

Questions, Comments and Suggestions

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Preface

My comments, questions, and suggestions are intended to help me better understand the application, and for all constituencies, to increase clarity, foster dialog, and improve the quality of the application. They should not be construed as advocating a position, either in favor or in opposition to the charter school application. Only when we have had a full explication of the issues and information will I take a position.

Budget: Financial viability and stability¹

- 1) Salaries and wages for each of the first three years almost exactly equal the PPR funding coming from the district/state. Thus, all of the school's other needs (space, supplies, services, maintenance, equipment) must be obtained from private resources. This suggests a very weak and unstable fiscal situation. It also suggests that the school's Director must devote the majority of her/his time to fundraising, leaving little time for day to day operational oversight and leadership.
- 2) The revenue budget shows funds to be raised from private sources that range from 33% in the first year to 26.5% in the third year. Same comments as in (1), above, apply.
- 3) The sources of non-state revenues are not specified. Does the school, for example, expect parents to contribute \$350-400/year (fundraisers shown on the budget work out to that amount)? Have you identified likely grant sources that can provide sustained amounts of the magnitude shown (K\$40/year)? Is there any likelihood of establishing an endowment? To generate K\$15/year would require about K\$300.
- 4) The revenue budget shows K\$27/year in income from a pre-kindergarten program. Aside from the fact that there is no annual increase in this amount (why not?), does the expenditure budget include the costs of operating the pre-k program (staff, operating expenses, capital costs, et al)?
- 5) What is the basis for estimated operating expense line items - they do not appear to scale with enrollment, typical CPI increases, et al.
- 6) There are no expenditures shown for annual audits.
- 7) There are no budgeted reserves in the financial plan. Planning to meet contingencies but cutting salaries and/or staff is generally considered an inadequate means of meeting financial shortfalls, particularly when these occur in the middle of a school year.

¹ For detailed questions, please see attached spreadsheets

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Curriculum, Goals and Objectives, and Instruction

- 1) Accountability Plan
 - a) Why are there no goals or objectives for the biological sciences, ecology, or earth sciences?
 - b) The arts are an essential part of the proposed curriculum - why are there are no stated goals or objectives that address students' artistic skills?
 - c) The goals for reading, writing, math, physical science, social science, et al, state that students will demonstrate proficiency in the respective subject. However, the measure in every case is simply to equal or exceed the District's performance. Would it not be better to present rubrics that specify what the charter school defines as "proficient?" Or are you satisfied with the State's standards?
 - d) The school's goal for " demonstrating fiduciary and financial responsibility" is to submit balanced budget reports each month and to obtain (and submit the results of) a sound annual audit. How does the school propose to address months where either monthly or year-to-date revenues have not caught up with expenses?
- 2) Curriculum
 - a) A major element in the proposed curriculum addresses Environmental Education. How is it possible to provide a sound education in this area without teaching fundamental concepts of Biology and Earth Science?
 - b) The curriculum is "student-driven." It is also "standards-driven." The application also states that "... teachers will ... at the end of each school year ... determine exactly which standards were addressed." This suggests a random, unplanned approach to ensuring that students are making adequate progress in all the subjects specified by the State.
 - c) Moreover, since the curriculum is student-driven, how does the school address a situation wherein individuals or even entire classes evince little eagerness or aptitude for a given subject?
- 3) Mathematics: the service-, problem-solving, and experientially-oriented nature of the school's instruction lend themselves exceptionally well to making mathematics an integral part of each learning activity. A great deal of literature suggests that because math is often taught as a "special" subject, students fail to make connections between mathematical thinking and real-life understanding and problem-solving. I would like to strongly suggest that math be an integral part of instructional activities and not set aside for special instruction.
- 4) Student body: multiculturalism
 - a) What sort of efforts have been made to obtain expressions of interest from the ELL

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- community?
- b) How many of the staff, management, or board have connections with the ELL community?
- c) What are the school's goals in this area? Does the school expect to enroll a significant enrollment in this area?

Operations

- 1) Daily schedule
 - a) It appears that 2½ hours out of 6¾ hours spent at school are devoted to activities that are not subject-related. How does this compare with the rest of the District? Is there enough time for subject-related learning activities?
- 2) Annual calendar - not specified beyond reference to the District's calendar. What modifications might be expected?
- 3) Parent involvement
 - a) What provisions have been made for liability issues (to protect students, the parents, and the school)
 - b) Background checks on parents?
- 4) Facilities
 - a) Which of the facilities mentioned is the best candidate from the standpoints of learning, affordability, maintainability, and availability?
 - b) Does the school plan to meet its capital equipment needs from startup grants? Is there any plan for what will be needed and what it will cost?
- 5) Transportation: Does the lack of school-funded transportation discriminate against students who live outside Gunnison?
- 6) Access to enrollment
 - a) If some families are guaranteed a place in the charter school, then how is this not a conversion of an existing private school to a charter school (a practice explicitly forbidden by State law)?
 - b) The application states that if needed, a "lottery will be held to identify admitted students and prioritize a waiting list." Does this mean that students' place on the waiting list will be established solely by lottery (i.e., that no other criteria, such as application date, fundraising potential, first language, or place of residence, will be used)?
- 7) Disciplinary procedures: May we obtain a copy of the policy?
- 8) Food service: aside from a vague reference to seeking assistance from the District and parents, the proposal doesn't address food service needs of students from low-income families. Does this discriminate against such students?

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9) Special needs students

- a) There is no provision in the budget for ADA-accessible facilities and equipment
- b) The ELL plan is clearly a generic text obtained from another organization. How exactly does the school propose to meet the needs of these students?

Employment, Organization and Governance

1) Employees

- a) By waiving all of the sections of the Colorado Revised Statutes cited in the application, the school will in essence make all of its teaching staff "at-will" employees. How will prospective teachers be informed of this fact?
- b) Will teachers and/or staff have the right to organize?

2) Governance

- a) Please provide an organization chart showing the duties, as well as the decision-making, recommending, and reporting relationships among the committees and councils:

- Steering Committee
- Founding Board
- Board of Trustees
- Community Advisory Council
- Family Council

- b) Which of these has explicit responsibility for fundraising? Accountability?
- c) What are the timelines for the establishment of each? What are the anticipated terms of the members?

3) Family participation

- a) Is family participation an explicit requirement in order for a student to continue attend the charter school? Can a student be expelled for family non-participation?
- b) Does family participation include direct financial support? Other types of direct support? Fundraising?
- c) Does the family participation requirement anticipate the needs and abilities of families whose first language is not English? How?