

# PHASE I: Letter of Intent

Created Wednesday, January 28, 2015

Updated Friday, January 30, 2015

## Page 1

Applicant groups and Existing Education Corporations interested in submitting an application to establish Regents-authorized charter schools are asked to complete this brief information sheet. The Department will use this information to plan and coordinate peer review panels with appropriate expertise to evaluate all application materials.

Please indicate whether an Applicant Group or an Existing Education Corporation is submitting this Round 1 Letter of Intent.

Applicant Group LOI to establish a single, brand new charter school

## Proposed Charter School Name

(Please write out the formal and full name for the school you proposed, and include the words "charter" and "school" in the proposed name(s)).

School Name	New York City Charter School of the Arts
Grades Served (K-5, .6-8, 9-12, etc.) During Initial Term	6-8
Number of Students During Initial Term	276

Proposed or Current Board Chair and Public Contact information, including mailing address, phone number, and email address.

(The entire chart may not be visible on your screen. Use the "tab" key to move from column to column. The first column will remain static as you do so).

	First and Last Name	Best Phone Number (###-###-####)	Email Address
Proposed/Current Board Chair	Danal Abrams		
Public/Media Contact Person	Jamie Davidson	917-833-6469	jamiesdavidson@gmail.com

If available, please provide the URL to the website established for the proposed school or existing education corporation.

<http://www.cityschoolofthearts.org/#intro>

Proposed Management and/or Partner Organization(s), such as a charter or educational management company or a university, academic program partner, or whole school change partner.

(See pages 45-46 of the application kit for definitions and guidance as only "substantial" partnerships should be listed here).

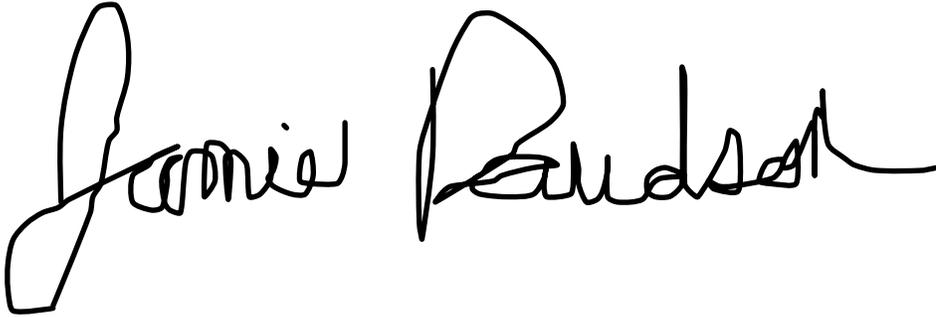
Proposed Management Company
Partner Organization 1

Lead Applicant(s) Signature and Date

Use your PC mouse or your mobile device stylus to sign your name below.

Lead or Co-Applicant listed in section c above.

(Internet Explorer may not support this feature. Open the portal using Google Chrome, Firefox, or Safari).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jamie Raudson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "R".

Date Signed (Lead or Co-Applicant)

2015/01/30

Thank you for completing this survey so that the Department may plan its review panel accordingly.

**1 Applicant Group Information**

**A. Public Contact:**

Jamie Davidson, (917) 833-6469,  
[jamiesdavidson@gmail.com](mailto:jamiesdavidson@gmail.com)

**B. Application History:**

This founding team and prospective board of trustees submitted a letter of intent in 2014 round II.

**2 Proposed Charter School Information**

**A. Proposed School Name:** New York City Charter School of the Arts

**B. Proposed School Location:** New York City Charter School of the Arts (City School of the Arts) proposes to open in Community School District 1 (CSD 1) on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. In response to the unique space requirements of our program, and with full awareness of the complexity of the facilities access process, City School of the Arts founders and board of trustees have identified a number of potential private facilities suitable for our program, including classrooms in Catholic churches and several of New York City Housing Authority’s larger community centers, as well as public and private university buildings. We are awaiting confirmation of site availability and lease terms; therefore we will also submit a request to the NYC Department of Education of Portfolio Management for co-location space as a contingency plan.

**C. Planned Grades and Enrollment:** City School of the Arts will ultimately enroll students in 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades. In our initial year we will enroll 92 students, which allows for reasonably small classes and projects for manageable growth each year. We will backfill as necessary to stay on target.

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Grade 6	92	92	92	92	92
Grade 7		92	92	92	92
Grade 8			92	92	92
TOTAL	92	184	276	276	276

**D. Proposed Management and/or Partner Organization:** Not Applicable

**E. Proposed School Mission:** The mission of New York City Charter School of the Arts is to inspire a joyful, diverse community of students to engage with the arts as a pathway to rigorous academic scholarship, compassionate leadership and lifelong creative learning.

