

New York State Education Department
Charter School Office
89 Washington Avenue, Room 471 EBA
Albany, New York 12234

Letter of Intent: Rosalyn Yalow Academy Charter School

This letter of intent (“**LOI**”) is being submitted in response to the Request for Proposals to Establish Charter Schools Authorized by the Board of Regents (“**RFP**”) contained in the 2012 Charter Application Kit, which was issued in final form by the New York State Education Department on January 3, 2012. As required by the RFP, this LOI includes certain requested information relating to (i) applicant information, (ii) proposed charter school information, (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, and (iv) Public Outreach and Community Support and is set out under the related headings below.

I. Applicant Information

a. Applicant information: The applicant is Alec Diacou, a resident of Community School District 10, Bronx, NY (“**District 10**”) and a parent of children that went through the District 10 public school system. His mailing address is [REDACTED]

b. Media contact: Public inquiries about the proposed charter school may be addressed to Mr. Diacou by email at alecdiacou@me.com or by telephone at 718-432-9128.

c. Applicant group and relevant experience and skills: The application is being submitted by Mr. Diacou. His relevant experience and skills include: (i) his training as an economist at the University of Chicago and in the economics of education; (ii) his work as a banker, including at Chase Manhattan Bank, at Bear Stearns as an associate director serving as financial advisor to the State of Connecticut for alternative student loans and the State of California Alternative Energy Source Finance Authority, and at Sumitomo Bank Capital Markets as a senior vice president developing financing programs for the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey, the cities of New York and Chicago, and other public entities; (iii) his work as the head of the not-for-profit organization “Yes the Bronx, Inc.” which runs a campaign to provide a unifying, iconic rallying point that will replace outmoded negative stereotypes of the Bronx with a universally understood positive image and message; and (iv) his experience as a parent of three children who grew up and attended New York City public schools, including in District 10. While at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Economics, Mr. Diacou trained under Nobel Laureates Milton Friedman, the father of the charter school movement and founder of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice (<http://www.edchoice.org>), and James Heckman, the leading researcher on the subject of early childhood development across socio-economic classes (for information on Prof. Heckman, please see his publicity website: www.HeckmanEquation.org, and please see Prof. Heckman's CV and publications at: <http://jenni.uchicago.edu/> and at http://jenni.uchicago.edu/home_page/vitae.pdf)

d. Proposed members the school's initial board of trustees: In addition to Alec Diacou, the initial board of trustees will include the following four individuals:

Kyle Bragg, vice-president of 32BJ Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the largest private-sector union and the country's largest property services union. Mr. Bragg is a trustee of several 32BJ funds and serves as chair of the union's social and economic justice committee. Mr. Bragg also sits on the Board of Directors of Project Reconnect, a Queens-based youth program and he is the founder of the Mount Zion Youth Literacy and Sports Program in Queens, an organization that builds literacy and introduces underprivileged youths to golf, tennis and other sports that are normally cost-prohibitive. Mr. Bragg has three children, ages 30, 21 and 17. His daughters attended public schools through high school graduation, and his son attended public school through junior high school graduation, all in Queens.

John W. Carr, a Manhattan resident and recently retired partner from the prominent New York law firm Simpson Thatcher & Bartlett LLP. Mr. Carr is a product of the Chicago inner city public schools before attending high school at the University of Chicago Laboratory schools. Currently, he has two daughters, age 8 and 12, that attend the Brearley School in Manhattan and he has served for over a decade as a member of the Board of Trustees of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. For several years he served on the board of the New York City Outward Bound Center which grew to operate a network of Expeditionary Learning schools in partnership with the NYC Department of Education. While at his law firm, Mr. Carr served as a facilitator to develop a community recommendation for the replacement of a removed district superintendent and also assisted in the management of the review process for a small grants program of New Visions for Public Education. After he retired from the full time practice of law at this firm, these varied experiences lead to his commitment to serve on the board of the proposed charter school.

Shirley Saunders, a Bronx resident and former senior staff assistant for a Bronx Congressman. Ms. Saunders now serves as Deputy City Clerk for the Borough of the Bronx. She has also worked and served as a Parent Association President for P.S. 153, a founding mother of Jack & Jill of America Inc., Bronx Chapter, and as an active member of Sister to Sister: One in The Spirit which focuses on empowering women.

