

**HUDSON VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOL FOR
THE ARTS AND GLOBAL AWARENESS**

**PROSPECTUS
August 16, 2010**



I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness shall be a regional public charter school serving students in grades 7 - 12. The school shall promote academic excellence, critical thinking, and self-motivated independent learning through the integration of arts and service learning into the academic curriculum. The school shall guide students to develop their highest artistic and academic competencies while encouraging community engagement. Students will become lifelong learners who embrace their roles as productive stewards of the global community.

The arts provide a portal through which teachers may access student interest, engagement, and achievement. The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness will build upon arts integration to foster inquiry, creativity, and reflection. Viewing, interpreting, performing and evaluating art challenges students at their highest cognitive levels, developing their ability to question, analyze, synthesize and ultimately articulate responses to a variety of concepts and issues. Diverse populations, including struggling and/or disenfranchised students are well served by the integration of the arts, as it provides an alternate means, with representations from multiple cultures, to demonstrate understanding and achievement of curricular applications. In addition, an emphasis on global awareness shall enable students to assess their impact on society at large.

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness will be regional in scope, drawing students from local districts to create a diverse community representative of the ethnic, racial and social makeup of Westchester County. Located a short walk from the White Plains Transportation Center, it is easily accessible by mass transit (railways and bus) and major highways. Its proposed setting, in a well-known, highly regarded non-profit community music school, offers specialized facilities (studios, equipment, performance spaces) and opportunities that foster partnerships with professional artists, educational institutions, and other community organizations.

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness shall serve students in grades 7-12. At inception, the school will accept students in the 7th and 8th grades, adding an additional grade each year thereafter. Middle school is a time in which students and parents explore educational strategies and options, and when the willingness to consider alternatives is high. With a specific focus, and the incorporation of student mentors and/or advisory groups, the school shall create a culture of high expectations and support, while fulfilling all NYS curricular requirements. These strategies offer confidence that our graduates will succeed academically and beyond, attending college at rates exceeding that of the county average.

An extended instructional day shall offer students two dedicated arts blocks, of one hour duration each. A third block shall be designated for academics and used for support and intervention, service learning, or project-based work.

Cross-disciplinary professional development shall create a common language, common goals, and opportunities for collaboration to address the differentiation of instruction, stimulation of multiple intelligences, and the infusion of the arts into the academic curriculum. This educational approach, coupled with an emphasis on community engagement, is aimed at raising academic achievement, creativity, and confidence to successfully meet the challenges of global citizenship.

The proposed school's founding group includes experienced, accomplished, and dedicated educators, administrators, members of governing boards (including school board), and law and accounting professionals, all deeply invested in the arts and global ethics, as well as public education. The group has substantial familiarity with educational management practices and issues of professional and public accountability. It is characterized by a common drive toward public service, a high degree of personal and professional ethics, and a shared belief in the interests of educational equity and improvement. Founding group member backgrounds include:

- an Artistic Director, Choreographer/Dance instructor, Theater educator/Director, Public Library Teen Program Manager, and active parent and community leader in the arts;
- a certified School Building Leader/School District Leader (SBL/SDL) with 12 years experience as a school board member and president;
- a 30-year secondary Public School Teacher whose certifications include Special Education, Science, and Gifted and Talented; this individual has served on the Destination Imagination governing board and as an Adjunct Professor at a local university;
- a 21-year Superintendent of Schools;
- an Attorney of 35 years, with experience on governing boards in the educational, professional, governmental, and arts communities; this individual is also an Adjunct Professor at a highly regarded law school;
- a state licensed, practicing Certified Public Accountant;
- a Broadway Conductor/Pianist of 30 years experience, and an Arts Educator/Administrator of 15 years experience, including at the college level; and
- a Lead Technician and Facilities Manager at a community college, and Adjunct Professor of technical theatre.

