



Charter Schools Institute  
*The State University of New York*

# Summary of Findings and Recommendations

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Application to establish the  
True North Troy Preparatory Charter School

October 17, 2007

## **Executive Summary**

The True North Troy Preparatory Charter School proposes to open in September 2008 with 78 fifth grade students in its first year, growing to serve 299 students in fifth through eighth grades during the term of its charter. 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 each student will achieve proficiency on the New York State assessments.

The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the Board of Trustees approve the charter application for the True North Troy Preparatory Charter School.

## **Background and Description**

An application to establish the True North Troy Preparatory Charter School (the “School”) in Troy was submitted to the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) on June 29, 2007. 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, Committee on Charter Schools’ Co-Chairs, Trustees Cox and Daniels, had the opportunity to question the applicant and members of the founding board of trustees. As the result of the meeting with the Co-Chairs, the applicant expanded the founding board of trustees to include members with significant financial expertise and who resided in the Capital Region.

The proposed school would open with 78 students in fifth grade and grow to include 299 students in fifth through eighth grades. The founding team envisions a middle school that ultimately prepares students to succeed in college, although they are very cognizant that the students must first succeed in high school.

To achieve its mission, the design of the educational program of the School 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, New York, which the applicant founded. In its first year, the 2006-07 school year, the school’s only grade, fifth, significantly outperformed students enrolled in the same grade of the Rochester City School District in both English language arts and mathematics. In English language arts, 61% of True North Rochester Prep’s students achieved proficiency or higher on state assessment as opposed to 45.2% of district fifth graders. In mathematics, 87% of True North Rochester Prep’s fifth graders achieved proficient or higher, while only 47.5% of district fifth graders met that bar.

The School's quest for excellence will be buttressed by nine "*Design Principles*." Those principles include: 1) Maximizing student academic achievement is 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.

The School will develop its curriculum based on the New York State standards and include the core subject areas of English language arts, mathematics, history/social studies and science. As part of the School's methodology for achieving excellence, the School would have a longer school day and year with daily double periods of English, and double periods of math four days per week. All core teachers would teach three, rather than four, sections per day in order for the fourth class period to be used for daily tutoring. Teachers will meet for three weeks during the summer prior to start of the school for planning and training. Students will also be dismissed early on Fridays to allow time for teachers to participate in professional development activities.

The School intends to partner with Uncommon Schools, Inc., a nonprofit charter management organization (CMO). By the fall of 2007, Uncommon Schools, Inc. will manage nine schools in New York City, upstate New York, and Newark, New Jersey. Uncommon Schools, Inc.'s goal is to build, develop, crusade for, and ensure the greatness of the highest-performing college preparatory charter schools that raise the achievement level of low-income students in the Northeast. Uncommon Schools, Inc. will provide services in the areas of school start-up, recruitment and human resources, monitoring, budget/back-office services, technology, fundraising, facility, marketing and advocacy. In return, Uncommon Schools, Inc. will receive a fee from the School based on a percentage of revenues. The draft contract between the parties specifies that the fee will be equal to 10% of core aid (per pupil revenue from school districts) and 10% of federal entitlement aid in the first three years of the charter, declining to 9.5% and 9% in the final two years of the charter respectively. (As with all management contracts, the Institute will review the contract pursuant to the charter and on behalf of the Board of Trustees).

Uncommon Schools, Inc. was originally established in 1996 to provide support for North Star Academy Charter School. As of the fall of 2007, Uncommon Schools, Inc. provides services to nine schools: North Star Academy (one elementary school, two middle schools and one high school) in New Jersey, Excellence Charter School of Bedford Stuyvesant (chartered by the Board of Trustees in 2003), Williamsburg Collegiate Charter School (chartered by the New York City Schools Chancellor in 2005), Kings Collegiate Charter School (chartered by the Board of Trustees in 2005), True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School (chartered by the Board of Trustees in 2006), and Leadership Preparatory Charter School (chartered by the Board of Trustees in 2005). At present, Uncommon Schools, Inc. is partially supported by philanthropy.

Over time, its long-term business plan anticipates that it will be fully funded through the fee for service contracts with charter schools – though it will continue to seek philanthropic support for individual schools. Uncommon Schools, Inc. appears at the present time and for the foreseeable future to be fiscally sound.

As with other divisions of Uncommon Schools, Inc. the managing director of True North Public Schools will serve the School in a superintendency capacity, managing the school – but ultimately responsible to the School’s board for his or her 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, (who is the 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 on True North Public Schools’ performance from True North Public Schools). 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.

