

# Victoria Rico, George W Brackenridge Foundation

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Victoria Rico

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Victoria Rico 00:02

My name is Victoria Rico and I chair the George W Brackenridge Foundation, which is a small foundation in San Antonio, Texas. It's a foundation that is solely devoted to education. I'm an attorney, and I really got into this work because I was asked to be a trustee for the foundation and and really began to learn about about public education and the challenges and opportunities after I took that position, I believe it was late 2011 i co founded a Harbor Master organization called choose to succeed, which was really designed to help support the growth of charter, high performing charter operators in San Antonio. And it was a, it was a an offshoot of a project, really, that was created in the foundation community in San Antonio to help recruit and support these high performing charter operators as they came to our city. Sometimes, somewhere along the way, I went for a site visit to Kip. And it really, it just really excited me. Just the level of classroom instruction was was amazing. I love the chance they let the students do the tours and listening to the individual students talk about their school. It was, it was clear that something very special was going on in Kip, San Antonio and and then I saw Waiting for Superman and and for me, like I think a lot of people, that was a, that was a, just a life changing moment. And what I learned from Waiting for Superman was that there are more like this out there. KIPP is not the only one there were. It featured high performing replicating charter schools from around the country and and that was news to me. Shortly after that, two guys met in a bar, and one of them was the attorney for the Brackenridge Foundation, and the other one was the chief growth officer for a high performing charter network called idea of public schools. And I got a call from our attorney saying, hey, IDEA Public Schools is looking to expand outside of the Rio Grande Valley, which is the southern part of Texas, and I know you're interested in charter schools, so I called idea up, and I said, I know you've never heard of me, but I'd really like to see your schools. And went down to the valley and just had the most amazing experience. We got in an idea school bus at the airport and went to see some of these campuses. There was an International Baccalaureate campus. It really just beautiful, beautiful schools, I mean order and heart and joy and high level of instruction in the classrooms and and they were growing very fast and very efficiently. And so I put in a pitch for them to come to San Antonio, and they and so idea and Kip actually, and this is typical of the charter movement. They introduced me to other high performing charters and other places that I might be able to talk to about the possibility of them growing schools in San Antonio. So I think, I think that's

really how it began. It just was it sort of spread through introductions from one high performing charter to another, and also these, these wonderful people at the philanthropy round table who will take foundations on tours of charter schools and any kind of high performing school. Sometimes it's hard to believe it's even possible that it that it's happened. And we have 21 now in the portfolio, and more growing every year. There, there. You know, I meet people whose kids are in these schools, and they're people who I've never met before, and children I've never met before, and it's just, it's just amazing, especially because so many of them are very happy it's you have gotten to go to a lot of ribbon cuttings. But I think the most exciting thing is when I just meet a kid or a family who happens to go to one of these schools or is on a wait list for one of these schools, and knowing that we helped to build that and and not only that, but they're gonna be more next year. We're really five years into this project, and there are so many people who I can point to and say, but for that person, the school wouldn't have happened. And some, a lot of them are philanthropists or foundation staff, but and some of them are elected officials. But I think, I think that initially, San Antonio was, was one of the cities where, where it was really a funder. Driven effort to begin with, and it was the Brackner Ridge foundation for about five minutes, and then Ewing Halls will joined, and then the San Antonio area Foundation. And really, there have just been a number of fantastic philanthropic organizations who have gotten behind this effort. And then, you know, as it happens in any community, it spreads outside of, you know, from person to person, my advice to a city that is trying to do what we did five or six years ago, I think first and foremost the philanthropy it really in most places, like in Texas, public funding is is not enough for charter schools. It's typically lower than it is for traditional public schools. And so while it should be enough for a school to operate once it's up, it's typically not enough for it to get started. And so I think having the philanthropy lined up is is probably the most important thing, a bit. Unfortunately, there's a lot more to it. We've found that it's really, really important. In Texas, it was really important to help operators get charters. It was, it's a very long and laborious and risky process and and it doesn't work very well if you don't show the chartering decision makers, especially at the time we were doing it and that that this is a community driven effort. It's not an invasion of out of state charters. This is, this is, these are people who were recruited to come here and then, and then, they're just 100 little obstacles to charter growth anywhere, whether you recruited them or not. And it really, really helps for people who, I think funders actually are in the best position to do this, that any local, any community leaders, are in a good position to stand up for the for charter operators, and should do that publicly. I've been really surprised at the traditional public school, just the education establishment and how it's responded. There's been in the teachers associations, which are kind of, we don't have teachers unions, but these are kind of affiliated with the National teachers unions. I've been really surprised by how they've responded every time we've had a high performing operator up for a charter at the public hearing on it, an attorney for the teachers association would stand up and express, express that they were concerned about this operator coming to Texas, and I didn't see them doing that about startups that didn't promise to be so good. It was really the great wins that seemed to draw this concern. And that was, was mind boggling to need San Antonio's. The demographics of San Antonio are what the United States will be eventually. We are majority Hispanic. We are we are basically what Texas will be in a few years, and the United and Texas is what the United States will be in a few years after that. And so it's an interesting place to see how charter schools work, because this, this is the population that the United States will eventually be. We're. We are not the most poorly educated city and in the United States, I don't think we are. We don't compete with DC or New Orleans, as they were before charter schools for the worst public education, but it is in no way sufficient to prepare our students for the 21st century economy. If you look at the A, C, T or SAT standards. How are our children prepared? Are they college ready when they're getting out of high school? When I looked at the number of ninth graders and then the number of college ready 12th graders, four years later, it was about

