

Great Oaks Charter School – Letter of Intent

I. Applicant Information

a. Lead Applicant:

Benjamin B. Carson (Resident of Community School District 2, New York City)

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[REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]

b. Media Contact:

Benjamin B. Carson - bcarson@greatoakscharter.org

c. Founding Group:

- Benjamin B. Carson (Employee of Proposed Support Organization) – Launch Director, Great Oaks Foundation; Previously Co-Founder and Launch Director, Great Oaks Charter School, Newark; Statistician, Charter Schools Office, New York City Department of Education
- Alia Smith (Proposed Trustee) – Student, Columbia Business School; Previously Tutor Corps Director, MATCH Public Charter High School, Boston and MATCH Corps Member
- Dr. Joseph P. McDonald (Proposed Trustee) – Professor of Teaching and Learning, NYU - Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development; Chair of Teacher Education Working Group at NYU; Previously, Director of Research, Annenberg Institute for School Reform
- Kate Hayes (Proposed Trustee) – Community School District 2 Parent; Sales Leadership at Johnson & Johnson
- Susan Mustokoff Akselrad (Proposed Trustee)– Senior Counsel, Rhodia Inc.; 25-year Practicing Attorney; Parent of two grown children; Previously, Philadelphia public school teacher
- Michael Duffy (Proposed Trustee) – Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Great Oaks Charter School, Newark; Managing Director, Victory Education Partners; Previously, Executive Director, Charter Schools Office, NYC Department of Education; Executive Director, City on a Hill Charter School, Boston; Founding Board Member, MATCH Public Charter School, Boston

d. Proposed Founding Board of Trustees

Michael Duffy
Kate Hayes
Dr. Joseph P. McDonald
Alia Smith

Susan Mustokoff Akselrad

e. Replication Information

The proposed Great Oaks Charter School will be the second school started by the Great Oaks Foundation. The first Great Oaks school, located in Newark, New Jersey, was authorized in January, 2011, and began operation the following August.

Both Great Oaks schools replicate the successful methods of the MATCH Public Charter School in Boston. MATCH is a middle and high school serving a high needs population – 93% minority, 77% living below the poverty line – with consistent success. 99% of the students who've graduated MATCH over the last 7 years have been accepted into four-year colleges and last year MATCH was ranked 1st in Massachusetts for student growth on the 10th grade MCAS exam. In 2008, MATCH chose to expand from a 9-12 high school to a middle/high school serving grades 6-12.

The key elements of the MATCH model - which we've replicated in Newark and propose for New York - are high academic expectations, a No Excuses school culture, a focus on engaging classroom instruction and individualized attention to students' needs via high-dosage tutoring. MATCH's central innovation is the MATCH Corps, a one-year fellowship where recent college graduates spend a year of service working at the school, so that every MATCH student can receive several hours of tutoring every day. In 2011, we launched the Great Oaks Tutor Corps to serve a similar function for students in Great Oaks schools.

The Great Oaks Foundation was founded to support the creation and ongoing needs of a small number of high-performing charter schools using the MATCH model. The Foundation does not manage the schools or provide significant support services, nor does it receive any fees from the Great Oaks schools. As mentioned above, proposed trustee Michael Duffy sits on the board of the Great Oaks school in Newark as well as the board of the Great Oaks Foundation. Neither position is associated with any compensation.

f. Proposal History

This is the first time any member of this founding group has been a part of a founding group for a New York State charter school. Benjamin Carson and Michael Duffy were members of the founding group for the Great Oaks Charter School in Newark, for which an application was submitted to the New Jersey Department of Education in October, 2010, and approved in January, 2011.

II. Charter School Information

a. Name: Great Oaks Charter School

b. Location: Community School District 2, New York City

c. Planned Grades and Enrollment:

Great Oaks will begin with 66 students in the 6th grade and will add one grade level per year until we reach a full scale enrollment of 462 students in grades 6-12.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
6th Grade	66	66	66	66	66
7th Grade		66	66	66	66
8th Grade			66	66	66
9th Grade				66	66
10th Grade					66
Total	66	132	198	264	330

d. Partner Organization:

The Great Oaks Foundation is supporting the creation of the Great Oaks Charter School and will provide ongoing support related to fundraising and facilities once the school launches. The Foundation will not manage the school nor provide the school with significant support of day-to-day operations and will not charge any kind of fees to the school.

e. School mission

The mission of the Great Oaks Charter School is to prepare our students to **succeed in college**. Our goal is that all of our students will enroll in and graduate from a four-year college upon graduating from Great Oaks. We will accomplish our mission by combining high academic and behavioral expectations for our students with a high level of individual attention to each student’s needs.

f. School Overview

The Great Oaks model replicates the successful methods of the MATCH School in Boston. MATCH has had a great deal of success with an integrated tutoring corps: Although the students are overwhelmingly minority and low-income, MATCH is frequently ranked among the best high schools in the country and 90+% of its graduates are either still in college or have attained a degree.