True North Public Schools has proposed to the School’s board of trustees an individual to serve as principal. Although 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, the proposed board has agreed upon a principal. (That person participated in the KIPP Pathways to Leadership Training residency program during the summer of 2007, and is currently serving as a leadership resident at the True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School for the 2007-08 school year.) 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 True North/Uncommon Schools, Inc. upon its termination or terminate the contract for cause. 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 applicant has found individuals to serve on the proposed board of trustees whose backgrounds and expertise reflect a variety of talents and skills. Based on 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, including providing effective oversight over the performance not only of the School’s administrators but of True North Public Schools as well (such as negotiating the initial contact and determining True North’s compliance and performance thereto). Two board members are affiliated with Uncommon Schools, Inc., and the 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 the School’s board of trustees are set forth below.

1. Doug Lemov (Lead Applicant): Currently Managing Director, True North Public Schools/Uncommon Schools and formerly President of School Performance New York; Vice President for Accountability, Charter Schools Institute; Principal, Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter School.
2. Susan Miller Barker: Vice President for Research & Evaluation, National Association of Charter School Authorizers; formerly Chief Program Officer, New York Charter Schools Association in Albany, NY; Senior Vice President, Charter Schools Institute in Albany, NY; Massachusetts Associate Commissioner of Education for Charter Schools, Boston, MA.
3. Jaynesha Brown: Currently Director of School Effectiveness, School Performance New York; formerly vice-principal at Milwaukee College Preparatory Charter School; elementary and middle school science teacher.
4. Robert Howitt: Founder and current Executive Director, WKBJ Foundation whose mission is educational assistance to financially disadvantaged young people.; previously with First Manhattan Co., a research-oriented money manager; currently serves on the boards of Uncommon Schools, Inc., Charles Hayden Foundation, and North Star Academy, True North Rochester Preparatory, Kings Collegiate and Williamsburg Collegiate Charter Schools.
5. Joseph Klein: CEO, Klein Steel Service Inc.; currently serves on the boards of Center for Governmental Research, the Jewish Family Service of Rochester and is the Treasurer of True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School. Joe was selected as the Rochester Business Person of the Year for 2006. Joe is the Vice-Chairman of Mayor Duffy's Literacy Campaign for Rochester.
6. Kenneth Baer: Founder, Baer Real Estate specializing in commercial, investment and industrial real estate; Founder, Aztec Antenna Corporation; appointed to New York State Real Estate Board; Chairman of the Board of Directors of the City of Troy Municipal Assistance Corporation.
7. Eric Shaw: Pastor of Troy's Bethel Baptist Church for the last three years.
8. Thomas Triscari: Academic Director of Executive Programs and Clinical Associate Professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; President, Information Technology Management, Inc.; career officer in United States Air Force, retired from active duty at rank of Lieutenant Colonel.
9. E.J. McMahon - Director of the Empire Center for Public Policy in Albany, Manhattan Institute's senior fellow for tax and budgetary studies, previously served as Deputy Commissioner for Tax Policy Analysis and Counselor to the Commissioner in the state Department of Taxation and Finance; Director of Minority Staff for the state Assembly Ways and Means Committee; vice chancellor for external relations at the State University of New York; and Director of Research for The Business Council's research arm, the Public Policy Institute.

10. Brian Stenson - a Director with RBC Capital Markets, an investment banking firm, previously the Deputy Director of the Rockefeller Institute of Government, advisor on fiscal and budget issues to Gov. Spitzer's administration during the transition period, Vice Chancellor for Finance and Business for the State University of New York, New York State Division of the Budget, Deputy for Fiscal Planning, Management and Authorities.

The founding group has identified several potential sites for the proposed school within the city of Troy. The possible sites include both former public and parochial school buildings. Both buildings include 31,000 – 33,000 square feet, require modest renovations and include parking lots and small adjacent additional property. A lot has also been identified where a new building could be constructed if other viable and cost-effective options fall through, as well as temporary space in the event of construction delays should a new building be required.

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

<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Per Pupil Aid</b>	<b>Total Dollars to the Charter School from the Enlarged City School District of Troy</b>	<b>Percent of General Fund Budget (\$88.3 M)</b>
78 (Year 1 2008-2009)	\$11,841	\$923,598	1.05%
299 (Year 5 2012-2013)	\$11,841	3,540,459	4.01%

The above illustration shows the maximum impact as it assumes that all enrolled students will come from the Enlarged City School District of Troy (the "District"). The calculations conservatively assume that there will be no increase in the per pupil aid or the overall budget of the District over the life of the proposed charter. The calculations do not account for federal Title grants, which flow directly from the State Education Department to the School or for special education funds which may flow through the District to the School.

