



Charter Schools Institute  
*The State University of New York*

# Summary of Findings and Recommendations

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*Proposal to establish:  
Tech International Charter School*

June 5, 2011

## **Executive Summary**

The proposal to establish the Tech International Charter School (“Tech International”) was submitted to the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) by lead applicant Steve Bergen on February 28, 2011 in response to the Institute’s Request for Proposals (“RFP”) that was released on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “SUNY Trustees”) on January 3, 2011.

Tech International would offer its students a “rigorous, technology-enhanced, internationally focused education that develops critical thinking skills, and builds outstanding academic achievements.” The board intends to occupy private facility space in New York City Community School District (“CSD”) 10 (Bronx). The school would open in the fall of 2012 with 88 students in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and would add one grade in each of the next two years until in its third year of operation it would serve 235 students in 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The school would increase enrollment within the 6<sup>th</sup> grade in the fourth and fifth year of the proposed charter period whereby the school would reach its initial capacity of 285 students in 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The founders ultimately envision a 6<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> grade program and plan to request a charter revision at some point in the initial charter period to add high school grades.

Tech International does not propose to maintain a relationship with a charter management organization nor with any formal partner organizations.

Consistent with the May 2010 amendments to the New York Charter Schools Act (the “Act”), the Institute finds: 1) that the proposal for Tech International rigorously demonstrate the criteria detailed in the Institute’s RFP including the mandatory criteria set forth in Education Law subdivision 2852(9)(b)(i); 2) that the proposed school has conducted thorough and meaningful public review processes to solicit community input regarding the proposal in accordance with the requirements in the RFP, which in turn conform with Education Law subdivision 2852(9)(b)(ii); 3) the proposal is one that best satisfies the objectives contained within the RFP based on the content of the proposal and its supporting documentation, and is therefore qualified within the meaning of Education Law subdivision 2852(9-a)(d); and 4) the Institute has scored the proposal pursuant to Education Law subdivision 2852(9-a)(c), and there are enough charters to be issued by the SUNY Trustees pursuant to the January 2011 RFP to accommodate the proposal and all other RFP applicants the Institute is recommending for approval.

Based on the foregoing:

The Institute recommends that the SUNY Trustees approve the charter proposal for the Tech International Charter School.

## **Background and Description**

While SUNY may still award a small number of charters pursuant to its traditional application process, amendments to the Act made additional charters to form new charter school education corporations available only through an RFP process. The Institute received 25 total proposals to create new charter schools in response to the RFP it issued on January 3, 2011. The current review cycle could legally result in a maximum of 63 new charters approved by the SUNY Trustees, per Education Law subdivision 2852(9), 30 of which reflect charters that were available but not awarded in response to the August 2010 RFP. Two of the current 25 proposals were submitted in response to the expedited timeline provided for in the January 2011 RFP and subsequently approved by the SUNY Trustees at their March 2011 meeting, leaving 61 possible charters to be approved.

The Institute conducted a rigorous evaluation of the Tech International proposal including academic, fiscal and legal soundness reviews. In addition, an external panel of education experts reviewed, evaluated and commented on the proposal based on the criteria set for the in the RFP. Pursuant to its protocols, the Institute has met with the applicant, the proposed board of trustees, which will oversee the school, and other members of the founding team. In addition, members of SUNY Trustees' Education, College Readiness and Success Committee had an opportunity to interview the lead applicant and members of the founding board.

The mission the Tech International would be to “offer its students a rigorous, technology-enhanced, internationally focused education that develops critical thinking skills, and builds outstanding academic achievements using a combination of traditional and innovative pedagogies. Tech International Charter School will instill in each student a mastery of academics, work habits and the lifelong skills necessary for college preparation and beyond; and clear expectations of international responsibility through experiential learning of our shared humanity and cultural differences.”

To achieve this mission, the founders would implement the following key design elements:

- technology as a tool to increase student achievement and generate awareness of global communities;
- up-to-date, culturally relevant curriculum based on E.D. Hirsch's Core Knowledge that reaches all learners;
- individualized student goal setting for achievement guided by assessment data;
- consistent professional development for all teachers and staff;
- project development and a lab period for all students;
- “TI Pride,” which will create and build an exceptional culture of high expectations and inclusiveness;
- strong collaboration between students' families, the school, along with the local and world community; and
- clearly defined hiring practices.

The rationale of the founding team to create Tech International is based on the belief that it can provide a rigorous middle school option for students of CSD 10 in the Bronx. The school envisions itself as a resource in the community, assisting families in achieving their dreams of success for their children.

