

The OCSO offers these general observations:

- The board and the leadership team need to take a step back and examine the competitive marketplace in which Confluence competes to examine redundancy and potential unmet opportunities. It should also seek to strengthen the board which is currently under its minimum membership. And, in that effort, take the opportunity to reflect on board training, on-boarding practices, and refine bylaws and other operations.
- With the continued negotiation for the purchase of the entire high school building and the cost of running a second high school, finances are a significant challenge and decreasing enrollments in the primary grades will not support this same organizational structure for many more years without some change. The organization needs to focus its mission, resources and talents where it can capitalize on past success.

- With significant leadership changes, and new curriculum, in an ever-changing assessment environment, academic growth and culture will continue to be a moving target. While Confluence understands that academic scores have been lower than desired, improvement is required, and a better strategic focus would help toward meeting that expectation.