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## **CITY OF KENNER**

### **PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **KENNER CHARTER SCHOOL EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

**Kenner, LA.** - It was only six months ago that the Kenner Discovery Health Sciences Academy opened as the first charter school in the city.

With nearly 700 applications already in hand for just 155 expected openings next year, Discovery school officials have submitted a proposal to the Jefferson Parish School Board to expand their pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup> grade format to also include high school.

The popularity of the school is no surprise to Kenner Mayor Michael Yenni, based on the research by his Economic Development Committee. Shortly after Yenni was elected in 2010, the group was given the task of determining the strengths and weaknesses of the city in the eyes of residents and visitors and what changes or additions would help to attract young families and businesses into Kenner.

“The research by the Economic Development Committee consistently listed education as one of the biggest setbacks for Kenner,” Yenni said. “It was clear that a charter school would be a huge plus for the city.”

Diane Hollis, chair of the Discovery Board of Directors, said Yenni was a key player in bringing the charter school to Kenner. The work by his Economic Development Committee fueled the interest of Discovery officials, which includes five members of the economic committee.

“The Mayor is definitely a visionary,” Hollis said. “He also is a strong partner and charter schools cannot thrive without plenty of strong partners. Our school also benefits from the support of authorizers. The Jefferson Parish School Board has been very cooperative and forward-thinking in regards to our school’s form of education.”

Another key player in the meteoric success of the charter school is Patty Glaser, Hollis said.

Patty Glaser was working at Lusher Charter School and had a history of successfully writing charter applications for new schools in the state when she was approached by a group of community leaders that had submitted a proposal in 2012 for the Discovery school that was rejected.

Glaser not only tweaked the Kenner Discovery School charter application, she also took the job as Discovery CEO. She left perhaps the most successful charter school in the state, in part, because of the excitement by Discovery school leaders.

Although opening a school from scratch is incredibly difficult, Glaser said, the broad group of leaders behind the Discovery school was undaunted. “My board thinks they can do anything and they can – and they did,” she said.

The participation by parents and the growing waiting list are just two of the factors that show how successful the school’s first year has been.

“I think we always knew that people were hungry for good, quality education,” said Lynda Nugent Smith, a member of the Discovery Board and Yenni’s Economic Development Committee. “But the numbers - I have to say – they have surprised me.”

What is it about a charter school that is so exciting to so many parents? Glaser said the autonomy and the ability to make key decisions is exactly what many parents want when it comes to their child’s school.

“A charter school is a school of choice,” Glaser said. “Parents choose it as opposed to being assigned to it – and that’s one reason you get such great buy-in from families. The second thing is decisions are made as they affect the kids under our roof only – it isn’t about an entire district.”

The Jefferson Parish School Board is expected to make a decision on Discovery’s charter expansion at its March 19<sup>th</sup> meeting at 5 p.m. at 501 Manhattan Blvd. in Harvey.

Glaser said she is confident the school’s mission fits a high school format, and Nugent Smith said the expansion would be an additional coup for the city.

“It’s a draw and a magnet for a renaissance and for young people to come to Kenner,” Nugent Smith said.

Yenni agreed about the importance of the new charter school to Kenner: “If you have young children, or you are planning to have children, the location of an excellent school plays a huge role in where to live,” Yenni said. “I feel confident that the Discovery Health Sciences Academy will be attracting residents for years to come.”

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