



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

*Application to establish the Girls Preparatory
Charter School of East Harlem*

August 28, 2008

Executive Summary

The Girls Preparatory Charter School of East Harlem (“Girls Prep East Harlem”) application was submitted to the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) by lead applicant Miriam Raccach on June 2, 2008. Girls Prep East Harlem would open in August 2009 in Manhattan with 144 female students in Kindergarten and 1st grade and grow to include 390 students in Kindergarten through 4th grade during its charter term. In year one, Girls Prep East Harlem would have three classrooms of approximately 24 students at the Kindergarten and 1st grade levels. The school would continue to add students each year in Kindergarten until each grade would have three classes of approximately 24 students each. The mission of Girls Prep East Harlem would be to prepare girls to graduate from college and succeed in life. It is anticipated that the school would ultimately serve students in Kindergarten through 8th grade, providing a comprehensive primary education. This application is a proposed replication of the Girls Preparatory Charter School of New York, a successful single-sex school authorized by the Board of Trustees that is located on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

The Institute recommends that the Board of Trustees approve the charter application for the Girls Preparatory Charter School of East Harlem.

Background and Description

The Institute conducted a rigorous review of the application, including an extensive staff review as well as a review by a panel of nationally renowned experts in fields such as education (charter and traditional schools), school administration, charter and traditional school policy, finance, and curriculum. The application has also been subject to a fiscal soundness review conducted by independent school finance experts. Pursuant to its review protocols, the Institute has met with the applicant and the other members of the founding team. In addition, the Institute has required the applicant to revise, clarify and otherwise amend the applications as needed. Lastly, member(s) of the Board of Trustees’ Charter Schools Committee have had an opportunity to interview the lead applicant and proposed board of trustees.

To achieve its mission of preparing girls to graduate from college and succeed in life, Girls Prep East Harlem would replicate the program in place at Girls Preparatory Charter School of New York (“Girls Prep”), which has now completed its third year of operation and its first year of participating in the New York State Testing Program. The results were impressive with 100 percent of Girls Prep’s 3rd graders scoring 3 or higher on the State’s mathematics assessment (versus 87 percent for the district) and 80 percent scoring 3 or higher on the English language arts assessment (versus 61 percent for the district).

The key elements of the Girls Prep model are:

- A research-based curriculum with a strong focus on literacy;
- High expectations for academic excellence;
- Extensive professional development of teachers and clear career paths for teachers and leaders;
- School uniforms for students and a dress code for teachers;
- Clearly articulated and consistently upheld behavior standards;
- A focus on ethics and personal responsibility; and
- Differentiating instruction in order to teach to individual learning styles.

Girls Prep East Harlem would provide a rigorous back-to-basics education, preparing students to achieve academic excellence. The school would employ the curriculum currently in place at its original school.

In mathematics, Girls Prep instruction has included a morning meeting and daily mathematics lessons, as well as one additional mathematics period each week for review and/or extension. The framework of the curriculum is Saxon Math. In literacy, Girls Prep teachers use a balanced literacy framework to help students become competent readers. This approach includes interactive read-alouds, shared reading, independent reading, literacy center activities, word and language concept study, and guided reading. Reading instruction takes place throughout the day in all subject areas. Girls Prep follows the Scott Foresman curriculum for science and social studies.

Girls Prep East Harlem would hire a balance of experienced teachers and talented individuals new to the teaching profession and would treat all the teachers as experienced professionals, compensating them for performance. It would provide a clear career path from teaching fellow to lead teacher to school principal. In support of this practice, the school would offer extensive professional development to all teachers throughout the school year with extra time devoted during the summer months.

Girls Prep East Harlem plans to hold all staff accountable for measurable outcomes. Academically, the school would work to prepare students to exceed the state's learning standards. Girls Prep East Harlem would administer the TerraNova CTBs together with internal assessments every six to eight weeks to track student progress and inform instruction.

The core members of the board of trustees for Girls Prep East Harlem would be the same as the original school, Girls Prep. However, the board is in the process of increasing its membership to include some members who would only represent Girls Prep East Harlem. The Girls Prep East Harlem board intends to delegate the management of the school and its staff to the executive director through a term-limited contractual agreement. The board would delegate management of the principal, the administrative associate, and the director of business and operations to the executive director, who would be directly responsible for the administration of the school. S/he would delegate leadership of the educational program to the school principal, who would oversee lesson planning, student assessment, and the professional development and evaluation of teachers. It is anticipated that the executive director and director of finance and operations would manage the day-to-day finances of the school. Based on conversations with the proposed trustees, they appear to clearly understand the roles and responsibilities of a charter school board and have the ability to ensure the appropriate and effective operation of the proposed charter school. The proposed board has also given serious consideration to potential conflicts of interest arising from operating two schools. The proposed trustees understand their duty of loyalty to each school, and have counsel available to handle any such issues that arise.