Benjamin Yalow, a Bronx resident of District 10, is the son of Rosalyn Yalow and currently serves as Comptroller, Chicon 7 Conference. As Vice President of the Rosalyn S. Yalow Foundation, he was responsible for grant decisions, fund solicitations and IT management. He has served on the board of directors of three non-profit organizations and continues to serve in that capacity on one such board.

e. Replication or Network Information: The proposed charter school is not a replication of another school model and is not intended to be part of a network. No member of the applicant group sits on the board of trustees of an existing charter school, and no member of the applicant group is participating in the submission of other applications during the current application round.

f. Application History: No member of the current or a previous founding group has ever applied to Board of Regents or any other charter entity to open this proposed school or another charter school, either in New York State or outside of New York State.

II. Proposed Charter School Information

- a. Proposed school name. Rosalyn Yalow Academy Charter School .
- b. Proposed school location: District 10 at a location to be identified once the charter is awarded. Based on preliminary discussions with community school board members in District 10, there appear to be a number of suitable locations at which the school could lease sufficient space
- c. Planned grades and enrollment in each of the years of the proposed charter term: It is anticipated that the charter school would initially open for students in grades K-2, with at least one additional grade to be added during each of the remaining 4 years of the charter school's initial 5-year term. It is intended that grades 2 through 6 would each have at least 2 classes of approximately 28 students each. To achieve this, there would be at least 3 classes in Kindergarten and 1st grade, which would allow for natural attrition. To the extent required, additional students would be admitted to the upper grades to maintain the desired class sizes. Overall planned enrollment during the 5-year term would be as follows: Year 1 - Kindergarten (3 classes, 28 students each class); 1st Grade (3 classes, 28 students each class); 2nd Grade (2 classes, 28 students each class); Year 2 - same as Year 1, plus add 3rd Grade with 2 classes of 28 students each; Year 3 - same as Year 2, plus add 4th Grade with 2 classes of 28 students each; Year 4 - same as Year 3, plus add 5th Grade with 2 classes of 28 students each; and Year 5 - same as Year 4, plus add 6th Grade with 2 classes of 28 students each
- d. Proposed Management and/or Partner Organization(s): The day-to-day business management of the proposed charter school would be handled by Mr. Diacou, under the direction of the board of trustees, and would employ a traditional school management structure using a certified educational administrator as Chief Academic Officer, a finance officer and appropriate staff. The management structure and size would grow over time, as necessary, as additional classes and students are added.
- e. Proposed school mission. The mission of the proposed charter school would be to provide at-risk children in grades K through 6 with a rigorous, back-to basics education focusing on the traditional and classical subjects of English, math, science, history, music, art, foreign language and geography to improve the District 10 elementary school graduation rate and enable the District 10 elementary school students to succeed in middle and high school.
- f. School overview: The proposed charter school would have class sizes of approximately 28 students per class and would be designed to foster a collaborative learning environment that uses art, music and disciplined activities such as chess and fencing to engage the children and their families in the education process. The somewhat larger class sizes will permit the hiring of more specialists to provide a richer educational experience. It is contemplated that the proposed charter school would integrate regular activities and programs with organizations such as, but certainly not limited to, the Bronx Arts Ensemble (“*BAE*”) and the Kasparov Chess Foundation (“*KCF*”) to provide performing arts education enrichment and to use the study of chess as a device to encourage academic discipline and critical thinking.

The BAE runs art and music programs in 57 Bronx public and one charter school. Since 1993 it has taught over 80,000 Bronx students. The BAE is committed to enriching the lives of students through performance programs and curriculum-related arts projects. Their 58 school programs combine hands-on teaching, student participation in interdisciplinary projects, teacher training, and professional performance, which, as noted in *Business Week*, October 28, 1996 “pushes students to perform—and to produce—by offering models of excellence, and by clearly defining

the paths for achieving it.” Our goal is to teach students the commitment, discipline, and training required of an artist and to encourage these ideals for general academic and lifetime personal achievement and to encourage parents and families to appreciate the arts in and out of school.

Working with Michael Khodarkovsky, the president of the KCF, the proposed charter school would incorporate the highly successful chess program implemented for the Harlem Children Zone (“**HCZ**”) schools in 2004-05. The program has been successfully used by the Promise Academy I and II charter schools under the HCZ umbrella in its K to 3 curriculum and that would serve as a model we would follow. The KCF promotes the study of chess as an educational tool in the classroom as an opportunity for competition by sponsoring tournaments for those students attracted to the competitive aspect of chess in order to spur them to higher levels of intellectual achievement. Schools across the country have participated in national championship tournaments only a short time after establishing chess programs. The HCZ results demonstrate that chess education is extremely effective with children because it involves all aspects of critical thinking, requires intense concentration and visualization, and stimulates intellectual creativity through easy experimentation. It makes learning how to think fun! Chess would also be used to strengthen parental and community bonds by encouraging parent participation in the education of their children.