**F. School Overview:** Our school design grows from the five key design features described below:

**Incorporating the Arts to Reinforce Academic Achievement**

**All instructional staff at City School of the Arts will leverage meaningful engagement with the arts to support strong academic outcomes.** A growing body of research demonstrates that studying music, theater, dance and visual art results in measurably better academic performance. Researchers from Boston Children’s Hospital published findings last June that correlate music education with higher test scores, bolstering the findings of previous studies linking musical training to enhanced cognitive skills. While we value artistic study for its own merits, we are also thoroughly intentional in our approach to arts integration as a basis for creating a collaborative community of rigorous scholarship.

City School of the Arts' academic program will be supplemented and infused by our unique and comprehensive artistic program. Our humanities curriculum will combine the NY State ELA and Social Studies standards in 90-minute blocks, using disciplinary literacy practice to analyze fiction and non-fiction texts in historical and comparative contexts. Our 90-minute math blocks will feature Connected Math, a leading problem-based Common Core-aligned curriculum. Inquiry-based science classes will be supplemented twice weekly by 90-minute lab periods. Sixth grade students will have 6 hours of core arts classes a week: 3 hours of piano and 3 hours of theater. Seventh grade students will have 3 hours of dance and 3 hours of visual art. Eighth grade students will declare an artistic major, devoting all 6 hours to advanced study in their chosen discipline. Additional artistic options will be available at club time, (2 hours per week), as well as during extended day, (4 days per week). Seventh graders who wish to continue in piano and theater will have that option during these additional times to avoid any interruption in their artistic growth. A Broadway musical—performed and eventually designed and directed by students—will be produced annually, with rehearsals after school and Saturdays.

## Hiring and Developing a High-Capacity Team

**Cultivating a team of innovative and collaborative educators, both academic and artistic, will be fundamental to serving our mission.** Our weekly Professional Development sessions—many of them taught in partnership with leading arts and educational organizations including The Juilliard School, MOMA, The Harvard Graduate School of Education and The Yellin Center—will prepare our artistic and academic teachers to equip students with a cross-disciplinary framework of creative and academic skills. Weekly grade level meetings will stimulate interdisciplinary collaboration around grade-level themes and the needs of specific students, and weekly content meetings will establish vertical alignment by department. Teachers will also collaborate across disciplines by sharing lesson plans to an online site such as “Box” and observing at least one colleague’s class per week to provide feedback and assess the potential for interdisciplinary connections. Data analysis sessions, facilitated by the Achievement Network, will follow each A-Net interim assessment and support teachers in the agile and responsive use of data. Finally, our one-month summer academy will foster innovative co-planning and provide teachers with access to resources, materials and outsourced workshops.

## Maximizing Diversity and Social Impact

**We see diverse school communities as potent catalysts for academic success and socio-emotional growth.** Studies show that racially and socioeconomically integrated schools benefit all students and strengthen urban neighborhoods. We believe that charter schools possess the potential to address the challenge of integrating our public school system. A year of outreach has affirmed that our program appeals to a broad cross-section of the Lower East Side, with parents from many disparate backgrounds expressing interest in enrolling their children. We are confident that we will successfully recruit and retain a community of learners and staff members that reflect the cultural, linguistic and socio-economic diversity of our district. Our partnership with Dialogue Arts Project—an organization that trains students and leaders to use arts and language to communicate more effectively across differences of race, class, and identity—will equip students with strong socio-cultural skills to maximize personal and academic growth.

## Promoting the Practice of Mindfulness

**Mindfulness practice helps students take responsibility for their own learning.** Using proven curriculum such as Mind Up and with the support of neuroscientist and learning specialist Dr. Paul Yellin, our students will develop the self-awareness required to understand and leverage their unique academic and socio-emotional learning strengths and challenges. Mind Up helps children improve focus, concentration, and academic performance, coupled with techniques to assist in managing stress, developing empathy, and navigating difference with resilience and creativity.

## Connecting Year-Round at Camp

**All City School of the Arts students will spend an average of four weeks per year at our partner wilderness facility, Camp Vacamas.** Collaborating on physical, intellectual and artistic work in a natural setting several times a year gives our staff and students the concrete means to

strengthen our school's culture, as well as our community and our planet. Bringing our camp experiences back to Manhattan, we will work in partnership with The Lower East Side Ecology Center on long-term stewardship projects in areas such as composting, recycling and water purity. Meaningfully integrating artistic, academic and nature-based learning, these projects will help our students use their creative and intellectual skills to make a substantive impact on the ecological health of their community.