This broadly representational group is highly capable, thoughtful, and functional with particularly strong governing experience in the educational environment. Members have created and managed school district budgets, created and analyzed policy manuals, managed service procurement and contracts, made critical personnel decisions, increased direct community interactions and support, overseen the construction of significant facility additions, improved student achievement and more. The capacities of these talented individuals working toward a common goal, will give the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness the best possible opportunity, and highest likelihood, for success.

II. STUDENT POPULATION

A. Student Enrollment

Anticipated Enrollment Table

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
7 th	32	32	32	32	32
8 th	32	32	32	32	32
9 th		32	32	32	32
10 th			32	32	32
11 th				32	32
12 th					32

B. Target Populations

The concept of target populations is particularly appropriate to charter schools, as the charter movement emerged, to a significant extent, as an alternative educational response to the needs of students found within that broad designation. Indeed, much of the variety, uniqueness, and enthusiasm behind charter school efforts has been deliberately aimed at target population students.

Historically, these populations have been “targeted” as a result of underachievement, and/or insufficient response to the various efforts employed by public schools on their behalf. The resultant educational achievement gap has been addressed more and more emphatically with time, most notably via the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which endeavored to make educational gaps more transparent and to promote broad public support and resources to address it. In the years since, while NCLB has been subject to both criticism and support, the issue has held stubbornly firm.

Significant research data (Lee and Burkum, 2002; Cooley, 2002, Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox, 2000; Jencks and Phillips, eds, 1998) indicates that a substantial educational gap exists for target population students even before school enrollment, often the result of poverty, culture, obstacles of language, and more. While these contributors are not directly part of the educational environment, they cannot be considered an excuse for future academic failure - the importance of education is simply too strong. It is for that reason, and with that moral clarity, that the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness shall positively embrace its role and responsibility towards these most critical student populations.

Target populations have been subject to various manner of educational outreach, from the new and innovative to “back to basics” approaches. Many have been well documented and data-driven, resulting in the uncomfortable awareness that, despite best practices and efforts, no single, clear mechanism exists as an educational panacea for these students. Whether it is the

diversity of their backgrounds, the individual nature of their issues, or broader cultural/societal concerns is uncertain. What is known is that, devoid of a “magic bullet,” educators must remain thoughtful, committed, and open to experimentation on the subject.

Research (Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga, 2009) has proven a direct connection between arts education and improved academic performance. The arts level the playing field for students from disadvantaged circumstances, including students in the aforementioned target populations. Sustained involvement in the arts increases proficiency in language arts and mathematics. According to the publication, “Champions of Change: the Impact of the Arts on Learning,” (2009) an arts-enriched curriculum:

- engages at-risk students with authentic learning experiences through a variety of non-traditional pathways (these students often become high achievers in arts settings);
- addresses multiple intelligences, providing a variety of pathways for learning and assessment;
- develops critical, analytical and abstract thinking;
- promotes collaboration, teamwork, and problem solving skills;
- provides a positive sense of community and belonging;
- empowers the individual and nurtures self esteem; and
- provides new perspectives of other cultures, compassion for others, and social responsibility.

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness intends to operate as a **regional** entity, open to students beyond the immediate district of its physical location. Its mission and vision, involving the infusion of arts and service learning into and beyond the curriculum, are not a response to any program deficiencies of the local district, but rather a unique, alternative educational opportunity for students from throughout the region. The proposed setting of White Plains, the county seat, provides a centralized location, accessibility, and opportunities for collaboration in a large, diverse county. To that end, further discussion of target population components shall be undertaken from a regional perspective, utilizing a weighted average of the likely catchment area, Westchester County. Relevant statistical analysis is as follows:

Students with Disabilities – 10.96%

IDEA (PL 108-446, 2004) defines a "child with a disability" as a "child... with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; AND, who... [because of the condition] needs special education and related services."

The arts presents a variety of ways for students to learn, create, and express themselves. It empowers the individual and nurtures self-esteem while providing students with dedicated mentors, positive peer groups, and support networks. This serves students with disabilities who may not do as well in a more traditional academic environment.

