

MOHAWK VALLEY COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL  
Letter of Intent to Apply

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TO: Charter School Office  
New York State Education Department  
FROM: B. Ann Maher and Dr. Kimberly Fiato, Co-Lead Applicants  
Mohawk Valley Community Charter School  
DATE: June 22, 2012  
RE: Letter of Intent to Apply

Please accept this Letter of Intent as official indication of application for a charter for the Mohawk Valley Community Charter School. In accordance with NYSED guidelines, what follows is information about the proposed school.

**I. Applicant Information**

**a. Lead Applicant Name(s):**

B. Ann Maher, School Administrator [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (315)717-4257 (cell) [REDACTED] [REDACTED] 	Dr. Kimberly Fiato, Community Member [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] 
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**b. Media Contact Name:**

B. Ann Maher      [MVCCS2012@gmail.com](mailto:MVCCS2012@gmail.com)    315-717-4257    or    315-316-1334

**c. Founding Group:**

The opportunity to help children of the Mohawk Valley meet their potential through high quality education has brought together a committed, caring group of individuals as our Founding Group. Experience, vision, and a willingness to volunteer the time necessary are common traits of our group, highlighted in the following chart:

Founding Member	Background/Expertise	Anticipated Role
B. Ann Maher	Educator/Administrator, SDA	Executive Director
Frank Sheldon	Business Management	Business/Operations Manager
Dr. Joanne Joseph	Clinical Psychologist, Professor	Board, Curriculum Design
Dr. Tanya Perkins-Mwautali	Physician	Community Volunteer
Donna LaTour-Elefante	Nonprofit/Executive Director	Staff Trainer
Courtney Hahn	Teacher/Educator	Educational Team
Edna Rivera	Parent/Community Volunteer	Board of Trustees
Christine Johnson	Charter School Consultant	Professional Development
Colleen Cavallo	Non Profit/Service Provider	Board of Trustees
Gus DeTraglia	Attorney	Board of Trustees
Mike Conley	Business Management	Finance /Governance Team
Bernadette Kapps	Educator/Teacher/Administrator	Educational Team
Heather Wixson	Educator/Parent	Educational Team
Dr. Kimberly Fiato	Military/Technology/Leadership	Board of Trustees

**d. Board of Trustees**

Consistent with Charter School Law, the following individuals, all members of the Founding Group, will serve on the Board of Trustees for MVCCS:

- Dr. Kim Fiato is retired from the Air Force, and teaches technology at Mohawk Valley Community College. Kim’s experience with leadership training and technology are assets she will bring to our Board. She is co-lead applicant of the application with Ann Maher.
- Dr. Joanne Joseph, clinical psychologist and professor at SUNY-IT, brings to the initiative deep experience working with children and families in the areas of resiliency and social/emotional development. Highly respected in the community, her working relationship with service providers will be an asset.
- Gustave DeTraglia III, Esq. is a life-long resident of the Mohawk Valley. As an attorney, he brings to the Board legal expertise and experience working with the educational system in the region, as well as a strong interest in regional growth.
- Edna Rivera will represent parents and families as a Board member. A native of Utica, Edna has five children in school, and sees both the strengths and challenges they face.
- Colleen Cavallo has experience with grant acquisition, community involvement, and educational initiatives that will be essential to the Board. As Program Planner for the Family Nurturing Center, her skills and background with non-profit organizations are strong assets.

**e. Replication or Network Information:** Not Applicable

**f. Application History:** During the 2011 Application Cycle, several of our Founding Members were part of the Mohawk Valley Charter School for Excellence proposal to the NYSED. The Lead Applicant of that initiative withdrew the application on September 1, 2011. Many of the founding members reorganized in October, 2011 with a new initiative, a new school design plan, and a new name, “The Mohawk Valley Community Charter School” (MVCCS). Our group submitted a full application in February, 2012 and chose to withdraw the application in March, based on feedback from the Charter School Review process. Dedicated work to address each element of that feedback, to strengthen and articulate more deeply the design and implementation plans for the school, is ongoing. This letter is the first step of our application for the second cycle of the 2012 NYSED application process.

