

PHASE I: Letter of Intent

Created Wednesday, January 21, 2015

Updated Friday, February 06, 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	REACH Academy Charter School
Grades Served (K-5, .6-8, 9-12, etc.) During Initial Term	K-5
Number of Students During Initial Term	600

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	Dolores Prezyna	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Public/Media Contact Person	Robin Nellis	724-601-9099	rnellis77@gmail.com

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

reachacademycharter.webs.com

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	Not Applicable
Partner Organization 1	Not Applicable
Partner Organization 2	Not Applicable

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).

Michael D. Olsen

Date Signed (Lead or Co-Applicant)

2015/02/06

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

I. Applicant Group Information

- A. Applicant Group Names** See Table 1 in Attachment 5b.
B. Applicant Group Roles See Table 1 in Attachment 5b.
C. Public Contact Robin Nellis
 Public Contact Information rlnellis77@gmail.com 724-601-9099

D. Application History

Two full applications have been submitted previously in support of REACH Academy Charter School. In February of 2014, the founders submitted a Letter of Intent during Round 1 to the SUNY Charter Schools Institute (CSI). After receiving an invitation to apply, the first full application was presented in March of that year. Reviewers identified key areas of the application that needed refinement. Since Round 2 of the SUNY’s 2014 RFP process only allowed for new charter applications in New York City, a Letter of Intent was submitted to SED during Round 2 in July. The Letter of Intent had mistakenly only proposed a kindergarten offered in the first year of the charter causing the LOI to be ineligible for full submission. In October of that same year, SED announced an additional application cycle for a Round 3 seeking applications that would provide “high quality options for the students in the City of Buffalo.” REACH Academy Charter School founders submitted a full application in November of 2014. Reviewers offered critical feedback. The founders are utilizing this feedback from the Application Review Team and are refining the proposal clarifying key points and aligning a coherent plan for implementation for submission during the 2015 RFP process.

II. Proposed Charter School Information

- A. Proposed School Name** REACH Academy Charter School
B. Proposed School Location City of Buffalo, New York
C. Planned Grades and Enrollment in the 1st thru 5th Year of Operation

	School Year	Kindergarten	First Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade	Fourth Grade	Fifth Grade	Totals
Year 1	16-17	X	X					120
Year 2	17-18	X	X	X				240
Year 3	18-19	X	X	X	X			360
Year 4	19-20	X	X	X	X	X		480
Year 5	20-21	X	X	X	X	X	X	600

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

E. Proposed School Mission

~Our Mission, Our Promise~

The Mission of the REACH Academy Charter School is to ensure the achievement of high academic standards for City of Buffalo students through a hands-on authentic learning environment. Scholars of REACH Academy Charter School will learn the value of Service, Leadership, Character and Citizenship, along with effective Communication Skills as evident in reading, writing, mathematical and technological comprehension. REACH Academy Charter School will provide the tools for scholars to rise above the limitations often posed by poverty, disability and the struggle to achieve English Language Proficiency.

F. School Overview

In order to close the gap on poverty, REACH Academy Charter School will provide an enormous amount of rich language experiences designed specifically to develop language abilities in vocabulary and background knowledge for students at-risk for academic failure. The development

of strong literacy skills make up the basic foundation for all learning. Scholars at REACH Academy Charter School will develop strong communication skills, as evident in reading, writing, mathematical and technological comprehension. While learning to read fluently and understand what is read is critical to academic success, it is not enough to bridge the gap for students in poverty. Building background knowledge and increasing vocabulary skills are essential to make up for the difference for students from impoverished homes (Snow K., 2013). REACH Academy Charter School will provide rich authentic opportunities for students to build the necessary skills needed to compete in the 21st Century.

REACH Academy Key Design Elements

These design elements are what make REACH Academy Charter School a dynamic, cutting edge, unique school of the 21st Century. Each of these are woven into every aspect of our school and provides students the opportunity for critical and reflective thinking throughout their educational experience to ensure high achievement.

1. Instructional Design – *The Six Point Plan to Increasing Student Achievement* model encapsulates an effective way to ensure high student achievement by allowing for continuous evaluation of student progress and requiring immediate modification to the students' learning plans. The Six Point Plan includes: Setting Up a Culture of High Expectations, Articulating the Curriculum, Ensuring Best Instructional Practices, Administering Common Assessments, Providing Research Based Interventions and Monitoring Progress.

2. Authentic Classroom Learning Environments – It's been clearly documented that student engagement increases when students are cognitively involved and thinking critically about the content. (Wilmington, 2007) Authenticity includes meaningful tasks that are real or have purpose, which increases student engagement. The classrooms at REACH Academy Charter School will be designed as "mini" real world familiar environments based upon developmentally appropriate themes. In order to bridge the gap for those in poverty, an enormous amount of rich authentic language experiences and exposure to a wide range of books across a variety of genres are essential (Snow, C. and Shattuck, 2014.)

