

January 13, 2012

Director Cliff Chuang  
NYSED Charter School Office  
89 Washington Avenue, Room 471 EBA  
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Mr. Chuang:

The purpose of this letter is to officially convey my intention to apply to NYSED for a charter for Brilla College Prep Public Charter School (“brilla” means “shine” in Spanish). In accordance with NYSED guidelines, what follows is information about the proposed school.

**I. Applicant Information**

- a. **Lead applicant:** Richard E. Ramirez, [REDACTED]
- b. **Media contact:** Stephanie Saroki de Garcia, [stephanie@setonpartners.org](mailto:stephanie@setonpartners.org)
- c. **Applicant founding group:**
- *Eric Eckholdt*, proposed board member – Eckholdt is executive director of the Credit Suisse Americas Foundation, where he spearheaded the foundation’s new K-12 education grants program. He formerly worked for Prep for Prep, which helps prepare academically gifted minority students for admission to private schools.
  - *Scott W. Hamilton*, proposed board member – Hamilton co-founded the KIPP Foundation and led the national replication of the two original KIPP schools for the first 5 years. He has unique experience in developing new school models, replicating high-performing schools, and growing teacher/leader recruitment programs. He has held posts in the White House, the U.S. Department of Education, and the MA Department of Education, where he served as Associate Commissioner of Education.
  - *Anthony J. de Nicola*, proposed board member – De Nicola is co-president of Welsh, Carson, Anderson & Stowe, a private equity firm focused on information/business services and healthcare. He has expertise in business management and finance.
  - *Richard E. Ramirez*, lead applicant & proposed board member – Ramirez taught 5th graders in Washington Heights, helping them achieve outstanding academic results. He then served Teach for America as a summer institute school leader, program director, and director of talent and recruitment.
  - *Ninfa Segarra*, proposed board member – Segarra is a senior advisor at Tonio Burgos and Associates, a strategic planning and lobbying firm. Segarra grew up in the Bronx (where the school will be located), and in 1990, she was appointed as her home borough’s representative to the Board of Education. Segarra has served as executive director for the

NYC Police Museum, president of the NYC Board of Education, vice president for Intercampus Collaboration at CUNY, NYC Deputy Mayor for Education and Human Services, and a member of the NY Governor’s Commission on Education Reform.

- *Stephanie Saroki de Garcia*, planning and start-up support – Saroki de Garcia taught high school students in Oakland and middle school students in the South Bronx, where the proposed charter school will be located. She launched and for 5 years led the K-12 education programs for a national organization of philanthropists.
- *Aaron Brenner*, advisor on school design, school leader selection, and coach for school leader – Brenner is founder of KIPP’s first elementary school, head of early childhood and elementary schools for KIPP Houston, and a former second-grade ELL teacher who was named Teacher of the Year at his school and district.

d. **Replication or network information:** Not applicable.

e. **Application history:** In 2002, Scott Hamilton applied to the Texas Education Agency to open KIPP Aspire in San Antonio and KIPP Truth Academy in Dallas. Both charters were granted and these schools have been successful. In 2005, Ninfa Segarra applied to NYSED to open Lower East Side Charter School for Leadership Excellence, and the application was rejected. The above schools are not related in any way to the proposed school.

**II. Proposed Charter School Information**

a. **Proposed school name:** Brilla College Prep Public Charter School

b. **Proposed school location:** Community School District 7

c. **Planned grades and enrollment:**

	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>	<b>Year 5</b>
<b>K</b>	84	56	90	90	90
<b>1</b>	112	84	90	90	90
<b>2</b>		109	90	90	90
<b>3</b>			104	86	86
<b>4</b>				99	82
<b>5</b>					94
	<b>196</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>532</b>

d. **Proposed management/partner organizations:** Not applicable.

e. **Proposed school mission:** Brilla College Prep, a K-8 school in the classical tradition, helps students to grow intellectually, socially, and physically into young men and women of good character and spirit, and to be prepared for excellence in high school, college, and beyond.

f. **School overview:** The school will be built on the following six cornerstones.

- 1) **High Expectations.** Because we believe in the inherent dignity and potential of every child, we have high expectations for our students' academic achievement and conduct that make no excuses based on their backgrounds or socio-economic status.
- 2) **Results Matter.** Brilla will relentlessly focus on high student performance on standardized tests and other objective measures because we hold ourselves accountable for helping students develop personally and academically in ways that will enable them to succeed at the nation's best high schools and colleges.
- 3) **Lead with Character.** Good character makes for a meaningful life and produces lasting personal and social happiness. The development of the virtues of justice, self-control, good judgment, courage, and kindness in students is central to our educational mission.
- 4) **Choice & Commitment.** Students, their parents, and the faculty of Brilla choose to participate in the program. Everyone must make and uphold a commitment to the school and to each other to put in the time and effort required to achieve success.
- 5) **More Time.** There are no shortcuts. Only with an extended school day, week, and year will students have the time to acquire the academic knowledge, skills, and habits that will prepare them for success in college and in life.
- 6) **Teach the Best Content.** ALL Brilla students will learn math and science while also becoming familiar with the classics of Western Civilization, because of the way the traditional liberal arts convey truth, beauty, and goodness, and because students need the world's best content in order to become good citizens and be competitive globally.

