



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

*Application to Establish the
True North Genesee Preparatory Charter School*

May 3, 2010

Executive Summary

The application to establish the True North Genesee Preparatory Charter School (“Genesee Prep”), to be located in the Rochester City School District, was submitted by Lead Applicant Doug Lemov to the Charter Schools Institute on January 11, 2010. The lead applicant and founding team propose to open the school in August 2011 with 78 5th grade students in its first year, adding subsequent middle school grades each year and in the school’s second year also beginning its elementary program by adding 78 kindergarten students. The school would grow to serve 594 students in Kindergarten through 3rd grade and 5th through 8th grade during the initial charter period.

The mission of the proposed charter school would be to prepare all students to enter and succeed in college through effort, achievement and the content of their character. The school plans to achieve its mission by relentlessly focusing on the mastery of standards in each subject so that each student will achieve proficiency on the New York State assessments. The school ultimately plans to serve students in Kindergarten through 8th grade.

The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approve the charter application for the True North Genesee Preparatory Charter School.

Background and Description

An application to establish the True North Genesee Preparatory Charter School in Rochester, New York was submitted to the Institute on January 11, 2010. The Institute conducted a rigorous review, including an extensive staff review as well as review by a panel of nationally renowned experts in the charter school arena. Pursuant to its review protocols, the Institute has met with the lead applicant and founding board members and has required the applicant to revise, clarify and otherwise amend the application in numerous respects. In addition, the Chair of the SUNY Trustees’ Charter Schools Committee had an opportunity to interview the lead applicant and founding board members.

The proposed school would open with 78 students in 5th grade, adding subsequent middle school grades each year and in the school’s second year also beginning its elementary program by adding 78 kindergarten students. The school would grow to include 594 students in Kindergarten through 3rd grade and 5th through 8th grade during the initial charter period. The founding team envisions a school that ultimately prepares students to succeed in college, although they are very cognizant of the fact that the students must first succeed in middle and high school.

To achieve its mission, the design of the Genesee Prep educational program is based on other successful urban charter schools, such as the Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter Public School, Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, Boston Collegiate Charter School (formerly known as the South Boston Harbor Academy Charter School) and North Star Academy Charter School of Newark, New Jersey, some of the highest performing urban public charter schools in the country. In addition, the School will be modeled after the more recently opened True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School in Rochester which the applicant founded and is authorized by the SUNY Trustees. In the 2008-09 school year, when True North Rochester Prep enrolled 5th through 7th grade students, the school significantly outperformed students enrolled in the same tested grades of the Rochester City School District in both English language arts and mathematics. In English language arts, 95 percent of True North Rochester Prep’s students achieved proficiency on state assessments as opposed to 62 percent of district students enrolled in the same tested grades. In mathematics, 99 percent of True North Rochester Prep’s students achieved proficiency while only 62 percent of district students met

that bar. The SUNY Trustees also authorize another replica of this model, the True North Troy Preparatory Charter School; that school is currently in its first year of operation.

The school's quest for excellence will be buttressed by nine "*Design Principles*." Those principles include: 1) maximizing student academic achievement as the first job of the school; 2) teachers must be trained, developed and supported through consistent, deliberate and frequent training within the school; 3) resources, especially time, will be dedicated to developing excellence in reading, writing and mathematics; 4) the school will instill both core knowledge and skills, and higher-order learning; 5) to increase student achievement, the School will implement a structured and rigorous system of behavioral standards and develop a School culture that inspires students to seek excellence; 6) great educators embrace their responsibility for and authority over the classroom; 7) teachers and administrators develop close and meaningful relationships with students via candor, firmness, caring and respect; 8) great educators assiduously maintain the highest expectations; and 9) a successful school environment must communicate, teach, and promote values that build integrity, leadership, character and the habits which drive success.

