



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

*Application to establish the
Our World Neighborhood Charter School II*

September 14, 2010

Executive Summary

The Our World Neighborhood Charter School II (“OWN II”) application was submitted to the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) by lead applicant Steven Zimmerman on May 3, 2010. OWN II is a proposed replication of the existing Our World Neighborhood Charter School (OWN) authorized by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “SUNY Trustees”). OWN II intends to occupy space currently used by OWN (which is relocating), the site of a former parochial school located at 31-20 37th Street in Astoria, Queens in New York City Community School District (“CSD”) 30. OWN II would open in September 2011 with 104 students in Kindergarten and first grade and grow to enroll 312 students in Kindergarten through fifth grades by the end of the school’s initial charter term. The educational philosophy of OWN II, like its model school, would be based on inquiry, active and experiential learning, social justice, continual professional development, and reflective practice. The school would aim to educate students to become independent thinkers and lifelong learners.

The applicant and founding team of OWN II seek to replicate the successful elements of the original OWN, which opened in the fall of 2002 with 385 students in Kindergarten through fifth grades. The school was granted a full-term renewal of five years without conditions by the SUNY Trustees in March of 2007 at which time it enrolled 725 students in Kindergarten through 8th grade. Since that renewal, OWN has met its key Accountability Plan goals in English language arts and mathematics. Throughout the current Accountability Period OWN has considerably improved its performance in both subjects. OWN has shown consistent gains in absolute proficiency levels and more importantly has continued to improve its performance in comparison to the CSD where it is located and similar schools state-wide. In English language arts, while OWN has outperformed the district in each of the three years of the Accountability Period, it performed better than predicted in comparison to similar schools in the most current year. In mathematics, OWN has outperformed the district in the last two years of the Accountability Period and again performed better than predicted in comparison to similar schools in the most current year. OWN has generally met its science and social studies goals throughout the Accountability Period. According to the State’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system, OWN is deemed to be in good standing. Based on the strength of the current OWN school, the strength of the application and the results of the Institute’s review and inquiry, the Institute is confident that OWN II has the capacity to be a successful school.

The Institute recommends that the SUNY Trustees approve the charter application for the Our World Neighborhood Charter School II.

Notwithstanding the application meeting the requirements for being recommended, the Institute does note a concern regarding the potential percentage of students enrolled at the school that would be eligible for the federal Free Lunch Program. In 2008-09, the original OWN Charter School, upon which the proposed school is being modeled, and is located in the same proposed community as the proposed school, 36.7 percent of its students were Free Lunch-eligible, as compared to 72 percent of students in CSD 30. The proposed school has opted not to provide an at-risk admissions factor for Free Lunch-eligible students, which could result in more students from outside the CSD attending the school, instead providing a detailed plan in the application for recruiting such students. The Institute will closely monitor the school’s ability to do so, and if enrollment and retention targets for this population of students are not met, may require action to increase such enrollment.

Background and Description

The Institute conducted a rigorous review of the application, which included a legal and fiscal soundness review. Pursuant to its protocols, the Institute has met with the applicant, the proposed board of trustees, and other members of the founding team. In addition, the Institute has required the applicant to revise, clarify and otherwise amend the applications as needed. Further, SUNY Trustee Pedro Noguera had an opportunity to interview the lead applicant and founding board members.

The key elements of the OWN II are:

- reflective practice for the student;
- reflective practice for the teacher;
- intensive focus on literacy;
- team teaching and sheltered instruction;
- data-driven decision making;
- *Pillars of a Positive Community* school culture program; and
- a longer school day and year.

OWN II's educational program would provide a broad liberal arts foundation that includes instruction in the core subjects of reading, writing (English language arts), mathematics, science, and social studies, along with exposure to the arts, music and physical education. In addition, students would receive instruction in Spanish beginning in third grade. The proposed school would institute a sheltered instruction approach and workshop teaching model with collaborative team teaching. This model is intended to, in part, provide students with differentiated instruction. The school day would run from 7:50 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and the school year would be comprised of 190 days.

