



New York State Education Department Charter School Office

Charter School Application Summary, Findings, and Recommendation

*Application in response to the
New York State Education Department 2011 Request for Proposals to
Establish Charter Schools Authorized by the Board of Regents
to establish the proposed:*

Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School

September 6, 2011

Summary of the Proposed Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School

Name of Charter School	Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School
Lead Applicant	Dennis P. Francione
District of Location	Rochester City School District
Opening Date	Summer/Fall 2012
Projected Charter Term	September 13, 2011 through June 30, 2017
Management Company	None
Partners	None
Projected Enrollment and Grade Span during Charter Term	Opening with 80 students in grade 9 in 2012-13, growing to 320 students (80 students per grade) in grades 9 through 12 in 2016-17.
Maximum Enrollment and Grade Span	320 students in grades 9 through 12
Mission Statement	“Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School (CMCS) is a model secondary school offering a community of diverse learners in the City of Rochester a small, personalized 9th through 12th grade high school that engages each student in career exploration, college preparation, and rigorous academic standards.”

The primary focus of the school is to graduate every student with a Regents diploma and the academic and technical skills needed for today’s work force and/or entrance into college. Key design elements of the school include:

- An academically rigorous, student-centered curriculum
- Individualized Learning Plans with Teacher-Advisor “looping”
- Project Based Learning approach to integrated humanities and math-science
- Career exploration through community-based projects or internships
- Comprehensive set of assessments across several outcome areas – academic, college, job readiness.

The proposed school calendar includes 193 days of instruction. The daily schedule is structured to offer a longer school day, beginning at 8:15 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., with more time allotted per week for instruction than in the traditional public schools.

When hiring staff, the proposed school states that it will comply with all requirements of New York State Education Law. The hiring of general education teachers will be in accordance with Article 56, Section 2854(3) (a-1). All special education teachers will be New York State certified in special education and will be “highly qualified” as defined by NCLB and IDEA. In order to retain staff the proposed school will offer competitive salaries and benefits, and professional development opportunities.

The planning team will draw upon the Rochester City School District curriculum framework as the foundation of the proposed school’s pedagogy and will enhance it by offering a student-centered environment with project-based learning, career exploration, and an internship program as its core. Teachers will be trained in creating a workshop setting in classrooms and will generate projects and activities that are aligned with the NYS Common Core Standards (NYSCCS). Teachers will also receive training and resources in curriculum integration and career internship program development. The school

learning environment will be extended beyond school walls to the home, libraries, museums, college, and the work place.

Prior to entering the charter school, prospective 9th and 10th grade students will meet with advisement teachers and parents to create Individual Learning Plans (ILP). The Individual Learning Plan will contain three major components: 1) Individual Student Profile which is a summary of each student's educational and career achievement, accomplishments, interests, skill strengths and gaps; 2) Learning Goals and Success Plan which details a minimum of five goals per year that reflect educational, career, and personal growth interests of each student; and 3) Student Work, Assessment Checklists & Rubrics which includes student work that demonstrates academic rigor and completion of required projects, internship work products, and a job-readiness skill checklist that will be measured utilizing teacher developed rubrics. For some students, an intervention plan will be incorporated. The goal is to link academic achievement as closely as possible to something that the student cares deeply about in the real world.

An advisement teacher will be responsible for navigating and guiding the learning process with 14-18 students, over two to four years. In this role, he or she will take on aspects of administration, guidance, management, recruitment, and community outreach. The advisement teachers will build relationships with each student and his or her family by meeting, conferencing, and visiting each student's family routinely. Though certified in one area, advisement teachers will be able to draw on many disciplines to meet the needs of each student and to facilitate students' completion of projects and advisory activities.

The school plans to introduce Grade 9 students to the Career Choices Program, developed by Academic Innovations, a curriculum development company that infuses career guidance themes into the English, math, and social science. Through this program, the school will teach students, through a myriad of projects and activities, how to make decisions when selecting a career choice, how to use effective communications, and how to work with others in pairs, in groups, and/or in teams.

The school will connect students and the school to the community and businesses and will provide them with greater opportunities to become employable citizens in this high tech region. Students will go out in the real world to learn, with the aid of business mentors. Community members will serve as a resource for students, providing a varied menu of options which will include workshops on job-readiness skills and career exploration information. The school will likewise serve as an asset to the local community and its needs, giving students authentic ways to utilize skills and knowledge while contributing to the local community as valued citizens—something not done in a traditional high school setting.

Students in Grades 11 and 12 will participate in community internships to learn in an authentic way as they contribute their time and enthusiasm to their field of interest. In addition, interns will produce, with input from their mentors, projects that will be useful to their host sites. A School Coordinator of Internship will pool together several resources, work sites, and mentors and align them with each student's career interest and choice and a Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection Youth Advocate will assist in the coordination and placement of students at their internship sites.

