



Charter Schools Institute  
*The State University of New York*

## **Summary of Findings and Recommendations**

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*Application to Establish the  
Invictus Preparatory Charter School*

**May 3, 2010**

## **Executive Summary**

The application to establish the Invictus Preparatory Charter School (“Invictus Prep”), to be located in Community School District 19 (Brooklyn) of New York City, was submitted by Clifford Thomas, as lead applicant, to the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) on January 11, 2010. The applicant and founding team propose to open Invictus Prep in August 2011 with 90 students in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, adding 90 students each year, and growing to enroll 360 students in 5<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade in the school’s initial charter term. The mission of the proposed charter school would be for its students—ultimately in 5<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade—to have the academic and ethical foundation necessary to excel in four year colleges and universities.

The Institute recommends that the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “SUNY Trustees”) approve the charter application for the Invictus Preparatory Charter School.

## **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 the Institute’s school finance expert. Pursuant to its review protocols, the Institute has met with the applicant and the other members of the founding team. The Institute has required the applicant to revise, clarify and otherwise amend the application as needed. In addition, the Chair of the SUNY Trustees’ Charter Schools Committee had an opportunity to interview the lead applicant and founding school board members.

Invictus Prep plans to open in August of 2011 serving 90 students in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and would add one grade of 90 students each year. Ultimately, the school would enroll 360 students in 5<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grades during the school’s initial charter term. The proposed school would not back-fill seats after 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Each grade level would consist of three classes of approximately 30 students each. The school ultimately envisions serving students in 5<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

The application cites the high poverty level and educational achievement gaps between student groups in East New York and their peers as its rationale for seeking to establish a charter school. Invictus Prep’s mission would be to ensure, “that students in fifth through twelfth grade have the academic and ethical foundation necessary to excel in four year colleges and universities.” Invictus Prep would use the following key programmatic and academic design elements to achieve its mission:

- A structured learning environment that includes the use of uniforms and a “fair and rigorous” code of conduct that would be taught to students and reinforced through rewards that are redeemable at a school “Victory Store” and other incentives such as extra field trips.
- A curriculum focused on academic achievement based on the best practices of other successful charter schools, such as Leadership Preparatory Charter School (authorized by SUNY).
- A longer school year (187 days of instruction) and school day (8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., except for Mondays when students would be dismissed early to allow time for teacher planning and

professional development). Invictus Prep would also offer 20 “Saturday Academies” over the course of the school year to provide increased enrichment and remediation opportunities, as well as a 10 day “Summer Academy” for students struggling to meet all academic requirements during the school year.

- Increased instructional time including 150 minutes of English language arts and 100 minutes of mathematics per day in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades; and 100 minutes of both English language arts and mathematics in 7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grades.
- Frequent assessment of students including the use of diagnostic tests that will measure each student’s ability at the beginning of the year and multiple interval assessments, based on the New York State Regents exams, throughout the year to measure progress. Assessments would be aligned to State standards and created through backwards design. The results would be used to provide targeted support to teachers in improving their instruction.
- An explicit focus on literacy that splits the 150 minutes of daily English language arts instruction into 50 minute mini-courses including Literary Analysis, Reading Fluency, and Writing Workshop in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. A writing component for all courses in every content area and grade, as well as a focus on non-fiction and the use of a common writing rubric to evaluate all written student work.
- A commitment to attracting hardworking, able teachers by providing all teachers with laptops and cell phones, ample time throughout the day and year for common planning, multiple professional development opportunities, and starting teacher pay roughly equal to a teacher with three years of experience and a master’s degree through the United Federation of Teachers’ contract salary schedule.
- A focus on families being part of the school’s educational program and process, including a commitment to multiple information sessions on all aspects of the school, individual visits to families’ homes before school, a voicemail system that includes student assignments, weekly individualized student academic and behavioral reports, three annual family-teacher conferences and three annual progress reports/report cards, and multiple opportunities to celebrate student success.