The Great Oaks Charter Schools are “No Excuses” schools. Our schools’ mission is to prepare our students to **succeed in college** by combining a culture of high expectations with ample attention to individual students’ needs.

A key distinguishing element of Great Oaks, taken from MATCH, is our residential Tutor Corps. Like the MATCH Corps, we have established a one-year fellowship program for recent college graduates who work full-time at our school as tutors. Every student in a Great Oaks school receives tutoring for 2 hours a day, every day. The Tutor Corps is a selective group of recent college graduates who have committed to this work for one year and are provided with housing and a modest stipend. In our first year in Newark, Great Oaks had more than 330 applicants for just 25 tutoring positions.

The course of a Great Oaks school day moves between two interconnected spheres – the classroom and the tutorial. In the classrooms, students will participate in interesting lessons, learning with their peers in an exciting setting led by a highly-skilled teacher who is responsible

for setting the pace, introducing new content and monitoring students' progress. Great Oaks leverages effective teachers' strengths – facilitating lessons that engage and motivate students – and uses the lower-cost tutorials to reinforce material and differentiate instruction.

g. Target Population

The Great Oaks Charter will locate in Lower Manhattan, in Community School District 2 and will be open to all students from New York City, with a preference in our lottery for students who reside in Community School District 2.

Community School District 2 is as socioeconomically diverse as New York City itself. Some of the best-performing public schools in the city are in D2, but so are many of the lowest-performing. Great Oaks' vision is to serve a representative group of CSD 2 students in a diverse and welcoming school and we will ensure that students who are at-risk of academic failure are able to attend Great Oaks.

Great Oaks anticipates drawing a reflective sample of the lower half of CSD 2. In the 61 charter and traditional public schools operating in 2010 in the Zip codes approximately corresponding to the area below 34th Street, an average of 67% of students qualified for free and reduced lunch, 11.5% of students were classified as Limited English Proficient. In those schools, 22% of students were black, 37% were Hispanic, 21% were Asian and 18.5% were white.

III. Enrollment and Retention of Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners and students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch

We want to create a truly diverse public school and the key will be in designing a program with broad appeal to parents and conducting extensive outreach. We will have a particular focus on areas with higher concentrations of at-risk students, where parents may be less likely to seek out new school options. We will conduct outreach in the areas surrounding low-performing elementary schools, in census tracts with high concentrations of low-income residents and in the NYC Housing Authority complexes in CSD 2. In all of our outreach materials, we will stress that Great Oaks is a public school, free of charge and open to all students.

We anticipate that our model's intensive focus on individual attention to students' needs will resonate with families of English Language Learners and students with disabilities and we will ensure that those families are made aware of the option available to them. We will have all outreach literature made available in Mandarin, Cantonese and Spanish and will focus our outreach efforts in neighborhoods and at local elementary feeder schools with larger groups of at-risk students.

Retention of at-risk students will be driven by the school's commitment to engage families in their students' progress. Great Oaks will ensure that we are proactively and transparently communicating with all of our families about their students' strengths and areas for continued improvement. By doing so, we can avoid unpleasant surprises when a student may need to attend summer school or repeat a grade.

IV. Public Outreach and Community Support

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The founding group has undertaken an extensive community outreach campaign in order to create awareness and solicit feedback about this proposed new school option. We have spoken with representatives of the elected officials from Lower Manhattan, including New York State Senator Dan Squadron; New York State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver; New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn; City Councilmember Margaret Chin; Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer; and members of Community Board 1.

In addition to local elected officials, we have worked to engage parents and family members directly. Planning team members distributed flyers at several District 2 schools as well as reached out to several local parent organizations. The planning team advertised and conducted a meeting for interested community members on Saturday, January 7th to answer questions solicit comments on the proposed school from interested members of the community.

We estimate that there will be sufficient interest in the Great Oaks Charter School to allow us to reach our targeted enrollment for several reasons. First, population growth in Lower Manhattan has created an overcrowding crisis in the primary grades that, as current elementary students age, will soon put middle school seats in high demand. Second, we believe a college-preparatory 6-12 public school with high doses of tutoring integrated directly into the school day will have a broad appeal for parents. Finally, charter schools in New York City have been extraordinarily popular with parents, resulting in (according to the NYC Charter Schools Center) – more than 64,000 applicants vying for less than 13,000 available charter seats. With that amount of city-wide demand, coupled with the lack of options in our proposed area, we anticipate a high level of interest in our program.

Signed: _____

Date: _____