Through their shared experiences as part of the leadership team at The Children's Storefront in Harlem, Tech co-founders Ms. Adjawah K. Scott and Mr. Steve Bergen have experienced how the use of technology as an educational tool has a direct impact on increased academic achievement, which is imbedded in the design of the proposed school. Consequently, the founding team believes the powerful balance of technology-based teaching and traditional methods to access meaningful content will shape the skills, attitudes, and engagement of students. The founders also believe that cultural investigation and exchange with young people can lead to enhanced critical thinking skills, broader awareness and deeper understanding of others throughout the world. Tech International endeavors to use technology and international themes to inspire students to see opportunities for success through education. If approved, Mr. Bergen would serve as the school's executive director, while Ms. Scott would serve as the principal and overall instructional leader.

Through weekly professional development for teachers and project development for students, the school intends to ensure that each student will be challenged to reach individualized benchmarks outlined in his or her Individualized Achievement Plans. Furthermore, the founders intend to capitalize on the cultural richness of CSD 10 by including families in the process of educating their children, which will allow for investment in an internationally focused, theme-based curriculum that enhances the school's core values. Students will be taught to embrace a culture of PRIDE - Plan B skills, Resilience, Integrity, Dedication and Empathy. Members of the Tech International community will strive to create and maintain meaningful connections with students' families to guarantee that the home-school partnership supports students in meeting individualized social, emotional and academic achievement goals. Teachers will be hired using specific criteria to determine if they possess the passion, dedication and skills to meet the challenges of educating students with a variety of needs in an urban setting.

Tech International also plans to be an inclusive environment that welcomes children with a range of needs, especially those with disabilities and English language learners. School will be in session for 195 instructional days during the first year with extended school days that run from 8:00am to 5:00pm. The school will begin with an introductory week when each family will be given a computer and e-reader to take home. These tools will then be used to support and enhance the core education program throughout the year. The coursework will include the core content areas of English language arts, mathematics, science and history accompanied by the unique offerings of lab periods and project development. In the second year of operation, students will begin participate in additional enrichment classes such as music, art, and physical education. The school will build its curriculum based on the framework of the Core Knowledge curriculum, designing units that align with the Common Core State Standards, New York State and/or Regents requirements.

The organizational structure of Tech International will include an administration of an academic program designed to meet the needs of all learners: students who are at-risk, performing within an average range, or advanced, as well as those classified with special needs including English language learners. The Executive Director will report directly to the school's board of trustees and be responsible for the overall day-to-day operations of the school. The Instructional Leadership Team (the Principal, Academic Support Coordinator, and Director of Curriculum and Instruction) will monitor and assess student progress and supervise and support the instructional staff. Teachers would be supported with consistent supervision that encompasses professional development, weekly team meetings, collaborative planning times, and biannual formal observation. The Director of Operations would be responsible for maintaining all business aspects of the school including, but not limited to, transportation, food service, budget, and documentation of compliance with charter law.

The Tech International by-laws indicate that its school board would consist of not less than 5 voting members, and not more than 15. The proposed initial members of the school's board of trustees are set forth below.

1. **Weenia Allen** – Family Services Worker, ECDO Head Start; A.A.T., Augusta Technical Institute.
2. **Joseph B. Dixon, Jr.** – Director of Professional Development and Training Services, Tequipment, Inc.; formerly Executive Director, Kornreich Technology Center; B.A and M.A.T, University of Memphis.

3. **Nicole Gesualdo** – Director of Strategic Communications, Fordham University; formerly Director of Marketing and Communications, The Chapin School; B.A., Georgetown University; M.S., Columbia University.
4. **Matthew P. Horvat** – High School Principal, University of Chicago Lab Schools; formerly Head of Upper School, The Browning School; B.A., University of Pennsylvania; M.A.T, Boston University.
5. **Barbara Lee Jackson** – former Health Reform Coordinator, Office of the Governor of the United States Virgin Islands and Executive Director, Virgin Islands Perinatal Incorporated; B.S., State University of New York at Stony Brook; M.P.H., Columbia University.
6. **Nicholas Sidoti** – Executive Sales Manager, Promenet, Inc.; B.A., University of Arizona.
7. **Robert Vitalo** – Head of School, The Berkeley Carroll School; formerly Headmaster, Fairfield Country Day School and Head of School, Media-Providence Friends School; B.S., New York University; M.A., Columbia University.
8. **Victor Catano** – Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer, Rockland Country Day School; B.A, Haverford College; M.B.A., Baruch College.

The applicant has worked extensively to locate a private facility that would meet the school’s needs and has presented a viability plan for the acquisition of such a facility. The school intends to occupy a facility located at 2842 Webster Avenue in the Bronx where the Bronx Community Charter School (authorized by the New York City Department of Education (“NYCDOE”)) is currently located. That Bronx Community Charter School will be vacating the facility to move into a permanent space. Alternatively, Tech International would lease a portion of the Bronx Community Charter School’s new permanent facility because that school would have not yet grown to capacity. In either case, Tech International would need to secure a larger facility for its third year of operation and beyond and has demonstrated a viable plan for doing so.