The school plans to use COMET, a web-based, user-friendly, customized database management system which allows staff to manage, store, and access student data to inform instruction and to collect data on socio-emotional indicators, which combined serve as an early warning system. This data system is a key piece of the school's continuous improvement model and the development of a student's Individual Learning Plans (ILP). COMET is locally operated at the Children's Institute of Rochester, New York.

The founding group has expressed its desire to work with the Rochester City School District and will participate in the District/Charter Collaboration Compact upon charter approval. Through the District/Charter Collaboration Compact, the district and charter school leaders commit to collaboration in

the interest of positive outcomes for all students in the city of Rochester. This collaboration includes a specific commitment to sharing effective practices with schools throughout the city of Rochester.

The proposed school will not establish new enrollment preferences for students beyond those listed in statute. The first preference will be for students who reside in the district of location. The school anticipates that 16.9 percent of its student population will be Students with Disabilities and 10.5 percent will be English Language Learners, based on data included in the Rochester City School District 2009-2010 school report card. The proposed school anticipates that student enrollment will mirror the district of location. The founding group presented a detailed, substantive narrative of how the proposed school will attract and retain its students, in particular those students who are English Language Learners and those students who have disabilities.

As required, the founding group provided a set of draft by-laws and code of ethics. Additionally, a curriculum vitae or resume, a completed statement of assurances, and a completed request for information from prospective charter school board member form was provided for each founding group member proposed for a seat on the school's board of trustees once the school is chartered.

The founding group consists of ten individuals, all but one of whom will transition to the Board of Trustees. The group consists of individuals who have a range of expertise in the areas of education (including higher education), school administration, curriculum development, career development, law, financial planning, business management, not-for profit management, real estate, accounting, fundraising, community engagement and parent involvement.

The proposed initial members of the board of trustees are set forth below:

- **Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason**, the proposed President of the Board of Trustees, is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at St. John Fisher College. She is a city parent who is knowledgeable about urban school reform, teacher quality, and culturally relevant pedagogy.
- **Kevin McCormick**, the proposed Vice-President of the Board, is the Senior Vice President of Informational Technology at Rochester Midland Company. Mr. McCormick brings expertise in organizational development, finance, and student career exploration and was a member of a Design Team to create a model small high school for the City School District.
- **Eugenio Cotto, Jr.**, a city resident, is the proposed Secretary of the Board. As Executive Director of Group 14621, a community-based organization, he has been active for 36 years in assisting city residents with civic engagement. His work has also included student recruitment, and providing internship opportunities.
- **Ellen Tomasso**, a city resident and lawyer in Rochester, provides guidance in the areas of charter school law and governance. Her children have attended city schools.
- **Connie Felder** is the Deputy Director of Rochester Works, Inc., a federally funded non-profit representing the local Workforce Investment Board which provides workforce preparation services and programs for youth, adults, and employers.
- **Dianne Spang** is the Director of K-12 Programs at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) and has worked with Rochester public schools on college readiness programming, including GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), STEP (Science, Technology and Entry Programs), and Liberty Partnerships Program. She also was a member of a Design Team to create a model small high school for the City School District.
- **Roderick Green** is the Executive Director of the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection, an exemplary program targeting academic enhancement, career readiness skills, mentoring, and college scholarships for Rochester youth.

- **Christine Hill**, a city resident and retired Rochester City School District's Director of Special Education, secondary assistant principal and former charter school administrator, provides knowledge of the critical components of special education, ELL, and charter school operations.

Additional members of the founding group who are proposed school employees include:

- **Dennis Francione**, founder and proposed Chief Executive Officer, is a retired Rochester City School District Principal and city resident who has created and implemented a small high school design with the support and resources of the Rochester City School District and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Dennis served as a teacher and school administrator for 35 years, having spent 31 years in the Rochester City School District. He worked on project-based activities with the National Center on Education and the Economy, participated in Atlas Communities, and organized and implemented communication studies programs in two separate high schools.

Members of the founding group who will not move forward in an official capacity but are willing to serve as a resource in the future:

- **Marci Miller**, the Rochester Regional Vice President for the Empire State Chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc., will serve in an advisory capacity and facilitate the matching of students with member companies that will provide internship opportunities within the building trades.

The organizational structure of the proposed school includes a Chief Executive Officer, who will report directly to the Board of Trustees, and an Education Leader and Director of Operations, who will report directly to the Chief Executive Officer.

The proposed school has not identified a specific facility in which to house the proposed school. However, several local facilities under the auspices of the Catholic Diocese are suitable and under consideration. Upon approval of a charter, the Board of Trustees will select a realtor to identify other potential locations and make the most appropriate selection.