The proposed school's focus on literacy would be manifest across the curriculum, resulting in math literacy, science literacy, and world literacy. Reflective practices would encourage students to be aware of their own learning, growth and skills and would provide opportunities for teachers to acquire and/or refine their pedagogical knowledge and skills.

The school would invest in certified English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers to address the language development needs of English language learners (one ESL teacher at each grade level Kindergarten through second grade and one ESL teacher for third through fifth grades) and provide structures for these teachers to collaborate with classroom teachers.

OWN II would implement a comprehensive program of assessments with a variety of tests aligned with both the curriculum and the New York State ("State") performance standards. The school would use assessment data to inform teaching and to support differentiated instruction. Ongoing assessment and the analysis and use of a variety of assessment data, disaggregated as needed, would be key components in the school's educational program, and instruction would be tailored to address individual student needs.

Pillars of a Positive Community (“*Pillars*”) would be the overarching school culture and community program designed to impart in students the values of our shared community. *Pillars* was established at OWN where administrators, teachers, parents and students sought ways to build a common community out of the many diverse families who enrolled their child(ren) in the school. *Pillars* is intended to provide a construct by which the school is able to convey its ethical tenets to all stakeholders and bring together the school community by embodying its focus on the social and emotional, as well as academic, development of the school’s students. The ten pillars honored are kindness, friendship, courage, respect, truth, responsibility, self discipline, fairness, perseverance and citizenship.

The OWN II by-laws indicate that board membership can range from five to eleven members. The proposed initial members of the board of trustees are set forth below.

1. **Steven Zimmerman** (Lead Applicant) – Founder and CEO of Zimmedia L.L.C. Former Board Chair of OWN, currently serving as Director of Special Projects for the school. Founder and Executive Director of The OWN Foundation.
2. **Angela M. Howard** – Senior Project Manager for Works-In-Progress Associates. Former Senior Project Manager for Jonathan Rose Companies.
3. **Ruth Schwartz** – New York University Graduate level instructor in the Program in Educational Communication and Technology and in the Program in Social Studies Education.
4. **Nancy Rose Sills** – Special Counsel at Graubard Miller.
5. **Richard Alan Welles** – Assistant Principal (K - 5) and board member at OWN. Former Regional Vice President for Curriculum, Instruction and Operations for Mosaica Education, Inc. (OWN’s former management company).
6. **Vacant** – Seat reserved for the parent of a student enrolled in the school.
7. **Vacant** – Seat reserved for the parent of a student enrolled in the school.
8. **Vacant** – Seat reserved for the parent of a student enrolled in the school.

Part of the OWN governance model is to have more than one source of parent input in the governance of the school as demonstrated by the three seats reserved for parents, which the Institute has found provides a true sense of ownership in the school.

OWN II intends to occupy a building located at 31-20 37th Street in Astoria, Queens, a former parochial school. The building is currently occupied by the middle school grades of the original OWN Charter School. Those middle school grades are scheduled to relocate to new space in the fall of 2011. The building includes classrooms, administrative office space, a gymnasium and a multi-purpose room. OWN II would also lease the building from the Trinity Lutheran Church. In the event that OWN II cannot occupy the preferred space, the founding team is investigating alternative space arrangements through the New York City Department of Education (the “NYCDOE”). The founding team stated that it had met with the NYCDOE to discuss the possibility of co-locating with another public school in CSD 30.

The fiscal impact of OWN II on the district of residence, the New York City School District, is summarized below.