The fiscal impact of Tech International on the district of residence, 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 Budget for New York City (in billions)</b>	<b>(%) of Total NYC Ed. Budget</b>
88 (2011-12 school year – year 1)	\$13,527	\$1,190,376	\$19.007	0.006%
285 (2015-16 school year – year 5)	\$14,781	\$4,212,585	\$20.704	0.020%

The calculations above assume there will be no annual increase in per-pupil aid in years 1 and 2 (2012-13, 2013-14) and a three percent increase each year thereafter for the remainder of the charter period (2014-15 thru 2016-17). The NYCDOE yearly budget figures were accessed from the latest, December 2010, Financial Status Report (FSR) published on the NYCDOE website. No information was available for 2015-16 and 2016-17 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 assumptions for years

four and five of the proposed charter period, illustrates a maximum fiscal 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 proposal 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 fiscal impact of the proposed school on both the New York City School District, public charter 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.

The applicant has conducted public outreach, in conformity with a thorough and meaningful public review process prescribed in the RFP, to solicit community input regarding the proposed school (Ed. Law §2852(9-a)(b)(ii)).

The RFP also contained minimum eligibility and preference criteria to reflect the requirements of Education Law subdivision 2852(9-a). The proposal met the eligibility requirements, as evidenced by the following:

- The proposal was complete and met the following basic criteria:
  - submitted by the appropriate deadline;
  - was complete, i.e., include a Transmittal Sheet, Proposal Summary and responses to all RFP requests;
  - individual responses adequately addressed each specific request; and
  - the proposal was coherent.
- The proposal met the standard for describing a quality educational program and provided sufficient evidence that the proposed school is likely to operate in an educationally and fiscally sound manner, to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes set out in Education Law subdivision 2850(2) *as well as* demonstrated a rigorous commitment to student achievement;
- The proposal included a viable plan to meet the enrollment and retention targets established by the SUNY Trustees for students with disabilities, students who are English language learners, and students who are eligible to participate in the federal free and reduced-price lunch program (as detailed in Request No. 24).
- The proposal provided evidence of public outreach that conforms to the process prescribed by the SUNY Trustees for the purpose of soliciting and incorporating community input regarding the proposed charter school.

As the Tech International proposal met the eligibility criteria, the Institute's evaluation continued with a full review of proposal, a review of the proposal by an external panel of education experts, an interview of the founding team and proposed board of trustees, and requests for clarification and or amendments to each proposal. The review process then continued with an evaluation of the proposal in relation to the eleven Preference Criteria contained in the RFP for which proposals can earn credit as described in the RFP's Scoring Rubric. The purpose of the Scoring Rubric was to prioritize proposals in the event that the number of proposals meeting the SUNY Trustees' requirements exceeded the maximum number of charters to be issued in 2011. In the event of a tie for the last charter both proposals will be rejected unless one applicant agreed to withdraw his or her proposal for consideration in a subsequent RFP. The preference criteria, which in addition to eligibility criteria and the overall high standards established by the SUNY Trustees, included the demonstration of the following in compliance with Education Law subdivisions 2852(9-a)(c)(i)-(viii):

- increasing student achievement and decreasing student achievement gaps in reading/language arts and mathematics;
- increasing high school graduation rates and focusing on serving specific high school student populations including, but not limited to, students at risk of not obtaining a high school diploma, re-enrolled high school drop-outs, and students with academic skills below grade level;
- focusing on the academic achievement of middle school students and preparing them for a successful transition to high school;
- utilizing high-quality assessments designed to measure a student's knowledge, understanding of, and ability to apply, critical concepts through the use of a variety of item types and formats;
- increasing the acquisition, adoption, and use of local instructional improvement systems that provide teachers, principals, and administrators with the information and resources they need to inform and improve their instructional practices, decision-making, and overall effectiveness;
- partnering with low performing public schools in the area to share best educational practices and innovations;
- demonstrating the management and leadership techniques necessary to overcome initial start-up problems to establish a thriving, financially viable charter school; and
- demonstrating the support of the school district in which the proposed charter school will be located and the intent to establish an ongoing relationship with such school district.

While the Institute received a total of 25 proposals in response to its January 2011 RFP, only 14 have been recommended for approval including two in March 2011 which were approved by the SUNY Trustees. All of the 14 proposals recommended for approval met the eligibility criteria and were therefore assessed a score using the rubric contained in the RFP. The proposal for the Tech International Charter School earned a score of 38 preference points out of a possible total of 64. Based on these scores and the other information and findings set forth herein, the Institute is recommending that the SUNY Trustees approve the proposal to establish the Tech International Charter School, which would not exceed the statutory limit in Education Law subdivision 2852(9-a)(a).

