



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

*Application to establish in Hempstead
The Academy Charter School*

August 29, 2008

Executive Summary

The application for The Academy Charter School (“The Academy”) to be located in Hempstead, New York was submitted by lead applicant Donna Douglas to the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) on June 2, 2008. The applicant and founding team propose to open The Academy in September 2009 with 168 Kindergarten through second grade students in the first year, growing to serve 336 students in Kindergarten through fifth grade during the term of its charter. The mission of the proposed charter school is to offer an exceptional curriculum that challenges students to explore connections across subjects and between theory and practice. The Academy would be managed by Victory Schools, Inc. (“VSI”), a for-profit management company that currently manages three schools authorized by the Board of Trustees. The Academy would be the one of the first charter schools in Hempstead; another application for a charter school in Hempstead is currently pending before the Board of Regents.

The Institute recommends that the Board of Trustees approve the charter application for The Academy 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/or 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 founding board, and the other members of the founding team. In addition, as part of its due diligence, Institute staff met with the leadership and key staff members of VSI, which would serve as the educational service provider for the school. The Institute has assessed the capacity of VSI to perform all functions required by its management contract and its capability to deliver services. 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.

The mission of the proposed charter schools is to offer “an exceptional interdisciplinary curriculum in a technology rich environment that challenges students to explore connections across subjects and use experiential learning to bridge the gaps between theory and practice.” The application states that the “focus on charter development and community service will cultivate a student body poised to be active, engaged and responsible members of the community.” Ultimately, it would be the mission of the school to ensure that students “graduate from the Academy with the content mastery and life skills needed to move into the top five percent of their middle and high school classes.”

The application states that the school will improve student academic achievement by focusing on the mastery of academic subjects, having an intensive focus on character development, and fostering a lifelong behavior of giving back to the community. To achieve its academic goals, the school’s curriculum would be aligned with state standards and include not only the core subject areas of English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies, but also health, physical education and family and consumer sciences, career development and occupational studies, and the arts (music and visual arts). In particular, the English language arts curriculum (balanced literacy) would be comprised of five primary elements: 120 minutes of instruction for all students, Scott Foresman reading, Great Source Writing and writer’s workshop, grade level trade books and classroom

libraries, and unit and end-of-year assessments. The school's mathematics curriculum would include 90 minutes of daily instruction with an extensive use of manipulatives. The science and social studies curriculum would be implemented using the McGraw Hill Science series. The Core Knowledge curriculum, along with Victory's supplemental binders, would provide the foundation for social studies. Each Kindergarten and 1st grade classroom would be staffed with a teacher and a teaching assistant.

In addition to academic achievement, the Academy Charter School's curriculum would also include character education, leadership development, and community awareness through service learning projects. Fifth grade students would have the opportunity to serve as Big Brothers/Big Sisters for incoming Kindergarten students, and the school would offer a debate program to further develop students' reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.

The school anticipates establishing a contract with VSI to provide day-to-day operational management services, which includes: start-up services, such as application development, student recruitment and enrollment, material selection and distribution, technology acquisition and distribution; and ongoing services, such as professional development, financial management, principal coaching, and instructional and curriculum support. The school's board of trustees would enter into a management contract with VSI that would outline the set of services to be provided. (As with all management contracts, the Institute will review the contract pursuant to the charter and on behalf of the Board of Trustees prior to final approval).

Since 1999, VSI has generally demonstrated the capacity to assist charter schools in New York State in successfully meeting their financial reporting and operational requirements, with few exceptions. Both SUNY authorized charter schools that are currently managed by VSI have been renewed: Sisulu-Walker Charter School of Harlem earned a short-term renewal of two years, followed by a subsequent full-term, five-year renewal; and Merrick Academy-Queens Public Charter School earned a full-term, five-year renewal. VSI has developed the expertise and support systems to provide effective management and operational services to its schools. The other Board of Trustees' school managed by VSI, New Covenant Charter School, has not yet been through renewal with VSI.

The school's founding board of trustees consists of individuals who embody a diverse set of skills and experiences, such as education, business, law, and community leadership. Based on Institute staff's conversations with the proposed trustees, they appear to clearly understand the board's roles and responsibilities, ensuring the appropriate and effective operation of the proposed charter school. The proposed board recognizes and appreciates the role of VSI and has taken care to establish a thorough and ongoing process to hold VSI accountable for school performance and to ensure that it maintains its capacity to serve the school.

The board bylaws indicate that board membership can range from nine to 13 members. The proposed initial members of the board of trustees are set forth below.

1. Donna Douglas (applicant) – Currently involved in contract work recruiting healthcare professionals and management and staff training. Formerly the Assistant Human Resources Director for Herbert Birch Services, Inc. Degree in Human Resources Management and Labor Relations as well as Health Services Administration.
2. Marcel Duane Deans – M.S. in Educational Administration, currently principal of Victory Collegiate High School in Brooklyn (not a charter school). Former Assistant Principal of MLK Jr. HS of Arts and Technology.