3. Center Based Learning – Scholars at REACH Academy Charter School will spend the majority of their day engaged in meaningful learning through a center based approach. Michael Bottini (2005) explains the benefits of this form of instruction. He states that centers provide children with opportunities for making choices, working with others, being involved in hands-on activities, and becoming fully engaged in learning.

4. Six Week Modules Rotating to New Learning Settings - Students will stay in a classroom learning environment for one unit of study for 4 - 6 weeks in length and will rotate through six different units or "thematic" classrooms.

5. Literacy Focused - A basic belief at REACH Academy Charter School is that students in poverty need an enormous amount of rich language experiences to bridge the gap that poverty creates. The students will engage in multiple, focused, rich literacy experiences throughout their school day. Using Fountas and Pinnell's model for Guided Reading and Phonic Lessons and Lucy Calkin's model for Reader's and Writer's Workshop as the basic literacy curriculum, students will receive a highly personalized approach in literacy instruction.

G. Target Population/Community Served

The Targeted Population for REACH Academy Charter School is directed to the minority student coming from a depressed socio-economic background in the City of Buffalo. The location of the school is going to be on the East Side of Buffalo in either an area known as the Broadway-Fillmore District or near Willert Park and the city's Fruit Belt neighborhood. Both of these locations offer

the challenge of lifting up an area with a high percentage of the population living below the poverty level and some of the lowest performing schools in the city. Buffalo Public School has an 81% free and reduced lunch rate as of 2012. With these locations, it is expected that the school will have over a 90% free and reduced lunch rate and a minority rate over 90%. The school curriculum is specifically designed to help reduce the poverty gap by providing rich language experiences designed to build background knowledge and vocabulary skills which have been shown to be delayed for students in poverty (Haty and Risely, 2004.)

H. Replication of High Quality School Models – Not Applicable

III.A. School’s Plan to Attract and Recruit Students

- A. Targeted Population** - The Targeted Population is directed to the minority student coming from a depressed socio-economic background in Buffalo. Driven by our mission to *provide the tools for scholars to rise above the limitations often posed by poverty*, our entire program is geared toward helping the struggling student who might not otherwise find success in a typical underperforming city school. The key design elements demonstrate a highly engaging environment involving center based learning and small group instruction that is differentiated and specific to student needs which will attract these students. Advertising in community newspapers, the local radio, and television broadcasting events to promote the school will begin immediately upon approval. Brochures will be widely distributed anywhere parents might gather or do business. Several Open Houses will be hosted in the months prior to opening.
- B. Students with Disabilities** - True to our mission, REACH Academy Charter School will recruit students with special needs by working closely with agencies that provide Preschool Programs for students with disabilities. Invitations for Informational Sessions will be set up to specifically address how our program will meet the needs of the students with special needs for parents to tour and learn more about the services offered. Program Administrators, Social Workers, District CPSE Coordinators, Special Education Teachers, Parents and Students will all be invited to learn more about REACH Academy Charter School. Additionally, our recruitment brochures will specifically mention the special education services offered and our special education philosophy of the school will be shared during Open Houses/Parent Information Nights.
- C. English Language Learners** – According to the New York State Report Card, 12% of the students in the Buffalo Public Schools were Limited English Proficient in 2012-2013. REACH Academy Charter School will visit ethnic community groups and offer presentations to their membership to invite prospective students to visit our school. Journey’s End Refugee Services and Hope Refugee Center will be invited to tour our school. Printed promotional materials will be distributed both in English and in Spanish for our Hispanic population in Buffalo.
- D. Students who are Eligible Applicants for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program** – The very location of REACH Academy Charter School will be one of the biggest draws of students’ who are eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (FRLP). In 2012-2013, the Buffalo Public Schools had an overall average of 81% of the population that qualified for FRLP. However, according the 2012-2013 New York State Report Card Data, schools located within a 1.2 mile radius of our proposed school’s location had an average of 92% FRLP rate. While recruiting for our school, we will emphasize the location of the school to draw from the local impoverished neighborhood where we will be situated. Additionally, recruitment brochures will be distributed to the local homeless shelters, food pantries and local public housing projects.

III.B. School’s Plan to Retain Students

- A. Targeted Population** -In order to retain our targeted population, we will ensure students success and maintain a high level of parent satisfaction.

- ~ We will actively seek high quality minority teachers who share similar background and cultural understanding and sensitivity as our students. Professional Development will include diversity training and acclimating teachers to what life is like for students living in poverty.
- ~ A Back Pack Program for Kindergarten and First Grade Students where back packs filled with fun, engaging literacy activities, toys and books are sent home with students.
- ~ Parents will be encouraged but not required to volunteer in school and in the classroom.
- ~ Anonymous Parent Surveys will assess satisfaction and gain feedback for improvement.
- ~ Classes will be held in summer/over breaks for students to remediate academic weaknesses.
- ~ 2nd Grade students and Up will be given planners to manage assignments, class work, notes.