- G. Target Population/Community Served:** We seek to make rigorous academic instruction and strong artistic programming accessible to all. We are a non-selective (non-audition) school and will encourage enrollment of all interested students, regardless of previous access to or skill level in the arts. Because commitment to diversity is central to our mission, we will actively recruit a student body reflective of CSD 1's demographics, with particular outreach to English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and students eligible for free and reduced price lunch (FRPL).
- H. Replication of High Quality School Models:** Not Applicable

### 3 Enrollment & Retention Targets Recruitment

- A. Those Identified in School's Mission:** We have partnered with New Design High School, a CSD 1 district school with mission alignment, to support our recruitment efforts and community engagement. They have committed space and human capital to this effort. We will hold our first Town Hall in their auditorium in mid-March. Through collaboration with many local community-based organizations (CBOs), parent networks and New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Residents Associations in and out of CSD 1, we are successfully reaching a broad and diverse cross-section of families committed to enrolling their students in our lottery.
- B. Students with Disabilities:** As the arts are frequently a lifeline to students who struggle in traditional educational environments, we will actively recruit students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Our goal will be to exceed the CSD 1 target of 21% students with disabilities for our incoming class of 6th graders, thus serving more students with disabilities than our local charter counterparts. We are partnering with CBOs that serve families of students with disabilities, and our outreach and marketing materials highlight our multi-tiered student support program. During lottery enrollment, we plan to work with guidance counselors and school administrators at CSD 1 elementary schools to identify and reach out to more of these families. We will also continue to follow up with the numerous emails and survey responses from 4th grade families of students with disabilities who specifically want an arts-focused environment to help meet their students' needs.
- C. English Language Learners:** With the support of Henry Street and University Settlement Houses, the founding team has reached out to and gathered support from numerous families of newcomers who speak languages other than English at home. This priority will continue to drive our efforts to recruit a student population that exceeds CSD 1's 13% composition of 6th grade students who are English Language Learners (ELLs). In addition, we will collaborate with strong bilingual schools such as American Dream Charter School and Emma Lazarus High School in order to better distribute information about our school to large groups of newcomers. Our workshops and information sessions have been held in English and Spanish, with all written materials translated into both languages. We have secured Mandarin translation—in person and in print—for all information session/student recruitment meetings. Three of our board members are native Spanish speakers; two are of Chinese-American descent, and one speaks Cantonese. A compelling programmatic element for families is the fact that co-founder Kate Quarfordt's theater classes are conducted in English and Spanish. In addition, we have prioritized the hiring of a Mandarin-speaking founding staff member.
- D. Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch:** We are committed to building a school that addresses the education-related obstacles that living in poverty presents. Recruiting a

population of students eligible for FRPL comparable to the district average of 78% is critical. The Juilliard School’s education outreach department draws low-income students from all over the city, and we anticipate their immense recruitment capacity having a strong impact on our outreach. We have also established strong relationships with local settlement houses, temporary housing facilities, the local Boys and Girls clubs, and dozens of NYCHA Tenants Associations; combined, these entities serve thousands of students eligible for FRPL. By holding information sessions and workshops for young people in spaces that serve low-income families, we have obtained commitments from 53 families who intend to enroll their current fourth graders in 2016. This overwhelmingly positive response and intent to enroll—both in and out of CSD 1—leaves us confident that we will comfortably match the district average.