The board bylaws indicate that board membership can range from five to 25 members. The proposed initial members of the board of trustees are set forth below.

1. Miriam Raccah (applicant) – Founder and executive director of Girls Preparatory Charter School of New York, Former Director of Business Affairs and Development for the Harlem Day Charter School (authorized by the Board of Trustees). Various professional positions in development/leadership roles in non-profit/education related agencies.

2. Sarah Robertson – Freelance Reporter and contributing writer to several publications; has over ten years journalism experience in New York City.
3. Bryan Lawrence – Founder of Oakcliff Capital, an investment partnership focused on publicly traded securities. Co-founder and board chair of Girl’s Preparatory Charter School of New York (authorized by the Board of Trustees). Provides technology training to teachers in NYC public schools and administers Jefferson Awards for Public Service to recognize individuals for public service.
4. Kim Richardson – Public relations consultant. Previously worked as a managing director at Weber Shandwick, and as director of communications at The Efficacy Institute.
5. Paul Vermylen – 25 years experience as director for several non-profit organizations such as Huntington Arts Council, the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory DNA Learning Center, Cold Spring Harbor Whaling Museum, and others.
6. Mary Mitchell – Senior Vice President, Strategic Marketing, Scholastic Education, Scholastic Inc. Formerly of FCB (now Draft/FCB) where she led one of the first interactive ad agencies. She relocated to San Francisco and worked with industry leaders such as Amazon.com, HP, Compaq, Palm and Taco Bell to create a viable marketing presence online.
7. Laura Weil – Chief Operating Officer and Senior EVP, Ann Taylor Corporation. Hired as COO of multi-division \$2.1B retailer to improve operating efficiencies and increase operating margins.
8. Nicole Pullen Ross - Vice President in Private Wealth Management at Goldman, Sachs & Co. with 12 years of financial services experience. Nicole is a Senior Partner on a 12 person team. The team oversees more than \$3.5 Billion in assets. Previously worked for J.P. Morgan and Co., where she provided strategic financial reporting and analysis.
9. R. Boykin Curry (Chair) – Partner at Eagle Capital and previously was an investor for Kingdom Capital. Founding board member of Girls Preparatory Charter School of New York; board member of Alliance for School Choice and co-founder of Democrats for Education Reform.

As part of the legal review of the application, the Institute examined the female-only admission policy of the school. The Charter Schools Act, specifically New York Education Law subdivision 2854(2), allows single-sex charter schools (“nothing in this article shall be construed to prevent the establishment of a single-sex charter school”). However, New York charter schools must also follow applicable federal law, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and regulations promulgated thereunder, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs. The Institute’s view that single-sex secondary education programs are not prohibited by Title IX so long as comparable facilities are available to both genders is supported by non-regulatory guidance of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights from May of 2000. The Institute finds

that comparable single-sex educational facilities are available for boys in the New York City School District including the Excellence Charter School of Bedford Stuyvesant (authorized by the board of Trustees). In addition, the curriculum of Girls Prep East Harlem will be founded on the identical learning standards taught in New York City public schools and indeed in schools across all of New York State. Based on the foregoing, and the fact that New York City has other male-only education programs, the Institute finds that comparable facilities and programs for males do exist in the New York City School District at the elementary and middle school level. Thus, the application describes a school that complies with federal law.

The second federal issue raised by the School’s proposed admission policy and examined by the Institute is the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution, which the United States Supreme Court has interpreted to prohibit gender based discrimination in the provision of governmental services. The Supreme Court visited single-sex admission at the college level in 1996 in the case of *United States v. Virginia*, 518 U.S. 515 (1996). In order to be permissible, gender separation in education must serve "important governmental objectives" and be "substantially related to the achievement of those objectives." The school meets this justification requirement by serving the needs of elementary and, (if renewed), middle school aged female students in New York City, who may have difficulty or not excel in the New York City School District as referenced by the applicants. The school’s goal of promoting equal educational opportunity for females, the delivery of an above-average educational program for girls at Girls Prep, the school’s replication model, and the applicant’s desire to close the urban achievement gap for girls all serve as important governmental objectives, and its single-sex admission policy is substantially related to that objective and not based on invidious discrimination against males. Lastly, the addition of a single-sex elementary school for females in New York City will promote public school diversity and choice, which not only is an objective of the Charter Schools Act, but also an important governmental objective itself.

Girls Prep of East Harlem anticipates being housed in public school space in East Harlem, as identified by the New York City Department of Education.

The fiscal impact of Girls Prep of East Harlem on the district of residence, the New York City School District, is summarized below.

