

## Letter of Intent: Waterfront Charter School

### I. Applicant Information

#### a. Applicant(s) information:

##### Co-Lead Applicants:



Community Resident  
Parent of a Buffalo charter school student

Emilio Fuentes



Community Resident  
Parent of 3 students who attended BPS

#### b. Media contact: please provide a phone number and/or email address to which public inquiries about the proposed charter school may be addressed.

**Media Contact:** Steven Polowitz, spolowitz@gpsattys.com 716-852-0600 (ext. 205) or 716-510-7399

#### c. The names of each member of the applicant founding group, including all applicants, along with a very brief description of relevant experience and skills. Please identify the current or prospective role that each member has or will hold in relation to the proposed charter school.

**Valeria Aldridge:** Parent advocate and Special Education advocate, East High School alumna, 25 years experience working with the developmentally disabled; foster and adoptive parent; former candidate for the Buffalo Board of Education; BPS parent, BPS District Committee of Stakeholders, BPS Task Force for Conflict Resolution. Assisting in community outreach.

**Teo Balbach:** Principal of Mercury Capital Partners and Board Chair of Tapestry Charter School; experience with high-needs K-12 program. Expertise in budgeting, staffing, and strategic planning. Assisting in community outreach, board governance, and budget development.

**Lynn Seagren Bass:** Principal and Founder of the high school program at Tapestry Charter School; 14 years in the Cleveland Hill School District, serving as psychologist and then Director of Pupil Services and Special Education, followed by 10 years in the Buffalo Public School District. Assisting in school design development.

**Hannya Boulos:** Executive Director, Buffalo ReformEd, an education reform advocacy organization whose mission is to empower the community to put the needs of students first. Assisting in community outreach.

**Roberta Cates:** Volunteer in community education improvement initiatives, retired from the Office of Child and Family Services. Assisting in community outreach.

**Amy Friedman:** Co-lead applicant, community and education advocate; founder and previous board chair of Tapestry Charter School. Leading community outreach and assisting school design development; Member, Initial Board of Trustees.

**Emilio Fuentes:** Co-lead applicant and education advocate; Expertise in employment and training, community and business development, civil rights and civil service. Assisting in community outreach and school design development; cumulative 20 years experience as a board member on several local non-profit agencies. Member, Initial Board of Trustees.

**Mary Ellen McGowan:** Volunteer in community education improvement initiatives, retired Buffalo Public Schools elementary teacher with 40 years of classroom experience. Assisting in community outreach and school design development.

**Joyce Nixon:** Director, National Inner City Youth Opportunities; runs a youth educational support program offering afterschool homework help, school and court interventions, family and individual counseling; first-hand knowledge of the issues facing students and families. Assisting in community outreach and school design development.

**Valerie Nolan:** Executive Director, Chameleon Community Schools Project, Inc., developing and supporting charter schools since 2004. Leading school design development, and partner outreach. Ongoing role in charter school technical assistance.

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**Steven Polowitz:** Partner, Polowitz & Schwach LLP; Director, Chameleon Community Schools Project, Inc.; founder and former board chair of Tapestry Charter School. Leading project development and partner outreach. Ongoing role in charter school technical assistance.

**Deborah Porter:** Marketing consultant and advocate for children, youth and families in education and mental health. Assisting in community outreach and school design development. Member, Initial Board of Trustees.

**Geoff Schutte:** Teacher, Tapestry Charter School. Assisting in school design development.

**Michelle Stevens:** Owner, Buffalo Cheese Traders; founder of Enterprise Charter School, former Trustee of Niagara Charter School. Assisting in community outreach and school design development.

- d. The names of proposed members the school’s initial board of trustees, which must include a minimum of five members, along with a very brief description of relevant experience and skills if not provided above.

**Valeria Aldridge:** Founders Group

**Teo Balbach:** Founders Group

**Amy Friedman:** Co-Lead Applicant

**Emilio Fuentes:** Co-Lead Applicant

**Joyce Nixon:** Founders Group

**Deborah Porter:** Founders Group

**CMD Representative:** Chameleon Community Schools Project/E2 (to be designated)

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- e. Replication or Network Information: If the proposed charter school is a replication of another school model or intended to be part of a network, identify the charter school being replicated (inside or outside New York State) and provide a brief description of the network. Please also indicate if the applicant group, in part or in whole, sits on the board of trustees of an existing charter school, and if the applicant group is submitting other applications during this round.

This application is one of two proposals being submitted during this round, to close an existing Persistently Low Achieving Buffalo Public School and reopen it as a charter school under a not-for-profit Charter Management Organization (Chameleon Community Schools Project, Inc.). The school will follow the Talent Development Secondary model for middle school turnaround (developed by Johns Hopkins), combined with the Language to Literacy model (developed by Buffalo Hearing & Speech Center and approved for West Buffalo Charter School) that develops an exceptional foundation of literacy and personal skills that give students the means to succeed and to reach their full potential.

- f. Application History: If you or another member of the current or a previous founding group has ever applied to this or another charter entity to open this proposed school or another charter school, either in New York State or outside of New York State, please indicate the date the application(s) was/were submitted and to which charter entity, and briefly describe the outcome of the charter entity’s decision.

