

I. **Applicant Information**

A. **Applicant Group Members:** See Table 1.

B. **Public Contact:**

Name	Email	Phone
Daniel Brink-Washington	info@buffalocommonscharter.org	(347) 267-8910

C. **Application History:** N/A

II. **Proposed Charter School Information**

A. **Proposed School Name:** Buffalo Commons Charter School (BCCS)

B. **Proposed School Mission:** Buffalo Commons Charter School prepares students to graduate from college and become skilled, engaged, and open-minded citizens of our democracy. We are committed to providing a diverse student body with excellent teachers, a rigorous interdisciplinary curriculum, and meaningful connections to the community.

C. **Proposed School Location:** Buffalo City School District (BCSD)

D. **Target Population/Community Served:** BCCS will serve a diverse student body mirroring the demographics of BCSD. A few current elements of that demographic are below:<sup>1</sup>

- 68% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch
- 22% of students receive special education services
- 15% of students are classified as English language learners (ELL)
- No majority racial group

E. **Planned Grades and Enrollment:** K-8 (450); see below.

Grade	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
K		50	50	50	50	50
1			50	50	50	50
2				50	50	50
3					50	50
4						50
5		50	50	50	50	50
6			50	50	50	50
7				50	50	50
8					50	50
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>450</b>

F. **Proposed Management and/or Partner Organization(s):** N/A

G. **Replication or Network Information:** N/A

<sup>1</sup> data.nysed.gov (December 2016)

H. **School Overview:** BCCS is founded on six core commitments. These commitments are a roadmap for building a sustainable institution of the highest caliber that engages all students in realizing their potential as skilled, engaged, and open-minded people.

1. **Commitment to Diversity:** BCCS knows that outcomes for all children improve in a diverse school setting. This includes increased student achievement and college going rates, as well as decreased prejudice.<sup>2</sup> We will systematically recruit students, faculty, leaders, and a board of trustees of all racial backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, religious beliefs, and abilities.
2. **Commitment to Student Achievement:** BCCS believes that every student is capable of realizing outstanding academic and personal success when held to high scholastic and interpersonal standards. To facilitate this culture of achievement and respect, BCCS will use a three-pronged approach, to maximize students' achievement beyond the standards required by New York State:
  - i. engaging and rigorous subject area curricula and instruction
  - ii. individual and small-group math and literacy skill instruction
  - iii. critical thinking and creative problem-solving in our *Innovations* class

At the heart of Buffalo Commons' academic program are engaging and rigorous subject area curricula and instruction. Each day students participate in core content area instruction which strives for depth and complexity of understanding.<sup>3</sup> BCCS teachers will also make instructional connections with the community through structured fieldwork in the Buffalo area, which may include project-based units, field trips, interviews, surveys, and guest speakers. BCCS' approach emphasizes both skill acquisition and application of those skills in real-world contexts.

In addition to subject area instruction that strives for depth and complexity, students at BCCS participate daily in tailored small-group instruction in literacy and mathematics to support and enrich their foundational skills. These groups will be flexible in terms of rosters and curricula, as they will adjust dynamically in response to needs surfaced by quantitative student data and teacher observation.

Finally, all K-8 BCCS students engage in *Innovations*, a daily, design-based interdisciplinary course that will boost student achievement, as well as allow each student to develop superior critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills, and the ability to collaborate with peers.<sup>4</sup> *Innovations* employs a structured curriculum in creative thinking, alongside a problem-solving approach rooted in design-thinking. This curriculum allows students to solve developmentally appropriate, real-world problems that affect our students, and our larger community.

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<sup>2</sup> Potter, Halley. *A New Wave of School Integration*. The Century Foundation. February 9, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Modeled on the work of Sandra Kaplan (2005)

<sup>4</sup> Hattie, John. *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-analyses Relating to Achievement*. 2009. Routledge: New York.

3. **Commitment to Excellence in Teaching:** BCCS knows that excellent teaching is the cornerstone on which high-performing schools are built. We know that students do best when consistently paired with teachers who are highly skilled and committed to their own professional growth.<sup>5</sup> Through a rigorous search process and demanding hiring process we will recruit and hire a strong instructional team. Consistent and differentiated professional development, alongside an organizational culture and systems that value professional collaboration, will ensure that BCCS teachers continue to grow and improve their practice throughout their tenure. To retain those excellent teachers, BCCS will set clear and high expectations for teachers, systematically support them with high-quality instructional leadership, regularly collect and reflect upon teacher feedback, and create pathways for teachers to extend their influence within the school and larger educational community.<sup>6</sup>
4. **Commitment to Success for All Students:** BCCS will serve students with a wide range of academic abilities and personal histories. BCCS is committed to providing all students with the challenging opportunities and necessary supports to maximize their learning. For all students, BCCS will gather and analyze a wide variety of data, including quantitative diagnostic, interim, and summative data, as well as more qualitative social and personal data. We will use these data sources to proactively uncover and address student academic deficits, and also to design materials and projects that compel students to explore their passions and improve their skills. Periodic interim assessments will help ensure that content is tailored to students by allowing faculty to differentiate instruction, group students flexibly, and implement high-intensity interventions. Students with IEPs and 504s, and those classified as ELLs, will have individualized program supports in order to ensure their success.
5. **Commitment to a Whole-Child Approach:** BCCS will graduate well-rounded students. Each day students will have two short personal reflection sessions modeled after the Quiet Time program. These sessions will likely occur at the beginning and end of the school day. Each day students will also engage in creative expression within the context of the interdisciplinary *Innovations* course, which positions artistry as both a means of expression as well as a tool. *Innovations* will be co-taught, pairing an engineering and design teacher with an art teacher. Lastly, each day, there will be time dedicated to physical activity in PE class and/or recess.
6. **Commitment to Family Partnerships:** BCCS knows how important strong partnerships with families are to student success. All new students will have the opportunity to be visited by a school leader at their home prior to their first day of school. The purpose of the visit will be to build rapport and lay the groundwork for a strong relationship. Face-to-face meetings will occur between home and school