Fiscal Impact on District of Location Fiscal Impact on District of Location

The projected fiscal impact of the Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School on its district of residence, the Rochester City School District (“RCSD”), is summarized below.

Year	Number of Students Enrolled in Charter School Per Year ⁽¹⁾	Charter School Basic Tuition Rate ⁽²⁾	Total Charter School Basic Tuition Only	Estimated District Special Education Payment ⁽¹⁾	Total District General Fund Budget ⁽³⁾	Percent of District Budget
2012-13	80	\$12,090	\$967,200	\$22,000	\$681,165,332	0.15%
2016-17	320	\$14,533	\$4,650,560	\$80,000	\$667,643,860	0.71%

The calculations above assume that there will be no annual increase in the charter school basic tuition rate in year one (2012-13) and a 4.7% average annual increase each year thereafter for the remainder of the charter period (2013-14 thru 2016-17). Projections for Rochester’s Total District General Fund Budget were not available; therefore, the 2012-2013 budget was assumed to remain flat over the 2011-2012 budget.⁴ However, since the budget of RCSD has declined over the last two years, the New York State Education Department (the “Department”) assumes a modest 0.5% annual budget decline during the remaining years of the charter, so as to avoid underestimating the fiscal impact that the charter school will have on the district going forward.⁵

It should be noted that, given the nature of district-based per-pupil funding, the estimates made by the Department in conducting this analysis are subject to unpredictable financial fluctuations. For forecasting purposes, the fiscal impact of this charter school on the district in which it will be located assumes that: there will be no fluctuations in the grade levels served by existing charter schools over the course of the school’s charter term; the charter school will be able to meet its projected maximum enrollment; all students will come from RCSD; and, all students will attend every day for a 1.0 FTE.

The specifics of the proposed school’s enrollment composition is not yet available; however, the Department acknowledges that the programmatic and fiscal impact of the proposed charter school on other public and private schools in the same area will also be influenced by the proportion of charter school enrollees that would have attended a same-district public or private school had it not been for the presence of this charter school.

¹ Source: Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School Application.

² Source: Education Law §2856(1)(a)(iii) and NYS Education Department Office of State Aid Charter School Basic Tuition Rate Analysis, September 2011.

³ Source: Rochester CSD Budget Book and District Profile 2011.

⁴ Rochester’s Total District General Fund Budget includes federal special education revenue and other federal grants and/or funds provided.

⁵ Additional notes: While the school has included other federal grants and/or funds that may flow through the district to be received by the school in its proposed budget, this analysis does not account for these sources of potential revenue, nor does it include the value of certain services (e.g., transportation) that the district is required to provide the charter school. However, the analysis also does not account for district per-pupil expense and overall resource savings that is likely to result from a significant reduction in the number of students attending district public schools.

Below, for reference, please find additional data on the Rochester City School District.⁶

Rochester City School District Data

Enrollment Data	
Total District Enrollment:	31,653
Grade 9 through 12 Enrollment:	9,848
White:	10%
Black/African-American:	64%
Hispanic/Latino:	22%
American Indian/Alaskan Native:	0%
Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander:	3%
Free/Reduced Priced Lunch:	85%
English Language Learners:	10%
Students with Disabilities:⁷	17%
Graduation Rate	
Graduation Rate for 2005 Cohort:	46%

2009-10 State Assessments (% proficient)		
Grade level	English Language Arts	Mathematics
Cohort 9-12	54%	54%

Public Hearing and Public Comment

As required by the Charter Schools Act, the Rochester City School District held a hearing on Thursday, May 26, 2011 to solicit comments from the community concerning the proposed charter school. Six community members spoke at the meeting; two in support of and four who opposed the proposed charter school. Those voicing opposition to the charter school cite the loss of funding by the public school district of location, and generally expressed opposition to the reforms previously outlined by the former Superintendent of Rochester City School District.

Additionally, the Department notified the school district as well as public and private schools in the region of the proposed school application, and issued an open call for written public comment via the State Education Department Charter School Office. The Superintendent of Rochester City School District was contacted by letter and invited to comment directly. Included in the application to establish the proposed school were letters of support from the Rochester City School District’s Board President Malik Evans and from the former Superintendent Jean-Claude Brizard.

⁶ Source: 2009-2010 New York State School Report Card (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/reportcard/2010/home.html>) and Special Education School District Data Profile for 2009-10 (<http://eservices.nysed.gov/sepubrep/>).

