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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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First Louisiana Charter School for Children with Autism Opening August 16

Baton Rouge, La. – The Emerge School for Autism will welcome its first class of students on August 16, 2018, as the first tuition-free school for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the state of Louisiana.

The school's mission is to educate students with ASD using therapeutically focused evidence-based strategies grounded in the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) enabling children to reach their full potential and transform their lives.

The highly integrative curriculum will be tailored to each child's individual needs and provide special education instruction using ABA, Speech-Language, and Occupational Therapy to children to prepare them for future education settings with a functional communication system, improved independence, self-help skills, and essential learner readiness skills. Socio-emotional learning will enhance the academic performance of the students and their ability to integrate into society or back to their home school. Data-driven decision-making will be an integral part of The Emerge School, as the team will collect data daily, and analyze data weekly for each student.

Since its inception in 1960, The Emerge Center, an independent 501c3, has undergone a natural, organizational evolution into the educational realm in response to community needs. The Emerge Kindergarten began in 2014 and provided academic instruction in alignment with Louisiana Student Standards and was composed of a combination of therapies, including Speech-Language, Occupational, and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to students ages five to six years of age. It was a BESE-approved, tuition-based program following a traditional school year calendar.

When Emerge students began transitioning out of the center's program and into traditional schools settings, students who had been successful within Emerge programs became significantly challenged by new environments, which lacked educational and therapeutic tools they needed to achieve success. In 2016, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation unveiled findings from a study of Autism Spectrum Disorder resources in the Capital Region, in which they found that educational opportunities for children with Autism are limited by the small number of private and public school classroom resources, as schools largely often opted out of offering curriculums featuring Applied Behavior Analysis.

In 2017, the Board of Directors and executive leadership of The Emerge Center completed a three-year Strategic Plan to position the non-profit organization for sustainable growth in its services for children with autism and communication challenges. By implementing the Strategic Plan, Emerge expanded its educational offerings with the creation of The Emerge School for Autism.

Beginning with twenty children in kindergarten for the 2018-2019 school year, The Emerge School plans to serve children ages five to eleven and grow to serve up to 120 students over time. In its first year, the school will operate out of two existing classrooms at The Emerge Center, with plans to identify a larger space to accommodate more students in the future.

Leigh Bozard is the principal of The Emerge School for Autism and Board Members of the School are:

- Charles Blaize
- Sarah Broome
- Erica Morgan
- Alice Meyer
- Melissa Juneau, CEO, The Emerge Center
- Jean-Paul Perrault, Chair
- Robert Pettit
- Ryan Thibodeaux
- Katie Sternberg, Chair, The Emerge Foundation
- Stephen Waguespack

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