This is the first application for a charter for Waterfront Charter School. Founders Group members Amy Friedman and Steven Polowitz are co-founders of Tapestry Charter School (a SUNY-authorized charter school since 2001); Michelle Stevens is a founder of Enterprise Charter School (a Buffalo Board of Education--authorized school since 2003).

**II. Proposed Charter School Information**

- a. Proposed school name: Waterfront Charter School

- b. Proposed school location (school district or community school district in New York City): Buffalo City Schools District: 95 Fourth Street, Buffalo NY, 14202.

- c. Planned grades and enrollment in each of the years of the proposed charter term.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Kindergarten	100	100	100	100	100
Grade 1	100	100	100	100	100

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Grade 2	100	100	100	100	100
Grade 3	100	100	100	100	100
Grade 4	100	100	100	100	100
Grade 5	100	100	100	100	100
Grade 6	100	100	100	100	100
Grade 7	100	100	100	100	100
Grade 8	100	100	100	100	100
	900	900	900	900	900

d. 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.

The charter application effort is a collaboration between Chameleon Community Schools Project, Inc. (CCSP) and Education Enterprises of New York (E2), both being NYS tax exempt not for profits. CCSP and E2 will enter into a Memorandum of Agreement outlining the roles, responsibilities and obligations of each with regard to charter management responsibilities, as well as compensation. For purposes of CMD contracts with the charter schools, the CCSP-E2 collaboration will operate under the CCSP corporate umbrella. CCSP and E2 are uniquely suited to partner as the CMD with combined experience in design, implementation, management of schools and expertise with at-risk student populations, including students with disabilities, low income, and other risk factors.

Beyond the CMD collaboration, the charter application effort includes a broader collaboration that includes community members, Eriell BOCES, various community organizations and education related service providers. The group has reached out to TDS/Johns Hopkins, which has expressed interest in the possibility of rejoining the turnaround effort at East High School and has, in the interim, given permission to use the Talent Development Secondary turnaround structure.

e. Proposed school mission.

Waterfront Charter School, a K-8 public school, provides a rigorous education in a nurturing environment, preparing students for excellence in high school and beyond.

f. School overview: A brief description of the school model, especially any innovative design elements that might require specific expertise to evaluate during the review process.

PS 95, Waterfront School is a persistently low achieving school. We propose that the Buffalo Board of Education adopt a turnaround plan that has the Board closing the school on June 30, 2013, and consenting to the charter restart by agreeing to lease the building to the proposed Waterfront Charter School effective as of July 1, 2013. Failing that, then we propose that the school's registration be revoked by NYSED. Chameleon Community Schools Project, Inc. will serve as the not-for-profit charter management organization. This is a new model for charter schools in NY and we are very cognizant of the need for collaboration with the Buffalo City Schools and for support and guidance from the NYSED Office of School Innovation.

The school model that we propose is the Talent Development Secondary (TDS) model developed by Johns Hopkins, combined with the Language to Literacy program of Buffalo Hearing & Speech Center (BHSC). We are partnering with BHSC, and have permission from Johns Hopkins to use the instructional program. While we remain in conversation with Johns Hopkins to bring them in as an Institutional Partner to ensure fidelity to their model; at present, we can say that we are committed to and will implement the TDS design whether Johns Hopkins agrees to become an institutional partner or not.

For the past 16 years, TDS has helped schools across the nation reorganize in ways that promote strong relationships for students and adults; implement innovative, evidence-based curricula and instructional strategies; and build professional communities that support distributed leadership, shared decision making, and increased capacity for continual improvement. Schools that implement the TDS organizational and instructional reforms see increases in student attendance, reductions in suspensions and other data related to student discipline and school climate, improved course passing and graduation rates, and increased scores on student achievement tests. TDS helps schools obtain such outcomes by offering research-based strategies, developed at Johns Hopkins University, that are paired with intense technical

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assistance provided by master educators who serve as TDS organizational and instructional facilitators. The goal of the TDS model is to create a school that meets all students where they are and takes them where they need to be to graduate from high school ready to succeed in college, career and civic life. The mission of a TDS school is to encourage and develop the individual talents of all students by nurturing their academic development in small classes with high expectations, providing extra instructional, social, and emotional support where needed, and developing strong interpersonal relationships among students, faculty and staff. By implementing the TDS model, we intend to create a school that provides a respectful, caring, and motivating learning community and challenges all students and adults to develop their unique gifts and talents, realizing their highest academic and human potential.

The TDS model is geared to help schools redesign instructional programs around the use of small learning communities and interdisciplinary teacher teams. These smaller organizational units enable teachers to build strong relationships with students and decrease student anonymity within the school. The TDS model provides a framework for teaming that build the staff's capacity to engage in distributed leadership and collective decision-making. While principals lead the instructional program and school logistics in a TDS school, they rely on thoughtful input from a school leadership team that includes a school transformation facilitator, academy leaders, team leaders, and partner organization representatives. Interdisciplinary teacher teams make most of the daily decisions on instruction, climate, and logistics.