**II. Proposed Charter School Information**

**a. Proposed school name:** Mohawk Valley Community Charter School

**b. Proposed school location:** Utica City School District (UCSD), Utica, New York

**c. Planned grades and enrollment:**

**Charter Term One Kindergarten - Grade 5 Total Enrollment: 450 Students**

Grade	Ages	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
		2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
<b>K</b>	<b>4-5*</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>6-7</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>7-8</b>		<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>8-9</b>			<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>9-10</b>				<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>10-11</b>					<b>75</b>
<b>Total # of students</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>450</b>

**d. Proposed Management and/or Partner Organization(s):** Not Applicable

**e. Proposed School Mission:**

The Mohawk Valley Community Charter School (MVCCS) serves students from a variety of language, cultural and ethnic backgrounds as well as students with different learning needs from Kindergarten through Grade 5. An academically rigorous, innovative curriculum prepares students to think critically, to problem-solve effectively, and to live responsibly. MVCCS students will become well-rounded, successful, global citizens prepared for higher education and the work force, empowered to effect positive change in the world.

**f. School Overview:**

It is the vision of our Founders' Group to create a school environment conducive to generating knowledgeable, global leaders equipped for leading successful lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The objectives of the school are these:

- Prepare students to meet the rigorous academic benchmarks as required by the Common Core Standards and the New York State Curriculum Guidelines.
- Immerse students in academic programs incorporating literature, math, science, technology, cultural events, and activities that emphasize and teach respect for diverse cultures.
- Instill respect, honesty, self-control and responsibility for individual behavior in each student.
- Increase/improve language proficiency:
  - English speaking students will learn about and be exposed to other languages.
  - English Language Learners and Limited English Proficiency (ELL/LEP) students will become proficient in English.
- Empower students to reach academic and behavioral goals by utilizing an Individual Achievement Plan (IAP) and instill confidence in the learning and discovery process.
- Have students learn from the environment around them, understanding math, science, engineering and technology concepts from a real-world view.
- Encourage curiosity, wonder, and creativity in each student about their environment.
- Provide experiential learning units aligned with each student's strengths and learning styles.
- Enrich academics by providing professional development for staff regarding best practice.

## **Key Design Elements**

MVCCS is committed to creating a community that accepts and respects cultural diversity. The following Key Design Elements will fulfill the mission:

- **Global Academic Curriculum:** The curriculum will reflect the diversity of the student body, meet the requirements set forth by the New York State Education Department and will be aligned with the New York State Common Core Standards and Curriculum Guidelines. Instructional approaches will build upon the cultural diversity of the community.
- **Individualized Approach to Learning:** A strength-based approach to instruction will be emphasized for every child. Each student's academic, social, emotional, physical, and behavioral strengths and learning challenges will be assessed regularly. Through an Individual Achievement Plan (IAP), MVCCS students will acquire an understanding of their personal learning style, learn to set personal goals and maintain a "growth mindset"<sup>1</sup>. Goals will be reached through collaboration of students, family members and school personnel.
- **Positive and Supportive Environment:** A school culture that emphasizes leadership skills, personal responsibility, cooperation and collaboration will assure a positive learning environment. Professional growth and enrichment opportunities throughout the school year for all staff will create Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) to hone teaching strategies, improve instruction, and revise curricula. The essential questions guiding our school are "How can our school community meet the needs of its members?" and "What daily activities will increase each child's resiliency, self-regulation and problem-solving capacity?"
- **Parent and Community Involvement:** Student achievement will be strengthened by parent and community involvement. MVCCS parents and caregivers will be partners in learning, through shared decision-making and an active parent teacher organization. Students and families alike will benefit from our strong school partnerships with family service agencies and community organizations. Programs will be offered to expand communication, teach nurturing family skills, and increase English proficiency for children and adults.
- **School-wide Accountability:** Teachers will employ web-based software programs like eDoctrina<sup>2</sup> to organize and plan instruction that prioritizes standards, utilizes curriculum mapping and fuels data analysis. School leaders will be actively involved with instruction, curriculum implementation and staff discussions about student progress. Achievement data will be analyzed, discussed, and shared with each student's family regularly.