English Language Learners – 7.45%

English Language Learners (ELLs) are a heterogeneous and complex group, with varying educational needs, backgrounds, languages, and goals. They present from English speaking homes, non-English speaking homes, or homes employing multiple languages. Their ties to American culture may be close, non-existent, or something in between. They may live in cultural zones, or in cultural diversity. In short, ELLs offer significant diversity in terms of language, socio-economic backgrounds, immigration status, and cultural values. This requires a variety of assessments and instructional approaches.

The arts, by their very nature, are conceptual as opposed to language based. This offers ELLs a variety of avenues through which to access, analyze, and demonstrate mastery of academic concepts. This alternative educational model allows ELLs the opportunity to quickly assimilate into the school community.

Students Eligible for Federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch – 28.23%

Federal law stipulates eligibility for free and reduced price lunch resulting from one of the following:

- a member of a household, as determined by the administering agency, is receiving assistance under the Food Stamp Program, or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF);
- the child is enrolled in a Head Start or Even Start program on the basis of meeting that program's low-income criteria;
- the child is homeless as determined by the school's homeless liaison or by the director of a homeless shelter;
- the child is a migrant as determined by the state or local Migrant Education Program (MEP) Coordinator; or
- the child is a runaway receiving assistance from a program under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and is identified by the local educational liaison.

Arts participation is highly correlated with socioeconomic status, which is the most significant predictor of academic performance. The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness will provide arts opportunities to families who normally would be unable to afford them.

Specific research compared student achievement among eighth grade students involved in the arts with those less, or not, involved in the arts. The results showed better grades, more positive attitudes, and less likelihood of dropping out among the arts-involved. The greatest difference was for economically disadvantaged students (Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga, 2009).

Attracting, Serving, and Retaining Students

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness, as a component of the public education framework, fully shares the objectives and commitment toward the success of target population students. To do so, the school shall actively seek to attract, serve, and retain these students in numbers comparable to that of its region, utilizing the following strategies:

Attracting Students

- preparing informational materials for publication and distribution in accessible languages (i.e. Spanish);
- coordinating public service announcements for local media platforms – press, radio, cable TV - in accessible languages;
- facilitating public meetings, discussions, and forums between members of the founding group and the general public in communities throughout the catchment area; and
- introducing the school to target population families within the catchment area via affiliations with, but not limited to:
 - Public Libraries
 - Health Centers/Clinics
 - Community Centers
 - Neighborhood Performing Arts Institutions
 - Big Brothers/Sisters of Westchester
 - Boys Clubs/Girls Clubs
 - Westchester County Youth Bureau
 - Westchester Institute for Human Development
 - Westchester ARC
 - National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)- Westchester County branch
 - Westchester Hispanic Coalition
 - El Centro Hispano de White Plains
 - Westchester Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
 - African-American Chamber of Commerce
 - African-American Men of Westchester
 - The Westchester Clubmen
 - United Black Clergy of Westchester
 - National Alliance of Black School Educators
 - Westchester County Hispanic Clergy Association

Serving Students

In an era in which a complete and competitive education for the 21st century is envisioned to include learning beyond high school, students of color and students who are living in poverty encounter daunting odds of academic success (Lee and Burkum, 2002). Statistics indicate that only 51% of African American students successfully finish high school, while 55% of Hispanic students do (Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga, 2009).

Learning experiences in the arts develop students' critical thinking abilities, creativity, imagination, and innovation. These capacities are increasingly recognized as core skills and competencies that all students require as part of a high-quality and complete education.