3. Barrington Goldson – Experienced executive with a background in business and social services sectors. Founder/Director/Pastor of Calvary Tabernacle, Inc. (a church). Founder and Chairman of Tri-State Music Association, Inc. Bachelors in Economics, Christian Education and Biblical Studies. Several recognitions for serving youth and civic service.
4. Wayne Houghton – Professional experience in accounting, operations and mathematical instruction with degrees in Financial Management and Accounting, Management, Secondary Assessment of Teaching Skills-Written, Accounting, and a Masters in School District Administration. Minister and Youth Counselor/Assistant Pastor for Calvary Tabernacle Church.
5. Tanya Hobson Williams – Current New York State Bar member, SDNY and EDNY. Degrees from Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law and St. John’s University with a BA in Government/Politics. Currently working as the Deputy Director for the New York City Department of Education.
6. Robert Stewart – Currently the Chief Operating Officer for Calvary Tabernacle Church. Formerly the Senior Design Associate for Sara Bernstein Design and Don Wise & Design Associates. Degrees from the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, and the Genesis School of Theology, Evangelism & Leadership.
7. Hazelin Williams – B.S. in communications and public affairs, most recent professional experience (2004) was Benefits Representative for the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association – College Retirement Equities Fund in New York City.
8. Ms. Ligia Estrada – Mortgage industry professional who currently serves on the Executive Board of the Hispanic Counseling Center in Hempstead. Active community resident, serving on the boards of the American Red Cross of Hempstead, the Central American Parade, the Women’s Domestic Violence Council, and the Hempstead Beautification Committee.
9. Currently in the process of confirming an additional board member with an education background.
10. PTO President (*ex officio*, non-voting).

The applicant and founding team have identified a currently unoccupied building previously used as a youth center located at 253A Fulton Street in Hempstead, New York as the initial location for The Academy. The school plans to lease this space from Calvary Tabernacle, Inc. for two years with the option of extending that lease for up to three years while a permanent facility is being constructed. The permanent facility would be built by Calvary Tabernacle and leased to the charter school. The applicant and founding team would also make arrangements to retain the option to terminate the lease at the end of any given academic year with 90 days’ notice. The Institute will include an additional term in the school’s charter to ensure that the school board receives information on fair market value lease rates prior to entering into any such lease and that the members of the board affiliated with the Calvary Tabernacle do not participate in the lease negotiations or approval.

The fiscal impact of the Academy Charter School on the district of residence, the Hempstead Union Free 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 Hempstead	Total Budget for Hempstead (in billions)	% of Total Budget
168 (2009-10 School Year- year 1)	\$17,877	\$3,003,336	\$155,135,368	1.9%
336 (2013-14 School Year – year 5)	\$20,120.36	\$6,760,320	\$174,606,223	3.8%

The calculations conservatively assume that there will be a modest (3%) increase in per pupil aid and in the overall budget of the Hempstead Union Free School District over the life of the proposed charters. 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. The applicant made an assessment that the fiscal impact of each proposed school on nonpublic schools in the same geographic area would be negligible.

The school has included 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 Institute has notified the Hempstead school district as well as public and private schools in the geographic area of the applications and as of August 25, 2008 had received only one comment from any of these entities. Roosevelt Children’s Academy Charter School, which is authorized by the Board of Trustees, opposes the application because it draws some students from the Hempstead Union Free School District and feels it would negatively impact its enrollment. (A copy of the letter is available in the Albany office of the Institute.) The Institute notes that this comment is not one that the Board of Trustees must officially consider pursuant to the Charter Schools Act, and that the Roosevelt school is very successful.

As a gauge of parent and community support, the founding team gathered petitions and received letters of support from local legislators. The group collected 120 signatures from parents of children of the appropriate age to attend the proposed charter school should it be authorized, as well as letters of support from Nassau County Legislators Roger H. Corbin of District Two and Kevan M. Abrahams of District One.

Findings

Based on the comprehensive review of the applications, 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 applications 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 the proposed by-laws for the operation of 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 Board of Trustees' approval of each 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 for the school 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;
 - the staffing of Kindergarten and first grade classes with a teacher and teacher's assistant to allow for more concentrated, focused and differentiated instruction;

- the inclusion of significant opportunities for professional development of 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 Board of Trustees approve the application for the Academy Charter School to open in Hempstead.

The Academy Charter School

Basic Identification Information

Lead Applicant:	Donna Douglas
Management Co.:	Victory Schools, Inc.
Other Partners:	None
Location (District):	Hempstead, New York
Student Pop./Grades:	Opening with grades 168 students in K-2 nd grades and growing to include 336 students in K-5 th grades
Opening Date:	September 2009

School District of Proposed Location Profile

Hempstead Union Free School District			
Enrollment (2006-07):		6,046	
Percent (2006-07):			
American Indian or Alaska Native		0	
Black or African American:		51	
Hispanic or Latino:		48	
Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander:		0	
White:		0	
Percent Participating in Federal Lunch Program (2006-07):		72	
Percent Proficient on State Exams (2007-08)			
English Language Arts		Mathematics	
Grade	Percent Proficient	Grade	Percent Proficient
3	69.2	3	88.2
4	72.1	4	84.3
5	70.4	5	79.6
6	41.5	6	47.6
7	47.0	7	55.5
8	32.0	8	37.3

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.