The School expects to get approximately 65% of its students from the Enlarged City School District of Troy, 25% from Lansingburgh Central School District, 5% from Watervliet City School District and 5% from Brunswick Central School District.

Assuming enrollment matches these estimates, the table below shows the resulting estimated the fiscal impact on each district. Also included below is the cumulative fiscal impact of charter school payments on each district as of 2005-2006 (the latest year for which information is available from the State Education Department).

Estimated Payments	Year 1 2008-09	Year 5 2012-13
From Enlarged City School District of Troy	\$ 603,891	\$ 2,297,154
From Lansingburgh Central School District	167,880	629,550
From Watervliet City School District	35,400	132,750
From Brunswick Central School District	35,272	132,270
<b>General Fund Budgets</b>		
Enlarged City School District of Troy	88,300,000	88,300,000
Lansingburgh Central School District	33,900,000	33,900,000
Watervliet City School District	20,000,000	20,000,000
Brunswick Central School District	20,800,000	20,800,000
<b>Percentage of district budget</b>		
Troy City School District	0.68%	2.60%
Lansingburgh Central School District	0.50%	1.86%
Watervliet City School District	0.18%	0.66%
Brunswick Central School District	0.17%	0.64%

The applicant represented that the proposed school would not have a significant fiscal impact on nonpublic schools in the same geographic area.

As a gauge of community support, the applicant included an analysis of the demand for charter schools in the area based upon the waiting list and enrollment of charter schools in the region. The only other charter school in Troy is the Ark Community Charter School that had a waiting list of 67 students for the 2007-08 school year, of which nine were 5<sup>th</sup> graders. In addition, a significant number of students that reside in Troy attend charter schools in Albany (even with the extended bus ride between the two cities). In particular, more than 100 students from Troy attend charter schools in Albany. Finally, the applicant highlighted that there is currently only one public middle school in Troy, the W. Kenneth Doyle Middle School, and it far underperformed the state averages on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade state assessments in both English language arts and mathematics. Based on these factors, the applicant believes a strong demand exists for a middle school option in Troy.

The application for the True North Troy Charter School also included several letters of support from community members, including two local pastors, the board chairman of the Ark Community Charter School, a professor at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, an attorney and a local technology specialist. Several of the individuals providing letters of support are also parents of students attending schools in the city of Troy.

The Enlarged City School District of Troy and public and nonpublic schools in the 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 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 1) is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Charter Schools Act (as amended), and 2) would have a significant educational benefit to the students expected to attend the proposed charter school. 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;
  - a half-year principal-in-training residency for the selected school leader at a high-performing, urban charter school prior to the opening of the 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 Board of Trustees approve the application for the True North Troy Preparatory Charter School to open in Troy in September of 2008.

# True North Troy Preparatory Charter School

Troy, New York

## Basic Identification Information

Lead Applicant(s): Doug Lemov  
 Management Co: Uncommon Schools, Inc.  
 Other Partners: None  
 Location (District): Troy/Troy City School District  
 Student Pop./Grades: 78 5<sup>th</sup> grade students; expanding to 299 students grades 5-8  
 Opening Date: September 2008

## School District of Proposed Location Profile

Public School Enrollment (2005-2006):	4171	
Percentages (2005-2006)	White: 58% Black: 30% Hispanic: 10% Asian, Other: 2%	
Percentage of Public School Student Participating in Federal Lunch Program (2005-06):	59%	
Test Scores (ELA/2007 and Math/2007) -- Percentages of Public School Students Failing to Meet the Regents Performance Standards:	<u>ELA</u>	<u>Mathematics</u>
	3 <sup>rd</sup> – 45.1	27.0
	4 <sup>th</sup> – 51.5	39.2
	5 <sup>th</sup> – 44.1	45.5
	6 <sup>th</sup> – 52.4	47.9
	7 <sup>th</sup> – 58.8	71.1
	8 <sup>th</sup> – 63.1	65.7
	Avg. – 52.9	50.3

Source: demographic data is from the New York State Accountability and Overview Report 2005-06; test data are from the 2006-07 results released on the State Education Department website.