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness uniquely relates to students through the infusion of the arts into interdisciplinary academic approaches and through the incorporation of a global ethics and awareness curriculum. These themes provide a framework for both student instruction and school culture, an anchor upon which all else is built. Such clear delineation of purpose provides added value in that instruction and culture shall be focused, genuine, and widely shared among the school community. Additional strategies follow:

- personalization and attention advantaged by the school's small class and school size (approximately 16 per class);
- presentation of an arts curriculum supporting individual expression, multiple learning styles, and genuine student engagement;
- the practice of the arts as active learning;
- inclusion of arts forms specific to the variety of cultures represented by students attending the school (cultural sensitivity will augment student connections and investment);
- introduction of a global ethics curriculum that aims to build sound ethics, open discussion, and provide practical tools for dealing with difficult dilemmas to foster a tolerant and supportive school culture;
- consistent opportunities to participate in Service Learning projects aimed at fostering student engagement and self-motivation;
- use of alternative assessments to gauge mastery of materials in subjects other than English;
- incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) services in all classes to better address language learning;
- hiring of dually certified Resource/ELL teachers for inclusion classrooms;
- creation, monitoring, and support of appropriate IEP and 504 plans by qualified professionals;
- utilization of regular, inclusive staff development on the subject of the social, economic, and educational impacts of poverty and language deficits;
- involvement of parents, families, and community in the pursuit of the school's and students' goals and achievement; and
- consistent outreach to the community in order to establish partnerships and connections, foster credibility, provide additional learning resources.

Retention

Included among the various educational issues facing target-population students is that of personal and family mobility; the reality that such students change schools and residences in a manner that may negatively affect their educational outcomes. Often, these changes are not seamless, further reinforcing the benefits of educational consistency. The concept of the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness as a **regional** school will alleviate the bureaucratic need for transfer that exists under the present school district model.

Other obstacles to retention also exist. Some students will likely recognize that, despite the school's appeal and advantages, it is simply not a good fit. Overcoming this obstacle may best be accomplished via a careful collection and analysis of student data regarding transfer. This information shall benefit the school in its recruitment efforts by further refining the profile of a Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness student.

Retention strategies include:

- utilizing a data-driven model to regularly monitor the progress and achievement of target-population students;
- using authentic assessment tools in response to students' learning styles;
- providing individual attention through small class sizes;
- providing regular student feedback via advisory groups and mentors;
- enrolling entering students in 7th and 8th grade to allow sufficient time to embrace school culture, standards, and expectations prior to the high school years;
- building a school culture that fosters student-to-student caring and responsibility, including peer tutoring and management of a code of conduct;
- establishing a viable and valued student governance framework that empowers students to participate directly in their own education via planning, review, and management activities;
- scheduling and holding Board of Trustee meetings in an open forum at a time in which parents, community members, and others may participate in discussions and decision-making activities;
- holding regular meetings with community organizations, representatives, clergy, etc. to elicit feedback on school performance;
- creating programs that bring together students and families to further school, family, and community goals;
- enhancing school/community connections via service learning projects that address neighborhood issues of the target populations; and
- conducting exit interviews with any student/family leaving the school to determine the degree to which the school served, or failed to serve the student's needs.

The founding group of the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness possesses substantial experience with target populations, as well as significant academic backgrounds and certifications in these areas. While recognizing that these populations present particular educational concerns, the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness welcomes these challenges, with the understanding that education is truly the best guarantor of a contributing and productive citizenry.

The plan described here is a work in progress, subject to review and revision as conditions dictate. Charter schools provide public education with new ideas and strategies in an attempt to find successful models. The outlined proposal, which provides appropriate professional services, a focused curricular effort, the genuine commitment of the educational community, significant family and community outreach, small classes, student feedback/empowerment and more, is therefore, a model worthy of implementation. The founding group, dedicated and open to innovation and collaboration, is committed to the reflection and program analysis that shall make this model more than a single trial. It is the beginning of a process aimed at the greatest potential possible.

III. SCHOOL DESIGN

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness shall be a regional public charter school serving students in grades 7 - 12. The school shall promote academic excellence, critical thinking, and self-motivated independent learning through the integration of arts and service learning into the academic curriculum. The school shall guide students to develop their highest artistic and academic competencies while encouraging community engagement. Students will become lifelong learners who embrace their roles as productive stewards of the global community.