The TDS model assists schools in developing Early Warning Indicator (EWI) systems that allow school stakeholders to collect, analyze, and disseminate student outcome data on an ongoing basis. Teacher teams receive significant professional development as well as ongoing support from an on-site facilitator to use this EWI data to ensure that the right students receive the right academic and social-emotional interventions at the right time. Under this model, we will be able to create schedules that extend learning time in core academic areas while still allowing students to explore electives and enrichment activities.

In addition to these organizational reforms, TDS provides significant curricular and instructional support designed to close the achievement gap and accelerate learning for struggling students. TDS has designed curricula for math and language arts in grades 6-12, as well as science and social studies supports for the middle grades. The TDS curriculum is focused, challenging, and standards-based, using cooperative learning that maximizes student interest and learning potential. Under the TDS model, instructional coaches provide extensive professional development to ensure that teachers provide differentiated instruction employing teacher modeling, cooperative learning groups, hands-on learning activities, and scaffolded instruction that maximizes the impact of every class period. The flexibility and individual attention provided by the TDS model are particularly well suited to meeting the needs of students with special needs, including students who are significantly below grade level in math and literacy, English Language Learners, Special Education students, the mentally gifted, and those with particular behavioral or emotional needs. The nurturing environment fostered by smaller learning communities is enhanced by a well-developed school climate program that builds school identity and enthusiasm for learning by celebrating and encouraging positive behaviors and attitudes while supporting students whose attendance, behavior, or achievement indicates a need for improvement.

Language to Literacy (L2L) will be used in the lower grades for all students, and as an intervention strategy where needed. L2L is built around a systematic approach to student language acquisition that leads to literacy while simultaneously building strong study skills, self-advocacy, and self-discipline that benefits students in every subject, throughout their education and beyond. L2L is aligned to New York State Learning Standards and is a speech-language pathology focused program that helps students acquire the building blocks necessary for high level reading. Particular areas addressed in the program include auditory processing, phonological awareness and phonics, and receptive/expressive language. L2L takes a "back to basics" approach to comprehensively teach the foundations for reading in a hierarchical way. The program is paired with Fast ForWord computer-based individualized instruction that helps children rapidly build oral language comprehension and other critical skills necessary for learning to read or becoming a better reader. The speech-language pathologist will serve as a literacy specialist in the classroom; there will be a speech-language pathologist at each grade level.

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Erie I BOCES will provide data collection, reports, and analysis; as well as professional development and school support services as part of their support to the school turnaround. Journey's End Refugee Services will provide native language instructional support to ELL students and families.

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

As a turnaround model, the students of the existing PLA school will have admission preference. According to the Joint Intervention Team report of March 2011, the student enrollment is 51% Black, 15% Asian, 17% Hispanic, 14% White, and 2% Multiracial. These students include 24% English language learners (ELLs) and 14% students with disabilities. The percentage of ELLs has risen from 10% in school year (SY) 2008-09 to 24% in October 2010. This represents students speaking 15 different languages. For SY 2011-12, students eligible for the federal free or reduced price lunch has risen to 95%. The school is below the district levels of students with disabilities (18%) but exceeds the district in students in poverty (79%); and ELL students (10%). The school is located on Buffalo's lower west side and is experiencing an influx of refugees and other immigrant groups. The school has been identified for ELA and Math.

### **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.**

As a turnaround model, the students of the existing PLA school will have admission preference. At present, 24% of students are English language learners and 95% are eligible for the federal free or reduced price lunch program; these levels exceed the district percentages for these target populations (8.4% and 81% respectively). The current school population 14% students with disabilities, compared to the district's 17.2%. In order to serve the growing ELL population, the founders are partnering with Journey's End Refugee Services to place instructional coaches into classrooms and provide pre- and post-teaching in the students' native languages to ensure that course content is effectively delivered. The agency also will assist the school in providing services to families so that they can participate in their children's education. In order to attract and retain students with disabilities, we will work on outreach with BHSC, Gateway-Longview, and other community organizations that serve this target population. LZL has been shown to be extremely effective with both ELL and students with disabilities.

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

The founding group has been meeting with members of the community, with current and retired teachers, and with representatives of community-based organizations to discuss the plan to turnaround Waterfront School through closure and restart as a charter school. Response has been enthusiastic, and we have letters of support from education reform groups, local business leaders, local political leaders, and family support organizations. Parents and community members are signing petitions—both paper-based and electronic—indicating interest and support. The founders have started a Facebook page for the project, as well as an online blog, so that they can disseminate information and respond to feedback. In addition, founders have met with the (then) president of the Buffalo City Schools Board of Education to apprise him of our intentions and to discuss ways to collaborate with the district to ensure a smooth transition, clear communications to parents, and shared services. The Buffalo BOE and Superintendent have received information about the proposed school, as well as requests to meet and discuss. CCSP has been given permission to use the TDS structure and is partnering with BHSC for Language to Literacy, and with Journey's End Refugee Services for extensive support to ELL students.

Date: August 13, 2012

  
Co-Lead Applicant

  
Co-Lead Applicant