Rooted in these cornerstones, other school design features take best practices from the nation's "no excuses" charter schools, including:

- **Smart start** – Start with kinder & 1<sup>st</sup> grade in year 1, then grow a grade level each year.
- **Power to lead** – The school leader is an entrepreneur who has demonstrated teaching success with underserved students and is given the authority to set vision, build team, and manage budget. The school leader is then held accountable by the board for results.
- **Literacy x2** – In early years, two blocks of literacy instruction daily that integrates history and other content and is balanced with strong mathematics instruction.
- **Blended Learning** – Accessible computer hardware and advanced learning software can help teachers differentiate and individualize learning. Drawing from the experiences of a KIPP school in L.A. that has been achieving outstanding academic results with early elementary students, Brilla students will spend 30% or more of their instructional time on computers, allowing teachers to spend 30% or more of their time providing targeted small group instruction.

- ***Liberal Education*** – The school’s academic program, in both content and instructional design, will draw from the Junior Great Books, the Paideia Program, and Core Knowledge, embracing the idea that the civil discussion of challenging ideas is a powerful source of personal growth and social engagement.
- ***Strong parent involvement*** – The school will provide parents/guardians with frequent communication about student performance, monthly classes, and many in-school and out-of-school opportunities to be involved.

**III. Enrollment and retention of students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the free and reduced price lunch program**

- School’s target population and community:** Brilla will serve a predominantly low-income (as defined by qualification for the federal meals program) student population living in the Mott Haven neighborhood of the South Bronx, including a large percentage of ELL students.
- Strategies to attract, recruit, and retain students:**
  - *Admissions preference:* Brilla will have an admissions preference for students who are eligible for the federal meals program, a sibling preference, and a preference for children living in the South Bronx.
  - *Recruitment:* Brilla will engage in extensive efforts to inform families in the South Bronx and its neighboring communities about the new school. We will knock on doors and recruit families in supermarkets and bodegas, community centers, and apartment complexes and public housing; reach out to community-based organizations, local non-for-profit and civic organizations, local businesses, and religious organizations in the community; conduct open houses at the new school location; disseminate materials and host information sessions at day care centers, Head Start programs, public and private elementary schools, afterschool programs, and youth centers. Parental outreach and recruitment activities will be conducted in multiple languages.

To effectively serve (and retain) ELL students, Brilla will:

- Use SED’s process to identify students who are ELL, implementing Home Language Questionnaires, informal interviews in the student’s native language and in English, and LAB-R. All teachers will receive professional development training on techniques for detecting whether a student has English language deficiencies and on communicating with students designated as ELL and their parents/guardians.
- Implement structured English language immersion. For students who require more intensive interventions, the school will be prepared to provide pull-out instruction and/or assignment to a certified aide, teacher, or qualified consultant.
- Conduct ongoing assessment of students’ literacy and proficiency in the English language at least annually to determine whether continued special services are warranted.

Brilla will educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, with their non-disabled peers, to the extent appropriate and allowed by each student’s IEP. The school will:

- Develop a special education team from the time of opening, including a full-time student achievement coordinator, certified special education teachers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and counselors, and coordinate their efforts with general education teachers.
- Use an extensive Response to Intervention process to ascertain early identification without over-identification and ensure the needs of all struggling students are met before they experience significant failure.
- Provide rigorous training and support to ensure that general classroom teachers are knowledgeable about the needs of students with disabilities, are informed of their responsibilities for particular students, receive the support they may require to implement a student's program, and implement any necessary modifications or accommodations in their classes.
- Provide space and develop a schedule that allows student to receive needed services outside of the classroom while minimizing disruption to their regular instruction.
- Effectively coordinate evaluation, placement as well as direct, contracted and district services through a productive relationship with the schools Committee on Special Education (CSE).

#### **IV. Public Outreach and Community Support**

- Public Outreach:** To date, our team has reached out to several non-profit, church, community, and business leaders in the South Bronx to solicit feedback on our proposal, including Archdiocesan and parish leaders, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Abraham House, Mercy Center, the Hopeline, Rosedale Achievement Center, the YMCA, and the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation. All feedback has been incredibly positive, with community members citing the lack of strong educational options in the South Bronx and the need for schools that focus on rigorous academics as well as good character. Our team's top priority over the next 6 weeks is to conduct a deeper public and community outreach effort.
- Community Interest:** Based on initial conversations with local non-profit and other community leaders, the proposed new school will likely generate strong community interest. According to a survey done of residents of the five boroughs by the NYC Center for Charter Schools, Bronx residents are the most favorable to charter schools. Moreover, the large number of charter school applicants in NYC demonstrates the high demand for charter schools. For the 2011-12 school year, five applicants competed for each available charter school seat, and of applicants who did not get accepted into any lottery, 8,713 lived in the South Bronx. The neighborhood where we propose to launch Brilla is especially in need of good educational options. Of the 9 public elementary schools located within one mile of our proposed new school site in Mott Haven, 8 are rated by the NYC Department of Education with a "C" grade or less; only one is rated an "A."

If you have any questions or require additional information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Richard E. Ramirez