Genesee Prep would target students at risk of academic failure. Key design elements would include: a longer school day (7:45 a.m. - 4:40 p.m., except Fridays when students would be dismissed early to allow time for staff professional development); a longer school year (195 days plus 10 additional days for students who require enrichment or remediation); extra attention in English language arts, with elementary students receiving over 15 hours of instruction and middle academy students receiving 14 hours of instruction per week; extra attention in mathematics, with elementary students receiving 80 minutes and middle students receiving 135 minutes of instruction per day (except Fridays when they will receive 75 minutes); and character education infused into all elements of the school's program. Science/technology and history would be taught in alternate semesters. Genesee Prep would use the same diagnostic assessments, constantly refined, aligned to State standards, and coinciding with its own scope and sequence as other True North schools. In addition to the required New York State Testing program assessments, the school would also administer the TerraNova assessment, University of Chicago Urban Education Institute's STEP assessment to measure literacy in Kindergarten through 3rd grade, and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills in the middle grades.

At full capacity, Genesee Prep's daily operations would be managed by the principal, who would lead an administrative team consisting of: an operations manager who would manage facility and administrative operations; a dean of students who would help promote and manage school culture, student discipline, and family outreach; and a special education coordinator who would oversee all special education issues. The principal would also be an instructional leader and oversee all teachers.

Genesee Prep intends to contract with Uncommon Schools, Inc. (USI), a non-profit charter management organization originally established in 1996 to provide support for North Star Academy Charter School in Newark, New Jersey. USI starts and manages urban college preparatory charter schools. By the fall of 2010, USI will manage 23 schools in New York City, upstate New York, and Newark, New Jersey, 13 of which have been authorized by the SUNY Trustees (the earliest in 2003). USI would provide Genesee Prep, "with essential services that will allow the school leader to focus on instructional leadership. USI would manage program design and development; teacher recruitment; training for teachers, school leaders, and other staff; facility acquisition and financing; financial management; fund development; technology; legal counsel [for day-to-day school issues but not for the School board]; and marketing and advocacy." USI receives some philanthropic support from a variety of national and local funders. Most of that funding is multi-year and general operating support. USI anticipates that it will be fully sustainable through public dollars in 2013-14,

though it will continue to seek philanthropic support for individual schools. USI appears at the present time and for the foreseeable future to be fiscally sound. The Genesee Prep board of trustees would enter into a management contract with USI that would outline the specific set of services to be provided and the per pupil fees to be paid to USI. The proposed agreement, included in the application, stipulates an initial fee equal to ten percent of per pupil funding during the school's first three years of operation, decreasing to 9.5 percent in the fourth year and 9 percent in the fifth year. (As with all management agreements, the Institute reviews the contract on behalf of the SUNY Trustees and pursuant to the charter agreement).

As with other divisions of USI, the managing director of True North Public Schools will serve the Genesee Prep in a superintendency capacity, managing the school – but ultimately responsible to the school's board for his performance. In keeping with that structure, the school's principal will serve as the school leader and report to the school's board of trustees. At the same time, however, the school's principal will report to and be monitored by the managing director of True North Public Schools, who is Doug Lemov, (the lead applicant). This dual reporting structure will ensure that the school's board of trustees is fully attuned to the school's performance (and does not receive only information regarding True North Public Schools' performance from the True North Public Schools superintendent). However, at the same it will also allow True North Public Schools to implement the model that the school's board of trustees has retained it to implement. Day-to-day, the school's principal, together with the oversight, mentoring and input of True North Public Schools, will implement the mission and the policies set by the school's board of trustees, hire and supervise all school-based staff, and observe, evaluate, and provide professional development to teachers as the instructional leader of the school.

Genesee Prep's principal will be selected from among the existing leadership team at True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School. This model of internal promotion to leadership ensures continuity and effective practices and reduces the risk of a poor leadership hire. Once selected, the principal will participate in Uncommon Schools' year-long fellowship for instructional leaders that includes professional development and advanced hands-on experience at a successful school (almost assuredly Rochester Prep) to ensure an excellent start to each school. The school's board of trustees can refuse to hire this individual with a super-majority vote of the trustees who are not affiliated with True North Public Schools. In the same way, the board can vote to fire the principal over the objections of True North Public Schools. A simple majority of non-affiliated board members can vote to not renew the contract with Uncommon Schools, Inc. upon its termination or sooner terminate the contract for cause. If the contract is terminated other than for cause prior to the end of the contract period, the school would pay financial penalties on a sliding scale representing USI's investment in the start-up of the school. Again, this strikes a balance between maintaining the school board's ultimate authority while also allowing True North Public Schools to implement the program it was retained to implement.