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> The New Teacher Project. [The Irreplaceables](#). (2012)

multiple times each year. In the time between these meetings, teachers and parents will work closely together to help each student strengthen his or her academic and social skills, as well as jointly supporting each child's overall wellness.

III. **Enrollment and Retention of Special Populations:** BCCS seeks to reflect the diversity of Buffalo in all ways. BCCS is committed to the inclusion of all students with all types of educational needs, and furthermore believes that this diversity will positively impact all student learning. Through targeted recruitment, we will seek to mirror BCSD demographics:

- 22% students with IEPs
- 15% students classified as ELL
- 68% students eligible for free or reduced lunch program<sup>7</sup>

All recruitment efforts toward these student populations will be conducted in English and, whenever possible, in the mother tongues of potential students. Recruitment will include:

- Geographically diverse community meetings for parents
- Outreach to local and relevant community-based organizations
- Media outreach to all local and hyper-local outlets

Having secured the enrollment of these student groups, we will ensure their success by:

- Creating a school culture that honors and celebrates differences
- Hiring and retaining high quality special education and ELL teachers
- Creating internal systems that meet all the needs in each student's IEP or 504
- Offering ELL students the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol program
- Ongoing professional development for faculty in differentiation and culturally responsive pedagogy
- Systematic support for at-risk students including:
  - annual use of a universal screening tool
  - interim assessments to track students' progress
  - a robust Response to Intervention system
  - collaboration with parents to help students see continued success at home
- Annual parent surveys to better meet the needs of students and families

IV. **Public Outreach and Community Support**

**A. Public Outreach:** We have engaged with hundreds of parents and community members who support the mission and vision of Buffalo Commons. See Table 2 for details.

**B. Support, Feedback, and Analysis:** From the outreach described in Table 2, BCCS leadership learned some important things about reaching our desired enrollment:

1. First and foremost we've learned how excited the local community is for this school program to become a reality. To date we have held eight community forums at libraries all over Buffalo that have been attended by about 100 community members and parents. Those events have been publicized to thousands of people on the event calendars of many local media outlets. Our team has been able to connect with additional parents through four private informational meetings and numerous parent focus groups. Our electronic outreach has been conducted in the form of our

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<sup>7</sup>*data.nysed.gov* (December 2016)

website and social media pages, where we've had thousands of views, likes, and follows. We have an email list where over 150 people have signed up to receive updates about our progress and we've begun a series of email engagement "campaigns". Recently we released an electronic survey that assesses the community's wants and needs, and it already has 25 respondents. 92% of those respondents would be likely, or very likely, to send their children to BCCS or recommend that others should. Lastly, we have established an online petition where over 100 people have, so far, shown their interest in either enrolling their own children and/or recommending the school to their personal and professional networks. We are excited to continue these and other outreach efforts. Clearly, our emphasis on bringing together a diverse student body, and offering them a program that stresses excellent teaching, academic rigor, and time set aside for creative and critical thinking are in line with the community's wants and desires.

2. We have had multiple families request busing services to and from school. While families are excited about our desire to be centrally located in Buffalo, they need busing services to facilitate a sustainable work and family schedule. Consequently we will actively pursue busing services through the appropriate districts.
3. Similarly, many families have voiced concerns over after-school programming from both a student support/enrichment perspective, as well as a family scheduling perspective. As a result, we are now pursuing the possibilities of after-school programming options through a variety of local vendors.
4. Another key takeaway from our initial outreach is the need to connect with more faith leaders and community-based organizations. We have come to understand that these people and organizations are trusted by our parents and community members, and we need to be more closely connected with them both from a recruitment standpoint as well as a service collaboration standpoint, once BCCS is authorized. We have set up meetings with those leaders that began in January 2017 and will continue through the opening of Buffalo Commons.
5. Finally, we have seen time and again how important it will be to address the lingual and cultural diversity of Buffalo's families and students. During our outreach efforts we had a number of encounters with families that understood we were a school, and wanted to know more, but a language barrier kept us from satisfying their desire for more information. Consequently, we have added a Google translation feature to our website, and we have reached out to a number of community organizations and leaders to better understand how to conduct community outreach with Buffalo's growing number of families for whom English is a new language.

**V. Proposed Board Chair Signature and Date**

*Sheri Rodman*

2/13/17