## **Findings**

Based on the comprehensive review of the proposal and interviews of the applicant and the proposed board of trustees, the Institute makes the following findings.

1. The charter school described in the proposal 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;
  - the inclusion of descriptions of programmatic and independent fiscal audits, with fiscal audits occurring at least, annually;

- the inclusion of a school calendar and school day schedule that provide at least as much instruction time during a school year as required of other public schools; and
  - the inclusion of methods and strategies for serving students with disabilities in compliance with all federal laws and regulations.
3. Granting the proposal is likely to: 1) 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 framework document that demonstrates how the proposed curriculum will ensure that students will meet or exceed the performance standards of the Board of Regents reflecting the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in literacy and mathematics;
  - a comprehensive plan to assess student achievement through the use of State tests, externally-verifiable standardized tests and other diagnostic assessments;
  - an innovative design that includes explicit strategies to enhance learning through the use of technology and to increase global awareness;
  - programs to meet the needs of students at risk of academic failure;
  - the inclusion of significant opportunities for professional development of the school’s instructional staff prior the start of each school year and throughout the year;
  - a commitment to providing an educational program focused on outcomes, not inputs; and
  - a sound organizational structure that is likely to allow the school to improve student learning by allowing the principal to exclusively focus on the instructional program.
4. The proposed charter school would meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets, as prescribed by the SUNY Trustees, of students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the federal free and reduced price lunch program as required by Education Law subdivision 2852(9-a)(b)(i).

The data upon which to base the enrollment and retention targets mandated by the amendments to the Act was not available at the time the statute mandated the RFP be issued. As a result, the Institute developed internal evaluation criteria regarding the enrollment and retention of each class of student referenced in the amendments to the Act such that the Institute could make the determination that the applicant would meet or exceed the enrollment and retention targets when developed. During the first year of the charter term, SUNY will develop such targets, and shall ensure: “(1) that such enrollment targets are comparable to the enrollment figures of such categories of students attending the public schools within the school district, or in a city school district in a city having a population of one million or more inhabitants, the community school district, in which the proposed charter school would be located; and (2) that such retention targets are comparable to the rate of retention of such categories of students attending the public

schools within the school district, or in a city school district in a city having a population of one million or more inhabitants, the community school district, in which the proposed charter school would be located.” The Institute will conduct separate analyses for setting enrollment and retention targets, respectively. The former analysis will be based on the demographic and classification characteristics of cohorts of students first entering the school; the latter analysis will be based on the characteristics of cohorts of students leaving the school. The comparison will be to an individual school or schools within the district that are representative of the districts’ relevant sub-populations. During each year in the charter period, the same methodology will be applied to each charter school to determine if it has met its district-based target. Based on the foregoing, the Institute finds that the proposals have rigorously demonstrated that the proposed charter schools would meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets, to be prescribed by SUNY during the first year of each charter in accordance with the amendments to the Act.

5. The applicant has conducted public outreach for the school, in conformity with a thorough and meaningful public review process prescribed by the SUNY Trustees, to solicit community input regarding the proposed charter school and to address comments received from the impacted community concerning the educational and programmatic needs of students in conformity with Education Law subdivision 2852(9-a)(b)(ii).
6. The Institute has determined that the proposal rigorously demonstrates the criteria and best satisfies the objectives contained within the RFP, and, therefore, is a “qualified application” within the meaning of Education Law subdivision 2852(9-a)(d) that should be submitted to the Board of Regents for approval.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on its review and findings, the Institute recommends that the SUNY Trustees approve the proposal to establish the Tech International Charter School to open in the Bronx in September of 2012.

# Tech International Charter School

## Basic Identification Information

Lead Applicant(s):	Steve Bergen
Management Co.:	None
Other Partners:	None
Location (District):	New York City Community School District 10
Student Pop./Grades:	Opening with 88 students in 6 <sup>th</sup> grade; growing to 285 students 6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> grades
Opening Date:	September 2012

## School District of Proposed Location Profile

New York City School District 10			
Enrollment (2009-10):		55,419	
Percent (2009-10):			
African-American:		20	
Hispanic:		67	
Asian, White, Other:		13	
Percent Qualifying for Free or Reduced Priced Lunch (2009-010):		84	
English Language Arts (2009-10)		Mathematics (2009-10)	
Grade	Percent Proficient	Grade	Percent Proficient
3	38	3	48
4	37	4	48
5	37	5	50
6	29	6	45
7	28	7	43
8	27	8	35

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