⁷ This figure is the available city-wide classification rate: the ratio of the count of school-age students with disabilities (ages 4-21) to the total enrollment of all school-age students in the school district, including students who are parentally placed in nonpublic schools located in the school district. The numerator includes all school-age students for whom a district has Committee on Special Education (CSE) responsibility to ensure the provision of special education services. The denominator includes all school-age students who reside in the district. In the case of parentally placed students in nonpublic schools, it includes the number of students who attend the nonpublic schools located in the school district. Source data are drawn from the Student Information Repository System (SIRS) and from the Basic Education Data System (BEDS).

Application Review Process

On January 3, 2011, as required by the New York State Charter Schools Act, the New York State Education Department (the “Department”) released the *2011 Request for Proposals (“RFP”) to Establish Charter Schools Authorized by the Board of Regents*. In this cycle, the Department could legally award 58 new charters per Education Law subdivision 2852(9), 25 of which reflect charters that were available but not awarded during the 2010 RFP cycle. The charter school application process utilized by the Board of Regents and the Department during the 2011 RFP cycle is multi-stage, and designed to ensure that any charter school applicant presented to the Board of Regents for possible approval demonstrates four essential competencies:

1. The applicant demonstrates clear understanding of the New York State Charter Schools Act and what it means to comply with the Act.
2. The applicant’s proposed school demonstrates clear alignment with the educational priorities stated in the law.
3. The applicant presents a coherent and practical design for the proposed school.
4. The applicant demonstrates the necessary experience, skill and will to manage the challenging and dynamic process of opening and operating a public charter school.

During this 2011 cycle, 100 letters of intent were received in January 2011, 80 charter school prospectuses were submitted by January 31, 2011, and after an initial review process, 37 applicants were invited to submit full applications. The Department received 36 full applications, including the application for Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School.

To assess all four necessary competencies, the Department reviewed and evaluated a letter of intent, a prospectus, and a full application. The prospectus, and the educational, organizational, and fiscal plan presented in the full application were evaluated by Department and external reviewers. After determining that the written materials submitted sufficiently met application criteria, the Department staff also conducted a two-hour capacity interview with the founding group and proposed board members for the school.

Findings

Based on the comprehensive review of the application and of the applicant, founding group, and proposed board of trustees, the Department makes the following findings:

1. The charter school described in the application meets the requirements of Article 56 of the Education Law (as amended) and other applicable laws, rules, and regulations.⁸ This finding is based on the following (among other things):
 - the applicant has included in the application the information required by §2851(2)
 - the proposed charter school would meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets, as prescribed by the NYS Board of Regents,⁹ of students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the federal free and reduced price lunch program as required by Education Law subdivision 2852(9-a)(b)(i)

⁸ Education Law §2852(2)(a).

⁹ Note, the data upon which to base the enrollment and retention targets mandated by the amendments to the Act was not available at the time the statute mandated the RFP be issued. As a result, the Department evaluated the plans for student enrollment, recruitment, and retention plans of each class of student referenced in the amendments to the Act such that the Department could make the determination that the applicant would meet or exceed the enrollment and retention targets when developed. During the first year of the charter term, the Department will develop such targets and incorporate these targets into the school’s charter agreement performance expectations.

- the applicant has conducted public outreach to solicit community input regarding the proposed charter school and to address comments received from the impacted community concerning the educational and programmatic needs of students in conformity with Education Law subdivision 2852(9-a)(b)(ii).
2. The applicant has demonstrated the ability to operate the proposed charter school in an educationally and fiscally sound manner¹⁰ and the four essential competencies prescribed by the Regents for charter approval noted above. This finding is based on the following (among other things):
 - The presentation of a sound educational plan in the application, which rigorously addresses the criteria outlined in the Department’s RFP in the areas of curriculum and instruction, school calendar and daily schedule, target population, assessment, and school climate and discipline.
 - The presentation of a sound organizational plan in the application, which rigorously addresses the criteria outlined in the Department’s RFP in the areas of governing body, founding group, management and operation, staffing and human resources, student recruitment, enrollment and evidence of demand, and community involvement.
 - The presentation of a sound financial plan in the application, which rigorously addresses the criteria outlined in the Department’s RFP in the areas of budget and cash flow, financial management, facility, transportation, food service, facility, and pre-opening plan.
 - An understanding of the New York State Charter Schools Act, and the skill, will and capacity to successfully launch and operate a high quality public charter school.
 3. Granting the proposed charter is likely to improve student learning and achievement, will materially further the purposes of the Act,¹¹ and will have a significant educational benefit to the students expected to attend the charter school.¹² This finding is based on the totality of the information presented in the application and during the application review process, as summarized in this document.

Recommendation

Based on the Department’s review and findings, Commissioner John B. King, Jr. recommends that the New York State Board of Regents approve the proposal to establish the Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School to open in 2012 in the city of Rochester.

¹⁰ Education Law §2852(2)(b).

¹¹ Education Law §2852(2)(c)

¹² As applicable pursuant to Education Law §2852(2)(d),