Number of Students	Per Pupil Aid Rate Assumed	Per Pupil Aid Revenue Only	Total Budget for New York City (in billions)	(%) of Total NYC Ed. Budget
104 (2011-12 school year – year 1)	\$13,527	\$1,406,808	\$18.447	0.008%
312 (2015-16 school year – year 5)	\$15,225	\$4,750,124	\$19.403	0.024%

The calculations assume that there will be an annual increase in per-pupil aid of three percent in each year of the proposed charter period. The NYCDOE yearly budget figures were accessed from the latest, May 2010, Financial Status Report (FSR) published on the NYCDOE website. No information was available for 2015-16 so no increase in spending was assumed for that year. Using the moderately aggressive assumptions for per-pupil aid and revenue and the district’s four year operational budgeting assumptions, along with the fundamentally conservative assumption for year five of the charter period, illustrates the maximum impact of the proposed school on the district.

It should be noted that the NYCDOE estimate used by the Institute in conducting its analysis is subject to unpredictable increases and decreases in any given year given the nature of per-pupil funding for the district. While the school has included in its application estimated calculations accounting for special education revenue, federal Title I funds, other federal grants and/or funds provided by the district and to be received by the school, the Institute’s calculations and analysis do not account for these sources of potential revenue.

The Institute finds 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 minimal.

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 the date of this report has received no comments from these entities.

Evidence of support for OWN II includes signatures on a petition of support for the establishment of the school from 95 parents with students entering Kindergarten and 41 signatures of parents with students entering first grade in 2011, as well as six letters of support from local officials, community groups, and other local charter schools. The application also notes the wait lists for three local charter schools as evidence of the demand for charter school elementary school options in Queens. (OWN has a wait list of 275 students for kindergarten and 62 students for first grade for the 2010-11 school year, and is located in the same neighborhood as OWN.)

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 required by Education Law subdivision 2852(2).

1. The charter school described in the application meets the requirements of Article 56 of the Education Law (as amended) 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 and health services;
 - an admissions policy that complies with the Act, federal law and the U.S. Constitution;
 - the inclusion of the proposed by-laws for the operation of the school's 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;
 - a 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 descriptions of programmatic and independent fiscal audits, with fiscal audits occurring at least, annually.

3. Granting the application 1) is likely to improve student learning and achievement, and 2) materially further the purposes of the Act. This finding is reflected by (among other things):
- the inclusion of a curriculum crosswalk 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;
 - an extended school year (190 days of instruction) and school day (six hours and 45 minutes per day);
 - use of the workshop model, which lends itself to differentiated and individualized instruction within heterogeneous classrooms;
 - a robust English as a second language (ESL) program supported by two ESL teachers in the schools first year of operation and growing to four by the fifth and using a sheltered instruction model to support English language learners in the general education classroom;
 - an academic program that focuses on the core subjects of English language arts, mathematics, history/social studies and science, as well as visual arts, music, foreign language and physical education; and
 - the infusion of literacy into all subject areas;
 - the inclusion of significant opportunities for professional development of the school's instructional staff throughout the year; and
 - a commitment to providing an educational program focused on outcomes, not inputs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on its review and findings, the Institute recommends that the SUNY Board of Trustees approve the application for the Our World Neighborhood Charter School II to open in Queens in the September of 2011.

Our World Neighborhood Charter School II

Basic Identification Information

Lead Applicant(s):	Steven Zimmerman
Management Co.:	None
Other Partners:	None
Location (District):	New York City Community School District 30
Student Pop./Grades:	Opening with 104 students in Kindergarten and 1 st grades; growing to 312 students in Kindergarten through 5 th grades
Opening Date:	August 2011

School District of Proposed Location Profile

New York City School District 30			
Enrollment (2008-09):		36,381	
Percent (2008-09):			
White:		15	
African-American:		9	
Hispanic:		54	
Asian, Other:		22	
Percent Qualifying for Free or Reduced Priced Lunch (2008-09):		83	
English Language Arts (2009-10)		Mathematics (2009-10)	
Grade	Percent Proficient	Grade	Percent Proficient
3	48.8	3	57.2
4	51.0	4	62.7
5	50.9	5	66.9
6	48.8	6	63.7
7	44.7	7	63.2
8	45.2	8	57.3

Source: demographic data is from the New York State Accountability and Overview Report 2008-09; test data are from the 2009-10 results released on the New York City Department of Education's website.