### **g. Briefly describe the school's target population and the community that the school intends to serve.**

The Mohawk Valley is an area rich in natural resources and history. Among the region's challenges are sluggish job growth, declining incomes relative to inflation, and lower education levels among adults than the state or nation. Child poverty rates are above the state and nation.

For over 200 years, Utica, New York, a city of 60,000, has attracted immigrants and refugees. The immigrant communities that settled in the city many years ago include Italian, Irish, German, Polish, and Arab populations. In the past 30 years, Utica has been host to more than 13,000 refugees. Oneida County now has one of the highest concentrations of refugees in the U.S, with a refugee population of 14%. Refugees and immigrants from more than 31 countries, including Bosnia, Poland, Vietnam, Sudan, Somalia, Burma, and many others now live here.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dweck, Carol. Mindsets: The New Psychology of Success. New York: Random House.2006.

<sup>2</sup> [www.edoctrina.org](http://www.edoctrina.org) Copyright 2010.eDoctrina.

<sup>3</sup> Herkimer and Oneida Counties Community Indicators Project: Regional Overview , September, 2011

We believe that MVCCS will be a highly attractive option for families in this diverse community. As the first proposed charter school in the Mohawk Valley, response to the initiative has been promising since no other viable tuition-free educational alternatives are available. The Utica City School District is ranked 646<sup>th</sup> out of 683 districts in New York<sup>4</sup>, citing a stronger need for choice within the city boundaries.

### **III. Enrollment and Retention of Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners, and Students Eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program.**

The goal of our school is to provide a strength-based, individualized approach to learning for every student, and to provide an attractive school choice option for students who experience learning and behavioral challenges in a traditional school setting.

Our school will seek a high enrollment of English Language Learners (ELLs), students living in poverty, and special needs learners. According to the 2010-11 Utica City School District (UCSD) Report Card, 76% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Limited English Proficiency students comprise 14% of the student population while 16.6% of students were classified as students with disabilities (SWDs).<sup>5</sup> Poverty is particularly pronounced among children in nonwhite racial and ethnic groups in Oneida County. Analyzing demographic data and applying it to our planning is critical to our outreach.

An enrollment petition drive is currently underway. Collaborative relationships with local agencies such as the Family Nurturing Center, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees, and area colleges have been established. Information is being circulated electronically, as well as via brochures and personal contact.

Recruitment of students in our target group of low-income and limited English proficiency (LEP) is being done in collaboration with agencies such as the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees, MAMI, The Latino Foundation, NAACP, and Multi Ethnic Association of Burma.

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

Exploring educational choice opportunities, celebrating the multicultural nature of the community, and building a commitment to regional literacy are currently strong initiatives in the region. Members of our Founding Group are active in all three areas. One example is a partnership with the local STOP-ACES group, an initiative dedicated to eliminating Adverse Childhood Experiences. Another example is participation in the Regional Literacy Coalition, spearheaded by the Herkimer/Oneida Community Foundation and United Way. Both initiatives support MVCCS as the first charter school for the region.

“Community Conversations”, our version of town hall meetings, have been held at least monthly since last November and will continue on a regular basis. Representatives of our founding team have reached out to the Utica City School District and the local BOCES to provide information and solicit their support. Media coverage has informed the public. Informational brochures are being widely distributed. Presentations for community groups that support the needs of families have been held and are ongoing. Parent awareness and involvement is being built through individual and small-group meetings. Our website, email distribution list, Facebook page and a LinkedIn group discussion have become effective tools of outreach to ensure that families, parents and community leaders are given a voice in the planning process.

It is our intention to offer a collaborative, strength-based educational opportunity through the Mohawk Valley Community Charter School. We will strengthen the community through connected families and successful, happy children.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.schooldigger.com/go/NY/district29370](http://www.schooldigger.com/go/NY/district29370)

<sup>5</sup> Utica City School District Report Card, 2010-11