## Retention

- A. Those Identified in the School’s Mission:** The founders of City School of the Arts are committed to building and retaining a diverse student body. We believe our partnerships with The Juilliard School and other prestigious arts organizations in combination with our youth leadership focus and commitment to democratic practices will create a dedicated, invested and loyal community of learners.
- B. Students with Disabilities:** Founding Director of Operations and Special Education Sara Sheffer Corona has a decade of experience coordinating special education programs in charter schools. Having served as special education coordinator at Uncommon Schools and DC Prep, Corona will use data from the Committee for Special Education and internal assessments to identify deficit areas, and the Response to Intervention (RTI) model to track student growth collaboratively and efficiently. Those students identified as having special needs prior to arriving at City School of the Arts will receive their prescribed support with a constant push towards maximizing time with their general education peers, and Corona will collaborate with local charter and district middle schools to source the highest quality related service providers.
- C. English Language Learners:** In the course of our outreach we met with upwards of thirty families who speak languages other than English at home; many expressed concerns that their students had scored 1s and 2s on the ELA exam due to lack of adequate language support in their district middle schools. Incoming ELLs at City School of the Arts will be assessed over the summer and placed in small groups to receive targeted instruction to supplement their ELA classes. A range of programs, including Words Their Way, the Wilson phonics support system, and Harvard’s pilot program Word Generation will be used to address specific student needs, with particular support available for students more accustomed to a logographic alphabet and/or with limited exposure to the English phonological system and American English intonation. All teachers will receive professional development on how to address academic language and vocabulary in the classroom to help develop students’ speaking and listening skills in addition to typically targeted skills of reading and writing. In these ways, we will ensure that ELLs develop skills in all four modalities required for academic success. City School of the Arts will deliver all newsletters and notes/calls home to ELL families in their identified preferred language.
- D. Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch:** Testing data from CSD 1 bears out a stark correlation between academic achievement and socio-economic status. Last year in CSD 1, only 20% of students eligible for FRPL passed the ELA state exam, while 66% of their peers who were not eligible passed with 3’s and 4’s. We will equip our teachers to confront this disparity with Professional Development provided by The Yellin Center designed to help educators understand and address the educational challenges faced by students living in poverty. Informed by countless studies documenting the success of arts education in combating drop-out rates among urban youth living in poverty, we will follow the lead of high-performing arts-based schools with strong retention rates for lower income students like Boston Arts Academy and Renaissance Arts Academy in LA. Creating a nurturing, arts-rich educational environment that holds students and families to high expectations for active involvement, we will exceed district

attendance averages and achieve exceptional retention rates for all students, including those from low-income families.

#### 4 Public Outreach & Community Support

- A. Public Outreach:** We are committed to ensuring that the design process of our school is transparent and collaborative. We have forged strong relationships with CBOs that serve thousands of local families; we have met with elected officials to learn about the concerns of their constituents, and we have received feedback on our school design from hundreds of local educators, parents, and community stakeholders. We are learning what matters to *students* by producing regular youth poetry workshops in local public housing developments, and inviting young people to attend our weekly focus groups with their families. We met with our CEC President, and presented our plans for City School of the Arts at their June school board meeting. Their questions and feedback directly impacted our approach to recruiting for diversity and creating charter-district partnerships. Local CBOs including Henry Street Settlement, University Settlement, The Educational Alliance, CITYarts, Abrons Arts Center, and the Lower East Side Ecology Center have pledged their full support of our mission and are committed to supporting our student recruitment efforts.

Our community outreach has also been strengthened by the September 2014 launch of our monthly newsletter, which currently reaches an audience of over 500 subscribers. Our website ([www.cityschoolofthearts.org](http://www.cityschoolofthearts.org)) and blog have also broadened our connections, with hundreds of views since going live in December. Our Facebook page received 300 ‘likes’ within its first 24 hours of existence, and has been accessed over 17,000 times. With 759 signatures and counting, our online petition of support includes over 50 positive comments. In addition to key partners in the community, we have connected with several philanthropic foundations and individuals eager to invest in the creation of our school. To initiate a development campaign immediately upon receiving a charter, we have secured the Apprentice Foundation to be a fiscal sponsor.

- B. Assessment of Parent Interest:** Last year, only 51% of CSD 1 families who entered a charter school lottery were granted a seat. Of the 150+ parents with whom we’ve met, almost all expressed desire for more arts-based classes, and many cited space constraints and limited human resources as reasons for the lack of artistic programming in local district schools. As a response, we intend to secure a private space with two full-time artistic teachers per grade. In addition, parents expressed excitement that our partnership with Juilliard would allow their children to participate in onsite after-school and weekend programming, and that our democratic practices will invite active family participation.

Our community outreach was targeted specifically to CSD 1; however, in response to our Facebook page, newsletter, and website, we have received numerous inquires from families in other districts. Based on this interest, we have begun to broaden our outreach by scheduling information sessions in CSDs 2 and 3 in Manhattan and 12 and 13 in Brooklyn. We anticipate our Town Hall meeting, scheduled for mid-March, to draw parents from all these districts. To date, we have 53 intent-to-enroll signatures and over 700 petition signatures in support of the creation of our school. While some parents we’ve spoken with have shared misgivings about the charter movement in general, their response to our proposed non-selective art-based public school has been overwhelmingly positive. The founding team and board of trustees of City School of the Arts are confident that we possess the capacity and public support to create a thriving new middle school in Lower Manhattan.

#### 5 Proposed Board Chair Signature & Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Danal Abrams, Board Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