Number of Students	Per Pupil Aid (does not include special education and federal entitlement grants)	Total Dollars to Charter School from New York City	Total Budget for New York City (in billions)	(%) of Total NYC Ed. Budget
144 (2009-10 school year – year 1)	\$12,816	\$1,845,546	\$12,440,586,240	0.01%
390 (2013-14 school year – year 5)	\$14,424	\$1,149,670	\$19,629,533,465	0.03%

The calculations conservatively assume that there will be a modest (3 %) annual increase in per pupil aid and in the overall budget of the New York City School District over the life of the proposed charter. The Institute’s calculations do not account for special education, federal Title I funds or other grants or funds provided by the district and to be received by the school. However, the school

has included in the application calculations accounting for special education, federal Title I funds or other grants or funds provided by the district and to be received by the school.

The applicant made an assessment that the programmatic and fiscal impact of the proposed school on both the New York City School District and nonpublic schools in the same geographic area would be modest.

The Institute has notified the school district as well as public and private schools in the same geographic area of the proposed school, and as of August 28, 2008 has received no comment from these entities.

To demonstrate that sufficient interest and support exists for the proposed school to meet its enrollment targets, the applicant and founding team obtained 525 signatures on petitions from parents with children in the Kindergarten through 8th grade age range. To accommodate this number would require the proposed school to open with more than three times as many seats. The demand is also evidenced by the fact that the current Girls Prep on the Lower East Side received six applications for each available seat in the 2007-08 school year. Finally, the application included letters of support from a variety of community organizations, including the East Harlem Tutorial Program, Harlem Parents United, the Northside Center for Child Development, Inc., the Sister Power Organization, Inc., the Young Women's Leadership Foundation and the Young Women's Leadership Network, and Youth Action Programs and Homes.

Findings

Based on the comprehensive review of the application, discussion with national experts and interviews of the applicant and the proposed board of trustees, the Institute makes the following findings.

1. The charter school described in the application meets the requirements of Article 56 of the Education Law and other applicable laws, rules, and regulations as reflected in (among other things):
 - the inclusion of appropriate policies and procedures for the provision of services and programs for students with disabilities and English language learners;
 - the required policies for addressing the issues related to student discipline, complaints, personnel matters, health services, Freedom of Information Law (FOIL), and the Open Meetings Law;
 - the inclusion of proposed by-laws for the operation of the school board of trustees;
 - a single-sex admissions policy that complies with the Charter Schools Act and federal law; and
 - the inclusion of an analysis of the projected fiscal and programmatic impact on surrounding public and private schools.

2. The applicant has demonstrated the ability to operate the schools in an educationally and fiscally sound matter as reflected in (among other things):
 - the articulation of a culture of self-evaluation and accountability at both the administrative and board level;
 - the student achievement goals articulated by the applicant;
 - the appropriate roster of educational personnel;
 - a sound mission statement;
 - a comprehensive assessment plan;
 - the provision of sound start-up, first-year, and five-year budget plans;
 - the plan to acquire comprehensive general liability insurance to include any vehicles, employees, and property;
 - evidence of adequate community support for, and interest in, the charter school sufficient to allow the school to reach its anticipated enrollment; and
 - the inclusion of procedures for programmatic and independent fiscal audits, at least annually.

3. The Board of Trustees' approval of the application is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Charter Schools Act (as amended). This finding is reflected by (among other things):
 - the inclusion of a curriculum framework document that specifies how the proposed curriculum will ensure that students will meet or exceed the performance standards of the Board of Regents;
 - a comprehensive plan to assess student achievement through the use of State tests, externally-verifiable standardized tests and other diagnostic assessments;
 - the articulation of strategies to amend and differentiate instruction where assessment data indicates such need;
 - a focus on high-quality teachers to allow for concentrated, focused and differentiated instruction;
 - the inclusion of significant opportunities for professional development of the school's instructional staff throughout the year;
 - daily blocks of time scheduled for literacy and numeracy;
 - the plan for the education of students at-risk of academic failure; and
 - a commitment to providing an educational program focused on outcomes, not inputs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on its review and findings, the Charter Schools Institute recommends that the Board of Trustees approve the application for the Girls Preparatory Charter School of East Harlem to open in fall 2009.

Girls Preparatory Charter School of East Harlem

Basic Identification Information

Lead Applicant(s):	Miriam Raccah
Management Co.:	None
Other Partners:	None
Location (District):	New York City, CSD 4
Student Pop./Grades:	Opening with 144 students in K and 1 st grades; growing to 390 students in K through 5 th grades
Opening Date:	August 2009

School District of Proposed Location Profile

New York City School District			
Enrollment (2006-07):			
Black or African American:		33	
Hispanic or Latino:		62	
Asian or Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander:		3	
White:		2	
Percent Participating in Federal Lunch Program (2006-07):		82	
Percent Proficient on State Exams (2007-08)			
English Language Arts		Mathematics	
Grade	Percent Proficient	Grade	Percent Proficient
3	53.9	3	84.2
4	54.0	4	74.7
5	66.5	5	73.6
6	44.0	6	62.8
7	52.4	7	62.6
8	33.6	8	47.6

Source: demographic data is from the New York State Accountability and Overview Report 2006-07; test data are from the 2007-08 results released on the State Education Department website.