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness is not designed as a pre-professional training program for artists, but hopes to attract students with a sincere desire and commitment for an alternative education without regard to talent or ability.

a) Increase student achievement and decrease student achievement gaps in reading/language arts and mathematics

The arts provide a portal through which teachers may access student interest, engagement, and achievement. The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness will build upon arts integration to foster inquiry, creativity, and reflection. Viewing, interpreting, performing and evaluating art challenges students at their highest cognitive levels, developing their ability to question, analyze, synthesize and ultimately articulate responses to a variety of concepts and issues. Diverse populations, including struggling and/or disenfranchised students, are well served by the integration of the arts, as it provides an alternate means, with representations from multiple cultures, to demonstrate understanding and achievement of curricular applications. In addition, an emphasis on global awareness shall enable students to assess their impact on society at large.

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness is designed to further facilitate student achievement through a challenging academic environment, small class sizes, a culture built upon global and personal ethics, and an extended day that includes a daily academic block available for tutoring, collaborative projects, independent study, or other academic intervention services.

Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies shall be employed in all classes to better address English language arts and math skills by insuring the identification of obstacles to learning, and prioritizing remedial work/tutoring. The anticipated hiring of dually certified Resource/ESL teachers will further advance the achievement of that educationally fragile population.

There is a direct connection between arts education and improved academic performance. Music education increases proficiency in mathematics, and theatre education improves reading and language skills. For example, music students use ratios, patterns, absolute values, and arithmetic when sight-reading, writing, and playing music. Learning a role in a play gives the English Language Learner a unique way to engage with the language, while improving listening, reading and speaking skills.

An arts-enriched curriculum engages students to look at traditional academic subjects in new ways. Therefore at-risk students often become high achievers in arts settings. For example, achievement gaps were significantly reduced in fourteen schools in which the Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE) implemented an arts-integrated curriculum (Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga, 2009).

b) Increase high school graduation rates and focus on serving at-risk high school student populations (including re-enrolled drop-outs and those below grade level)

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness has created its key design elements with graduation rates in mind. The strategies outlined in the target population section of this document address most of these elements. We review those relevant to graduation rates and at-risk populations here:

- incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) services in all classes
- personalization and attention advantaged by the school's small class and school size (approximately 16 per class);
- creation, monitoring, and support of appropriate IEP and 504 plans by qualified professionals;
- presentation of an arts curriculum supporting individual expression, multiple learning styles, and genuine student engagement;
- introduction of a global ethics curriculum that aims to build sound ethics, open discussion, and provide practical tools for dealing with difficult dilemmas to foster a tolerant and supportive school culture;
- consistent opportunities to participate in Service Learning projects aimed at fostering student engagement and self-motivation;
- enrollment beginning with 7th and 8th grade for the purpose of establishing a culture and community prior to the high school years, thus ensuring student investment in the school design; and
- involvement of parents, families, and community in the pursuit of the school's and students' goals and achievement.

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness draws upon a model charter school of 15 years, located in South Hadley, MA – the Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School (PVPA). According to the PVPA 2008-2009 annual report, 85.2% of graduates are attending 4-year colleges, while all graduating seniors passed the required state exit exams. Student attendance was 93.8% with a less than 1% dropout rate.

The Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Performing Arts, located in Bethlehem, PA reports similarly. Statistics for the class of 2009 indicate that 83% of graduates are attending colleges, according to the following distribution: 65% - 4-year colleges, 18% - 2-year colleges, plus an additional 11% - professional art/theatre schools.