The proposed board of trustees of the School, whose backgrounds and expertise reflect a variety of talents and skills, would be the same individuals that comprise the board of the True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School. However, each board would have a different chairperson. Based on Institute staff's discussion with the proposed board members, they appear to: clearly understand the roles and responsibilities of a charter school board of trustees; have the ability to ensure the appropriate and effective operation of the proposed charter school, including providing effective oversight over the performance not only of the school's administrators but of True North Public Schools (such as negotiating the initial contact and determining True North's compliance and performance thereto); and have the capacity to effectively govern and fulfill their fiduciary duties

relative to two charter schools. Two school board members are affiliated with USI (the maximum allowable under the SUNY charter agreement), and the School board has developed policies to ensure that these members will recuse themselves from voting on issues involving the performance of True North Public Schools or Uncommon Schools, Inc. The proposed initial members of Genesee Prep's board of trustees are set forth below:

1. **Doug Lemov** (Lead Applicant) – Managing Director, True North Public Schools, Uncommon Schools, Inc.; former President of School Performance Inc.; former Vice President of Accountability for SUNY Charter Schools Institute; board member of the New York Charter Schools Association and KIPP Tech Valley Charter School; M.B.A., Harvard University.
2. **Susan Adsit** – President and CEO, Junior Achievement of Rochester; former Vice President for the Chase Manhattan Bank (now JPMorgan Chase); Board Vice Chairperson of Alfred State College Development Fund Board.
3. **James S. Gleason** – Chairman of the Board of Directors and former President and C.E.O. of the Gleason Corporation; numerous board positions (including True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School); M.B.A., Simon School of the University of Rochester.
4. **G. Jean Howard** – Chief of Staff for the City of Rochester; former Founding Executive Director of Wilson Commencement Park; numerous board positions (including True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School); M.S. in Education, Indiana University.
5. **Bob Howitt** – Executive Director, WKBJ Foundation; trustee of USI and numerous Uncommon Schools Inc. charter schools.
6. **Joseph Klein** – President and C.E.O. of Klein Steel Service Inc.; active in numerous education related programs, including the board of True North Troy and Rochester Preparatory Charter Schools.
7. **Geoffrey Rosenberger** – Managing Member of Lily Pon Ventures, LLC; numerous board positions (including True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School); M.B.A., University of Kentucky and is a CFA.
8. **Hugh Scott** – Principal Consultant for Xerox Corporation.
9. **Rebecca Sumner** – Executive Director, Cancer Wellness Spa of Greater Rochester; former administrator and instructor at Nazareth College and the University of Rochester; board member of True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School; Ph.D. in English, University of Rochester.

At the time of application submission, Genesee Prep had not identified a facility. The founders of the school, along with USI, acquired extensive knowledge of Rochester's school facility options in opening True North Rochester Prep's elementary and middle school sites and are weighing options including the possibility of using space in or near Rochester Prep. In addition, the founding team has identified possible locations including two former Catholic school buildings, the former site of Rochester Leadership Academy Charter School (closed by the SUNY Trustees in 2005), a former

Rochester City School District building, and other facilities that could be renovated to accommodate the proposed charter school.

The estimated fiscal impact of the True North Genesee Preparatory Charter School on its district of location, the Rochester City School District, is summarized below.