10 or 11% of them. And I don't know that that's the perfect way to look at it, but it is shocking that you have about one in 10 kids who are in ninth grade four years later not being ready. I mean, are ready? Only one in 10 ready for college. And of course, you know, we have an economy that's going to require a third of our kids to be college educated for new and replacement jobs. Two thirds need to have at least some higher education, and we just weren't producing that. The schools we recruited do get most of their kids to and through college and the so we see this as a way to help address that I went recently to basis sixth grade. Class and the sixth graders, they were in a chemistry class. They take bio they take biology, chemistry and physics, starting in sixth grade, the sixth graders were balancing chemical equations. They were calculating grams per mole. And I did that as a junior, I believe, at a high school, barely so I'm watching these sixth graders at basis, calculating grams per mole. I got to meet with it a few of them afterwards. They had older siblings in high school, and the in this was in a reasonably good district and in a traditional public school, high school honors chemistry class, their older siblings were doing less sophisticated work than these sixth graders at basis, and this is what it's going to take. I mean, the difference between the kind of education we need to provide and the kind we're providing today is about a four year difference. I mean, about four years worth of extra education and a K 12 experience. So when I see those sixth graders at basis, I know we're providing that this, this work is hard, and it it's really hard to avoid learned pessimism, because we lose, we lose so many bureaucratic battles, we lose so many little political battles. Even though we have 21 schools open now, there are 12 that should have been that aren't here because someone made a bad decision that we couldn't fix or we didn't work hard enough. So it's hard, and I think it's hard for any community that's trying to build high performing charter schools, because you see all of these losses. And the place I go when I feel like, why am I doing this is kip. And Kip San Antonio has this wonderful founder leader, Mark Larson, and he lets me go and talk to kipsters When I need to. And I meet these kids who are just, you know, they're living under a trampoline in a park, or, you know, just some incredible stories, and they're going to go to college. And that's why we do this. I think something that's interesting to me, that maybe not to anybody else, as far as I can tell, but I'll run it by you, is the data. And so when we were when we were starting figuring out what high performing charter schools actually do, is very complicated, because we had these lottery based studies and like, holy moly, they're closing the achievement gap in four years, right? But the thing is that those were all in Boston or New York or, you know, they were all somewhere else. None of them had Texas schools and but we cobbled it together the best I did. I mean, we cobbled it together the best I could. And it looked like, I mean, this looks like the cure to cancer, and I'm borrowing Roland friars, whereas there, but now, you know, Stanford University creative Center has come out with these, these, this, you know, it's analysis of state by state, community by community, and even cmo by CMO. Like looking at actual charter operators and how much value add is it? Are they? Are they creating? And they've, they've helpfully converted it to days of education per year and and we were right. I mean, this kind of cobbled together understanding from these lottery based studies and A, C, T and SAT scores. We were right. We are looking at, you know, KIPP, San Antonio is providing over 100 extra days worth of learning a year in math per year. Idea is, I mean, each of them, they're all over 50 extra days per year of education and reading and math. And when you add that up over a 13 year education, I mean, this is, this is really transformative. So to me, that's, that's one of the great stories of the last five years, is, is Waiting for Superman. Was, was right. These schools are really getting it done. Yeah.