The proposed school’s organizational structure reflects the daily management of operations by its executive director (principal), who would be assisted by a director of finance and operations and a director of curriculum and instruction. Over the course of the charter, the school would also employ a director of development, dean of community and culture, and a tutoring and enrichment coordinator. The founding team has already identified an executive director (the lead applicant) who is a Prep for Prep alumnus, Building Excellent Schools fellow, and member of the New York City Middle School Task Force.

The proposed members of the school’s board of trustees possess diverse background knowledge, skills and experiences, and, based on Institute staff’s conversations with the proposed trustees, they appear to clearly understand the roles and responsibilities of a charter school board of trustees, and have the ability to ensure the appropriate and effective operation of the proposed charter school. The proposed initial members of the school’s board of trustees are set forth below:

1. **Clifford Thomas** (Lead Applicant/proposed school leader) – Fellow, Building Excellent Schools; ex-officio, non-voting trustee.
2. **Renee Chung** – Recruitment Coordinator for Prep for Prep charter management organization.
3. **Shelly Cleary** – Senior Vice President, Community Development Trust. Previous Acquisitions Officer for The National Equity Fund/New York City and the Neighborhood Mortgage Officer/Project Manager for The Community Preservation Corporation/CPC Resources, New York.
4. **Eddie Gonzalez-Novoa** – Executive Director, Public Allies New York. Previous Director/New Perspectives at Bank Street College of Education and Director of After-School Services for the Hetrick-Martin Institute.
5. **Charles Guerrero** – Director of Development Opportunities for Prep for Prep. Previously served as the Director of College Guidance at Prep for Prep.
6. **KaYee Tom** – former Manager, Private Equity Finance, The Blackstone Group. Previously served as Finance Associate for JP Morgan Chase.
7. **Alexander Marchuck** – President and Director of Operations for Perfect Score Tutoring. Formerly an Equity Trader at Broadway Trading/Schonfeld Securities in Syosset, New York.

At the time of submitting its application, Invictus Prep had not identified a facility. However, the applicant and founding team was working with multiple groups to identify a facility, including Groundwork, Inc., the Community Development Trust, New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE), and the Community Board of the area in which the proposed school would be located. The founding group is exploring both the possibility of using existing, underutilized NYCDOE space, or renting private space.

The fiscal impact of the proposed Invictus Preparatory Charter School on the New York City School District is summarized below:

<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Per Pupil Aid Rate Assumed</b>	<b>Per Pupil Aid Revenue Only</b>	<b>Total Dollars to Charter School from NYC (includes SPED)</b>	<b>Total Budget for NYC (in billions)</b>	<b>(%) of Total NYC Ed. Budget</b>
90 (2011-12 school year – year 1)	\$12,443	\$1,119,870	\$1,232,585	\$18.821	0.007%
360 (2015-16 school year – year 5)	\$12,443	\$4,479,480	\$4,921,721	\$20.308	0.024%

The school’s calculations conservatively assume that there will be no annual increase in per pupil aid over the span of the charter period. The Institute obtained the New York City School District yearly

budget figures from the latest, February 2010, Financial Status Report published on the website of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE); there was no information available for 2015-16 so a 3% increase in spending was assumed for that year. It should be noted that the school district estimate is subject to unpredictable increases and decreases in any given year. The Institute's calculations do not account for federal Title I funds, other federal grants and/or funds provided and to be received by the school since the school's main funding stream is per pupil aid. However, the school has included in its application calculations accounting for federal Title I funds, other federal grants and/or funds provided by the district and to be received by the school.

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

The Institute has notified the NYCDOE as well as public and private schools in the same geographic area of the proposed school and as of the date of this report had received no comment from these entities. (Copies of the notification letters are on file in the Albany office of the Institute.)