Number of Students	Per Pupil Aid Rate Assumed	Per Pupil Aid Revenue Only	Total Dollars to Charter School from Rochester CSD (including SPED)	Total Budget for Rochester CSD (in millions)	(%) of Total Rochester CSD Budget
78 (2011-12 school year – year 1)	\$11,183	\$869,590	\$978,699	\$741.997	0.132%
594 (2015-16 school year – year 5)	\$12,587	\$7,476,420	\$8,407,106	\$835.124	1.007%

The school’s calculations assume that there will be an annual increase in per pupil aid of 3% over the span of the charter period. The Institute obtained the Rochester City School District budget figures from the latest 2009-10 budget book and district profile published on the Rochester City School District website. There was no clear information at either location regarding budget projections for years 2010-11 thru 2015-16 so a 3% increase in spending was assumed for those years. It should be noted that school district estimates are 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 the per pupil aid. However, Genesee Prep 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 made an assessment, and the Institute concurs, that the fiscal impact of the proposed school on both the Rochester City School District and nonpublic schools in the same geographic area would be minimal.

The number of students on the wait list for the True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School (that is in the same geographic area as the proposed True North Genesee Preparatory Charter School) reflects a satisfactory level of community interest and support for the proposed charter school. At the time of submitting the application to establish the True North Genesee Preparatory Charter School, True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School’s wait list included 166 students in kindergarten through eighth grades.

The application for the School also highlighted recent editorials in the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* newspaper as evidence of the level and extent of community support for the proposed charter school. One editorial “advocated that the district try to replicate the success of True North Rochester Preparatory [Charter] School.” [November 22, 2009]. In another editorial, the writer stated that the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, might want to take a look at the True North Rochester Charter School as follows: “True North is blowing up the idea that pushing poor city kids too hard with discipline and high daily expectations will produce pushback and more dropouts.... The results? Impressively high test scores. Astonishing, in fact...City school Superintendent Jean-

Claude Brizard, like Duncan, is looking for fresh ideas that he can replicate. True North offers some true guidance in that regard.” [May 14, 2009].

The Rochester City School District and public and nonpublic schools in the same geographic area of the proposed school were notified of the Institute’s receipt of this application and its right to comment on it. (Copies of the notification letters are on file in the Albany office of the Institute). None of the notified schools or the school district chose to comment on the application for the School.

Findings

Based on the 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.

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, health services, Freedom of Information Law (FOIL), and the Open Meetings Law;
 - 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 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 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;
 - the articulation of strategies to amend and differentiate instruction where assessment data indicates such need;
 - the staffing of classes with high-quality teachers;
 - the selected principal participating in Uncommon Schools, Inc.'s year-long fellowship for instructional leaders that includes professional development and advanced hands-on experience at a successful school to ensure an excellence start to each school;
 - the inclusion of significant opportunities for professional development of the school's instructional staff throughout the year;
 - an academic program that focuses on the core subjects of English language arts, mathematics, history/social studies and science;
 - the inclusion of regularly scheduled time for teachers to provide one-on-one and/or small group instruction to students;
 - a commitment to providing an educational program focused on outcomes, not inputs;
 - the conscious modeling of the school on some of the most successful middle schools in inner-cities across the United States; and
 - the oversight and support of a cadre of respected school professionals, who have successfully led and demonstrated achievement in inner-city charter schools.

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 True North Genesee Preparatory Charter School to open in Rochester, New York in August of 2011.

True North Genesee Preparatory Charter School

Rochester, New York

Basic Identification Information

Lead Applicant:	Doug Lemov
Management Co.:	Uncommon Schools, Inc.
Other Partners:	None
Location (District):	Rochester City School District
Student Pop./Grades:	Opening with 78 students in 5 th grade, adding 78 kindergarten students in its second year, and growing to include 594 students in K-3 rd and 5 th -8 th grades at the end of the first charter term.
Opening Date:	August 2011

School District of Proposed Location Profile

Rochester City School District			
Enrollment (2008-09):		32,132	
Percent (2008-09):			
White:		11	
African-American:		65	
Hispanic:		22	
Asian, Other:		2	
Percent Participating in Federal Lunch Program (2008-09):			
Free Lunch:		75	
Reduced Price Lunch:		7	
Percent Proficient on State Exams (2008-09)			
English Language Arts		Mathematics	
Grade	Percent Proficient	Grade	Percent Proficient
3	49	3	79
4	57	4	65
5	64	5	68
6	70	6	65
7	53	7	58
8	43	8	43

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.