Supporting evidence is provided by a *New York Times* article from 2009 which reported that “...the nonprofit Center for Arts Education found that New York City high schools with the highest graduation rates also offered students the most access to arts education. The report, which analyzed data collected by the city’s Education Department from more than 200 schools over two years, reported that schools ranked in the top third by graduation rates offered students the most access to arts education and resources, while schools in the bottom third offered the least access and fewest resources. Among other findings, schools in the top third typically hired 40% more certified arts teachers and offered 40% more classrooms dedicated to coursework in the arts than bottom-ranked schools. They were also more likely to offer students a chance to participate in or attend arts activities and performances. The full report is at caenyc.org.” (Harris, 2009)

The above data on graduation rates and high performance indicators from our model charter schools coupled with the data from the Center for Arts Education provides our founding group with promising evidence that the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness will succeed.

c) Focus on academic achievement of middle school student populations and preparation for transition to high school

The founding group of the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness, with a strong background in secondary educational leadership, has deeply and thoughtfully considered its design plan with regard to grade levels, growth, and middle school achievement.

Middle school is often seen as a time in which students and parents explore educational strategies and options, and when the willingness to consider alternatives is high. With a specific, research-based curricular focus, the incorporation of global and personal ethics, student mentors and/or advisory groups, the school shall create a culture of high expectations and support, while fulfilling all New York State curricular requirements. Service learning offers students an alternative means to success; one that builds confidence and respect from contributions to something outside oneself, and which may be independent of the required, more standard curriculum. As success, teamwork, and confidence are critical to healthy adolescent growth and development, service learning gains importance not only for the good it does directly, but for its overlapping benefits in the more academic realm. Middle school students who feel accepted, appreciated, and part of something significant perform at higher levels.

The instructional schedule of the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness includes dedicated daily blocks for arts activities in addition to the integration of the arts into regular academic subjects. The 7th and 8th grade arts curriculum is planned to offer a broad introductory overview of the four core arts disciplines (vocal and instrumental music, theatre, dance and visual arts), providing a variety of experiences in preparation for more concentrated study during the high school years. This exposure will keep students engaged and attentive to their academic futures.

These strategies offer confidence that our graduates will succeed academically throughout their middle and high school years, and beyond.

d) Utilize a variety of high-quality assessments to measure understanding and critical application of concepts

The founding group of the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness recognizes both benefits and limitations to any single assessment tool. This necessitates the utilization of varied assessments, at multiple instances, in order to assure an effective understanding of concept and skill mastery.

The variety of assessments include structured rubrics, progress monitoring systems (i.e. Maze, DIBELS, running records), authentic performance tasks, portfolios, anecdotal records, and state and standardized exams. Students will be encouraged to demonstrate mastery in a variety of ways including traditional academic presentation as well as through more creative and innovative artistic channels. Assessments will be specific, frequent and regular in order to make the data useful as a catalyst for positive instructional change.

e) Increase implementation of local instructional improvement systems to assess and inform instructional practice, decision-making, and effectiveness

Instruction is an evolutionary process, subject to the influence of assessment data that, used properly, informs and molds it for greater effectiveness. It must meet the needs of individual learners, follow a logical curricular path, and have ongoing feedback. Learners succeed when instruction challenges them, and when subsequent evaluation of instruction results in appropriate instructional adaptation. That is the promise of a local instructional improvement system.

“Race to the Top” provisions require:

- increasing the acquisition, adoption, and use of local instructional improvement systems that provide teachers, principals, and administrators with the information and resources they need to inform and improve their instructional practices, decision-making, and overall effectiveness; and
- providing effective, data-informed professional development, coaching, common planning and collaboration for teachers and principals – especially in the areas of analyzing and using data.

Schools, therefore, must:

- understand data and know how to use it to make strategic instructional changes to continuously improve achievement;
- foster a culture of data use and expertise;
- establish themselves as true learning communities where teachers share best practices and resources to impact district-wide performance; and
- create a climate where each teacher can make a difference for each child.