B. Students with Disabilities – The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools offer the following strategies for retaining students with disabilities. The REACH Academy Charter School will have a culture of high expectations for all students. This will be done through constant communication of the message that all students are welcome and expected to succeed. We will provide a robust curriculum designed by effective teachers who regularly progress monitor to inform targeted and fluid interventions based on common formative assessment data. Having a very structured Response to Intervention (RtI) model will ensure that teams of general and special education teachers meet students’ needs as they arise, rather than waiting for students to fail. Classroom teachers will be a key participant in grade level teams that share in the accountability of all the students’ success. By closely tracking success, we will ensure that required retention targets are met while demonstrating students’ growth in their program.

C. English Language Learners – In order to retain our English Language Learners, the faculty and staff will integrate cultural traditions of ELL families throughout our school community. We will host a Cultural Night annually where all families in our school community are invited to share a special ethnic dish to be sampled by all. Cultural Night will also invite parents to share a special ethnic or cultural tradition or custom within the school community. Maps and flags will be displayed in a prominent place within the building to designate where our students are from. By creating a welcoming school environment that respects the cultural traditions and customs of our students and their families, we will build a strong sense of community within our building. The faculty and staff at REACH Academy Charter School will encourage the native language use at home and suggest that parents read and tell stories to their children in their native language which will also help their reading skills in English. Bilingual books will be available in the school library. One of our greatest challenges for us will be communicating with ELL parents. Creating a good translation process will be paramount. We will offer staff training on how to communicate in simplified English on the phone when necessary. We will work with an agency such as The International Institute of Buffalo on providing Interpreter and Translation Services which they have available in more than 60 languages. Services will be provided for Parent Teacher Conferences in order to effectively communicate with families.

D. Students who are Eligible for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program. Understanding our population is critical to meeting their individual needs. The school will incorporate flexibility to help our students reach success and to lessen the stress often found in families living in poverty. The school will open at least 30 minutes earlier (longer if necessary) every day to provide free supervision for students whose parents must drop them off early in order to get to work. No student will be expected to wait outside in the freezing cold Buffalo temperatures waiting for the school to open. A free quality after school program will run from the end of the school day until 5:15 pm daily so students are not left home alone unsupervised. A School Uniform Policy will be instituted to reduce the burden of shopping for designer clothing and the competition among students often associated with having the most fashionable items. A Uniform Swap will be facilitated annually

where parents can trade gently worn uniforms each year for the appropriate size needed. A washer and dryer and a shower will be located in the building for the rare occasion when some students need to discretely receive a shower and clean clothes. Extra uniforms, socks, belts and underwear will be made available for students whose families don't have the basic means to provide these essentials. The School Social Worker will lead a Winter Coat Drive for those parents struggling to purchase quality warm clothing. Monthly Spaghetti Dinners and an annual Chicken BBQ will be hosted to share an inexpensive meal together while building a strong sense of school community. The Social Worker will pick up students who miss the bus and have no way of getting to school.

IV. Public Outreach and Community Support

- A. Public Outreach** – Beginning in October of 2013, the founders have made the public aware of the following: ~ An Application will be Submitted to SED to Open a New Charter School; ~ The Intended Location, Target Population and Proposed Grades and Enrollment; ~ The Mission Statement and Description of the Academic Program; ~ A Request from the Applicant Group Actively Soliciting Comments and ~ The Manner in which the Public can Submit Comments; Email, Facebook, Web Site Survey and Community Meetings. A letter was sent to Community Stakeholders representing over 200 community activists, politicians, members of the Buffalo Public School Board, the Buffalo Common Council, faith leaders, heads of local colleges, major companies and many other influential people in Buffalo. A 2nd letter was resent to update the community on the status of the REACH Academy Charter School application during Round 1 of the 2015 RFP process. A press release announcing our latest Town Hall Meeting has been issued to the local media and to several community centers and organizations throughout the region. Discussions have taken place with the Interim Superintendent of Buffalo, a neighboring BOCES District Superintendent and the Past President of Erie Community College regarding REACH Academy Charter School. Valuable feedback has already been incorporated into our application. For example, during our Public Hearing in Buffalo during Round 1 last year, members of the Buffalo Board of Ed. wanted us to be sure to include as much diversity as possible on our faculty. They gave an excellent suggestion to go outside of the area and do a nationwide search to be sure to have as many teachers as possible who share the same racial background as the majority of our students will be. Catholic Charities of Buffalo has recently decided to partner with us and REACH Academy will host the following Catholic Charities sponsored programs: Tomorrows Youth Today, Foster Grandparents and Closing the Gap.
- B. Community Support** – Our website can be found at www.reachacademycharter.webs.com where a survey form is available for stakeholders to provide their input. A Comment Card will be used in addition to the survey during one-on-one outreach visits to Buffalo area shopping malls and other high traffic areas. A tri-fold brochure and other marketing materials have been developed. A local Pastor on the East Side has invited us to attend Sunday Services to engage parents as they enter or exit the church. Of the feedback we have received from parents in Buffalo, there is an overwhelming concern for the state of the Buffalo Public School System. Most expressed dissatisfaction with the home district and support for a new charter school that had an extended school day, a positive behavior system and a quality after school program