The applicant and founding team of Invictus Prep provided evidence of community interest and support sufficient to ensure that the school would meet its initial enrollment projections through multiple methods. First, the application included 151 signatures collected from community residents on a petition of support for the proposed school. Of these signatories, some 79 state that as parents of children currently in third grade and below (and thus fifth grade eligible in August 2011 and onward), they would send their children to Invictus Prep if it existed. Second, the applicant and founding team have met with hundreds of community residents and leaders to gather input for the proposed charter school plan and to develop support in the community; many community based organizations provided letters of support. The application included letters of support from: The Community Coalition of East New York,<sup>1</sup> Groundwork, Inc., The Brighter Choice Foundation, Prep for Prep, The Local Initiative Support Corporation, and The Local Development Corporation of East New York. The applicant and founding group have also developed relationships with numerous other community organizations that have indicated that they support the creation of the school. These organizations include: the Brooklyn Economic Development Corporation; the Brooklyn Small Business Development Center; the Brooklyn Public Library; Sponsors for Educational Opportunity; and, The Pratt Center for Community Development. Finally, the applicant and founding group are developing a Community Advisory Committee comprised of local leaders who have agreed to provide community input to the school and to serve as advocates for the school. Current members of this Committee include Erica Ahdoot, Interim Executive Director of Groundwork Inc., and Helen Jordan, Co-Chair of the Community Coalition of East New York.

## **Findings**

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

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<sup>1</sup> The Community Coalition of East New York is a supra-organization of over 40 community based organizations that are actively working towards improving educational, health, and financial outcomes for the residents of East New York. Cliff Thomas, the lead applicant, has had repeated meetings with their leadership and members, and will continue to engage them as the founding group reach out to other resources in the community.

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 issues related to student discipline, complaints, personnel matters, health services, Freedom of Information Law (FOIL), and the Open Meetings Law;
  - the inclusion of the proposed by-laws for the operation the board of trustees; 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 school in an educationally and fiscally sound matter as reflected in (among other things):
  - the provision of an educational program that meets or exceeds the State performance standards;
  - 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;
  - an 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 SUNY 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 focused on academic achievement based on the best practices of other successful charter schools and 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 for the school to assess student achievement through the use of state tests, externally-verifiable standardized tests and other diagnostic assessments;
- an explicit focus on English language arts with 150 minutes devoted to literacy each day at the fifth and sixth grade levels and 100 minutes at the seventh and eighth grade levels, along with a writing component embedded in every content area at each grade level;
- 100 minutes of mathematics per day in fifth through eighth grades;
- the plan for the education of students at-risk of academic failure;
- a focus on families being part of the school's educational program and process, including a commitment to multiple information sessions regarding all aspects of the school, individual visits to families' homes before school, a voicemail system that includes student assignments, weekly individualized student academic and behavioral reports, three annual teacher-family conferences and three annual program reports/report cards, and multiple opportunities to celebrate student success;
- Increased opportunities for parent involvement, including weekly communication with parents/guardians, progress reports, and conferences; 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 SUNY Board of Trustees approve the application to establish the Invictus Preparatory Charter School in Brooklyn in the fall of 2011.

# Invictus Preparatory Charter School Brooklyn

## Basic Identification Information

Lead Applicant:	Clifford Thomas
Management Co.:	None
Other Partners:	None
Location (District):	New York: CSD 19
Student Pop./Grades:	Opening with 90 students in 5 <sup>th</sup> grade and growing to include 360 students in 5 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup> grade
Opening Date:	August 2011

## School District of Proposed Location Profile

<b>New York City School District 19</b>			
Enrollment (2008-09):		26106	
Percent (2008-09):			
White:		1	
African-American:		53	
Hispanic:		39	
Asian, Other:		7	
Percent Participating in Federal Lunch Program (2008-09):		87	
Percent Proficient on State Exams (2008-09):			
English Language Arts		Mathematics	
Grade	Percent Proficient	Grade	Percent Proficient
3	63	3	90
4	59	4	79
5	65	5	79
6	66	6	70
7	57	7	70
8	43	8	59

Source: Demographic data is from the New York State Accountability and Overview Report 2008-09; test data are from the 2008-09 results released on the State Education Department website.