The founding group of the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness recognizes the potential benefits of a Local Instructional Improvement System and intends to research a variety of systems and implement the most advantageous to our students' achievement. The school schedule provides ample time for teacher preparation, collaboration, and staff development in this area.

f) Partner with low-performing, local public schools to share best practices

The charter school movement was founded to promote innovation, diversity, and the dissemination of educational best practices to existing public schools, principles to which the founding group of the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness fully subscribes. In that regard, the founding group foresees inter-school collaborations and partnerships which might include professional development activities, collaborative instruction at each school, informal peer relationships/evaluations, conferences and presentations, and personnel sabbaticals to observe, study and instruct.

The design of the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness lends itself to the sharing of best practices as well. Students at the school shall be expected, in addition to their study of the arts, to exhibit their knowledge and interpretation via performance, workshops, and educational outreach. In this manner, students from partnering, low-performing, local public schools will be exposed to, and included in, activities that include public speaking, team-building, and problem solving; 21st century skills that foster high academic achievement.

g) Demonstrate the ability to overcome start-up challenges to open a successful school through management and leadership techniques

The start-up process to the creation of a new charter school is complex on a variety of fronts. Challenges include:

- attracting students and families;
- securing appropriate facilities;
- securing a dedicated and talented faculty, staff, and administration;
- locating necessary supplies, materials, and furnishings;
- completing curricular work;
- initiating critical community relationships;
- tending to issues of health, safety, and security;
- creating a workable student database;
- instituting appropriate financial controls and systems;
- screening and programming for target populations; and
- insuring that the school's intended focus and culture emanate throughout.

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness founding group has a deep appreciation for the intricacies of the start-up process, as well as the unanticipated issues that arise, no matter how thorough the planning. The ability to manage multiple concerns, steer with consistent aim, be resourceful in the face of challenges, and keep the goal of serving students in sight, is vital in an endeavor of this type.

In response, the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness founding group offers substantial direct experience in public school governance, administration, and operations. Members have created school policy manuals, managed school budgets and personnel, negotiated union contracts, managed the investment of funds, procured school insurance services, created and managed significant bond projects and construction, implemented programs, planned and monitored professional development, liaised with parents and community members, and networked through regional and national organizations on issues of concern to public schools and student achievement.

Additional experience includes policy-making in professional and non-profit organizations and business ownership. The founding group is characterized by its ability to collaborate, a diversity of backgrounds, and a broad range of individual experience. In addition to multiple educators and school administrators, the group includes an attorney, a certified public accountant, and a facilities manager.

Understanding the challenges that the start-up process presents, the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness founding group has held informal discussions with the Music Conservatory of Westchester to consider housing the school within its facility, which would reinforce the school's objectives and make available arts-appropriate space and an accomplished arts faculty.

This founding group has strong desire, experience, and the skill to stay ahead of many anticipated challenges. It exhibits its own record of achievement in various fields and conditions and confidently looks forward to this next one.

h) Demonstrate the support of the school district and the intent to establish an ongoing relationship with such district

It is important to reiterate that the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness shall be a **regional** school, whose catchment area includes over 40 local school districts, thus limiting the impact on any particular one. Nevertheless, the founding group has contacted the White Plains Superintendent of Schools to discuss the charter's plans, explain its programs and aspirations, and seek cooperation and support as it moves forward. A copy of the Executive Summary was presented as an additional resource.

The discussion was professional, cordial, and positive, concluding with an agreement to continue meeting and updating regularly as the application progresses. The Superintendent's reception was welcome and open, and the likelihood of a productive, ongoing future relationship, benefiting both institutions, appears high. It is anticipated that the desired school district support shall be forthcoming as a greater understanding is achieved, relationships constructed, and the charter process proceeds.

The founding group has sought additional relationships within the proposed district of location as well. Given the objectives of the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness, as defined in its mission statement, the founding group has entered a sincere, serious, and symbiotic association with the Music Conservatory of Westchester, a more than 80 year-old

non-profit community music school serving 850 students at their White Plains facility and 1800 students via outreach programs. The Conservatory has played a vital educational and community role in the arts for generations, and in concert with the proposed school, may contribute even more broadly, with the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness, in the near future. Their letter of support is attached.