V. Proposed Board Chair Signature and Date

2/7/2015



Dolores M. Preznya – Proposed Board Chair

Date

TABLE 1: APPLICANT GROUP INFORMATION

***Minimum of 5 members must be designated as Trustees**

NAME OF APPLICANT GROUP MEMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS	CURRENT EMPLOYMENT	RELEVANT EXPERIENCE, SKILLS, AND ROLE ON APPLICANT GROUP (Key Words)	PROPOSED ROLE (if any) (Trustee, Employee, Consultant, or None Continuing Role)	PROPOSED POSITION ON THE BOARD (e.g., officer, trustee, or constituent representative)	LENGTH OF INITIAL TERM	VOTING MEMBER (YES OR NO)
Dr. Dolores Prezyna	[REDACTED]	Adjunct Professor -SUNY Fredonia- Retired Principal Frontier Central School District	Academics, Board and Building Leadership and Supervision Literacy Specialist, Instructional Leadership, Teacher Evaluation, Union Negotiations, Evaluations	BOT Trustee	President	3-Years	Yes
Linda Marszalek	[REDACTED]	Nationally Certified Data Team Specialist - Genesee Valley BOCES	Educational Leadership, School Turnaround, Data Teams, Literacy and Academics, Curriculum Planning, Finance/Budget Planning, Instructional Improvement, Sp. Ed	Head of Schools	N/A	N/A	N/A
Michael Olsen	[REDACTED]	Teacher- Buffalo Public Schools Information Technology Coordinator-Enterprise Charter School	Facility Planning, Design and Maintenance, Instructional Technology Implementation and Coach, Chief Information Officer, Computer Networking, Student Management Systems, Procurement Experience	BOT Trustee	Vice President	1-Year	Yes
Christine Mann	[REDACTED]	National Presenter/Consultant – Xillix Advisor/Consultant - Jansen Biotech (Division of Johnson & Johnson)	Finance, Budget Oversight, Human Resources Experience, Contract Negotiations, Personnel Policy, Leadership, Operations, Marketing Specialist, Bi-Lingual/ German	BOT Trustee	Officer of the Board	2-Years	Yes
Leslie Scott	[REDACTED]	Assistant Federal Public Defender - United States Federal Public Defenders Office	Legal, Experience in Special Education and Criminal Law, Inner-City Youth Mentor, At-Risk Youth Advocate Community Leader and Minority Status	BOT Trustee	Board Secretary	1-Year	Yes

Dawn Race	██████████	Nationally Certified Assessment Specialist - Genesee Valley BOCES	Building Administration, Leadership, Special Education, Counseling, Youth Behavioral Specialist, Positive Behavior Intervention Systems Experience, Assessments	BOT Trustee	Officer of the Board	2-Years	Yes
Ryan Caster	██████████	Certified Public Accountant - Freed Maxick CPAs, P.C	Financial Oversight, Budget Planning and Development, Procurement Procedures, Business Operations, Payroll, Benefits	BOT Trustee	Board Treasurer	2-Years	Yes
Parent Representative- TBA	TBA	TBA	Expected to Bring Parent Perspective to Governance and also a Liaison and Advocate to Individual Parents and Family Council	BOT Trustee	Officer of the Board	2-Years	Yes
Community Representative- TBA	TBA	TBA	Expected to Bring Community Perspective to Governance and also a Connection to Community Partners and Advocates for the School	BOT Trustee	Officer of the Board	3-Years	Yes
Lisa Rogers	██████████	Individualized Residential Alternative Specialist - People Incorporated	Educational Leadership Positive Behavior Intervention Specialist, Community Outreach, Youth Mentor, Special Education, CSE, IEP Development, Supervision	Dean of Students/ Director of Operations	N/A	N/A	No
Robin Nellis	██████████	District Data Clerk Global Concepts Charter School	Student Management Systems, Board Clerk Experience, Community Outreach Office Supervision, Daily Building Operations, Records Management, Student Attendance, Data Clerk	Intake Coordinator Board Clerk Chief Information Officer	N/A	N/A	No