Fencing is an activity that is equal parts physical activity and mental agility. The proposed charter school would establish fencing as at least one strenuous physical activity to assure that its students develop their bodies as well as their minds. The mental aspect of fencing is critical to success. New York City continues to be the center of fencing in the United States, and there is an abundance of talented Olympic hopefuls and college fencers residing in the city that could be recruited to teach our students.

Students would be taught to read using scientifically validated approaches to teaching the mechanics of reading as outlined by the National Reading Panel. We anticipate using these strategies stressing the teaching of phonics and phonemic awareness as implemented by the Reading Reform Foundation, which has a track record of giving New York City students the necessary skills to decode and physically read a passage.

At that point, we would use a curriculum based on the widely admired Core Knowledge curriculum developed by Dr. E.D. Hirsch, Jr. designed to give students, beginning in Kindergarten, the type of basic knowledge one needs as the basis of a sound and comprehensive education.

Students will be taught mathematics using the well-regarded Singapore Math program, based on the methods used in Singapore, the country with consistently highest math scores among all the nations of the world.

g. Target population and community: District 10, which is located in the northwest section of the Bronx in New York City, is a densely populated community with a large percentage of students that can be defined as “at-risk” by almost any measure. Of the approximately 60,000 students enrolled in District 10 public schools (which are essentially evenly divided between boys and girls), approximately 67% are Hispanic, 19% are black, 7.4% are Asian, 5.7% are white, and the remainder, native Americans. Approximately 85% of the students participate in the free and reduced price lunch program, of which approximately 78% receive free lunch.

Statistics published by New York City's Department of Education provide a grim assessment of the result for lower school students in District 10. In English Language Arts, 59.7% of students test below grade level in the fourth grade—the grade in which test results are best—while 74.6% test below grade level by the time they reach the eighth grade. The math results are not much better and show that that 46.6% of students test below grade level in the fifth grade—the grade in which test results are best—while 52.2% test below grade level by the time they reach the eighth grade. Declining scores follow a national trend that suggests that academic programs based on test preparation, rather than the type of intensive instruction that would be implemented at the proposed charter school, is failing to achieve long-lasting results for our children.

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

Unlike school districts in most suburban and smaller urban areas of New York State, District 10 provides a fertile source of English language learners and students who are eligible for the free and reduced price lunch program. We believe that, by providing a high quality program in a safe environment and by raising awareness of this attractive alternative through public outreach to parents through community boards, elected public officials, as well as newspaper articles and television interviews, we will be able to attract substantially more than enough applicants to fill the available classes. Student enrollment would be determined by lottery among all applicants of District 10.

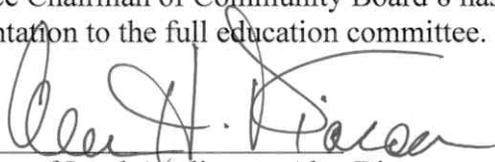
Every effort would be made to recruit and service students with special needs reflecting the population of District 10. No effort would be made to winnow out low-performing students. We believe that our program would achieve success with all students.

IV Public Outreach and Community Support

We believe that there is more than sufficient interest in the proposed charter school to enable it to reach its anticipated enrollment. Public outreach to the residents of District 10 began with an August 2, 2011 press release announcing efforts to explore options for a potential opening of a new charter school in the northwest Bronx. Shortly thereafter, there were articles in two Bronx newspapers, the *Riverdale Press* and the *Riverdale Review* highlighting these efforts. The press release and articles led to inquiries from a number of community residents regarding the nature and purpose of the proposed school. At least two of those inquiries came from members of Bronx Community Boards, 7 and 8, whose students reside in District 10 and would be served by the proposed charter school.

On January 4, 2012, Mr. Diacou was invited to meet with the education committee of Community Board 7, which represents approximately one-half of District 7. Board members agreed that a new grade school in the community was needed, and suggested a number of potential sites that would be suitable for the proposed charter school. They also expressed their intent to write a letter of support on behalf of the proposed charter school.

The Vice Chairman of Community Board 8 has also expressed interest in having our group make a presentation to the full education committee. That meeting has been scheduled for January 31, 2012.



Signature of Lead Applicant - Alec Diacou