Preliminary outreach has also been extended from the founding group to administrative staff at the Westchester Community College (SUNY) Center for the Arts in White Plains. This facility, located across from the Music Conservatory of Westchester, is capable of providing the school with specialized visual arts equipment, curriculum assistance, and potential instructors. Reaction from WCC was positive and the founding group plans to continue discussion towards a favorable conclusion that offers students greater educational opportunity and challenge.

i) Provide access to viable educational alternatives to students in regions where there are a lack of alternatives

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness offers a clear educational alternative to the existing public school structure in the form of an arts integrated academic curriculum, instruction in global ethics and awareness, and daily time blocks for direct arts instruction and participation.

Once again, it should be noted that the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness is not designed as a pre-professional training program for artists, but hopes to attract students with a sincere desire and commitment for an alternative education without regard to talent or ability.

Access to music lessons, dance classes, and live theatre is often directly related to a family's ability to finance such endeavors. As such, lower income students have less opportunity to take advantage of this type of programming. The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness will be able to provide these exceptional opportunities to families who normally would not be able to afford them.

While attention to the arts is a central tenet of the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness, many public schools have scaled back their attention to the arts to concentrate on more core academic areas. The founding group does not view this as an either/or choice but, instead, sees the arts as essential to student achievement.

The Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness hopes to disseminate its model of arts integrated curricula and other practices (after suitable vetting and testing) to regional and other schools that might benefit from it. The arts have always been vital to learning, expression, and communication – 21st century skills that educators, business entrepreneurs, doctors, scientific researchers, accountants, lawyers, and others value highly.

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music conservatory of westchester

August 13, 2010

The Regents of The University of the State of New York
Office of Innovative School Models
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Sirs:

The Music Conservatory of Westchester is pleased to write in support of the proposed Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness. We have been in discussion with the school's founding committee to assess the potential to house the school at the Conservatory, and for the Conservatory to provide music classes.

Founded in 1929, the Conservatory is a nonprofit community music school, accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music, chartered by the New York State Board of Regents, and a member of the National Guild for Community Arts Education.

As a regional organization, the Conservatory has provided generations of students with high quality music education programs and a wide variety of arts experiences. We understand the critical role the arts can play in the development of young minds: developing creativity, critical/analytical thinking, self-confidence, self-reflection, team-building, and expressiveness. The arts are a universal language that bridges cultural differences and forges common bonds among people of all backgrounds.

The Conservatory has resided in White Plains for 80 years, and we are confident that the city would offer a compatible home for a charter school for the arts. White Plains is a large and diverse city, and this is reflected in the schools. The district administration gives its support and encouragement to the arts across all grade levels. White Plains supports two alternative schools (the Hospital School at Cornell Medical Center and the Community School), indicating that they are open to alternative models of education. The Conservatory has always maintained a close relationship with the district's arts educators and has provided scholarship assistance to many of its students.

While approximately 25% of the Conservatory's students come from White Plains, the Conservatory is equally a magnet for students from communities throughout Westchester and beyond. Each year we serve over 850 students onsite in our White Plains facility. These students hail from over 100 communities in six counties, including Rockland, Bronx, Putnam, Orange, Nassau, and Fairfield CT. We also serve an additional 1800 students in outreach programs.

Students and their families are willing to travel great distances to take part in quality arts programs. Yet there is not a regional arts-based middle or high school in the county that is open to students from all school districts. In fact, there are few such schools anywhere in the country, and most of those that do exist are private institutions such as Interlochen or Walnut Hill.

From our long experience providing music education, we are confident that the Hudson Valley Charter School for the Arts and Global Awareness would be an important and groundbreaking addition to the educational opportunities available to students in the region. The Conservatory looks forward to having a role in this project and urges the Regents to lend their support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jean Newton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jean" and last name "Newton" clearly legible.

Jean M. Newton, Ph.D.
Dean of Students and Faculty
Associate Director for New Initiatives and Programs