



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:*

Young Women's College Prep Charter School of Rochester

September 6, 2011

Summary of the Proposed Young Women’s College Prep Charter School of Rochester

Name of Charter School	Young Women’s College Prep Charter School of Rochester
Lead Applicant(s)	Laura Rebell Gross
District of Location	Rochester City School District
Opening Date	September 2012
Proposed Charter Term	September 13, 2011 through June 30, 2017
Management Company	None
Partners	Young Women’s Leadership Network
Projected Enrollment and Grade Span during Charter Term	Opening with 75 students in grade 7 in 2012-13, growing to 375 students in grades 7 through 11 in 2016-17.
Maximum Enrollment and Grade Span	450 students in grades 7 through 12
Mission Statement	“Young Women’s College Prep Charter School of Rochester will offer young women from the city of Rochester the opportunity to learn in a single-gender environment where a central focus is placed on preparation for college enrollment and graduation. YWCP will partner with families and the community to instill in each student a sense of leadership, responsibility, and ethics, supporting young women in their endeavors to achieve excellence in and out of the classroom.”

The primary focus of the school is to instill in each young woman a sense of leadership, responsibility, and ethics to achieve excellence in and out of the classroom. Key design elements of the school include:

- Small, single gender school with an average class size of 25 students
- Curriculum based on Young Women’s Leadership Network Schools
- Focus on literacy and the humanities
- Interdisciplinary and Project-Based Learning
- Leadership development
- College prep focus
- Curriculum-based advisories
- Attention to health and wellness
- Partnerships with parents and community
- Extended school day and year

The proposed school calendar includes 195 days of instruction. The daily schedule is structured to offer a longer school day, beginning at 8:00 a.m. and ending at 4:00 p.m.

When hiring staff, the 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 school will offer competitive salaries and benefits and professional development opportunities.

The planning team has consulted with the education team at the Young Women's Leadership Network and studied the curriculum being used at the Network's schools in East Harlem and Astoria. The curriculum is an inquiry-based model and allows teachers to employ pedagogical strategies that encourage questioning and independent thinking. The middle school curriculum is specifically designed to be interdisciplinary and to allow for co-planning and co-teaching throughout the academic year. The high school curriculum focuses on teaching beyond the tests and preparing students for college success and leadership roles in the community. The school will design its curriculum to focus on the development of strong reading, writing, and communication skills.

Every student will have Individual Learning Plans (ILP), a living document which identifies a student's specific strengths, interests, and areas of concern. Each student's Advisor will work with the student to update and consult the ILP on a regular basis. The ILP will be used in consultation with parents as well. The staff and Principal will use the Friday faculty meeting as an opportunity to assess each student's progress and to determine what academic intervention services are needed.

The school is in the process of identifying an appropriate online data management or student information system, which will serve as a platform to aggregate and analyze student data. Teachers will access multiple reports and visual representations of student data at the classroom, group, and individual levels. This platform will allow for timely access to data in a format and presentation that will help drive planning, instruction, and intervention. This platform will also be a resource for the Principal and the administration to draw upon when planning professional development and evaluating teachers.

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 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 city of Rochester, and recruitment efforts will focus on resident students residing in the northeast zone. The school anticipates that nearly 17 percent of its student population will be Students with Disabilities and 10.4 percent will be English Language Learners. The founding group presented a detailed, substantive narrative of how the proposed school will attract and retain its students, in particular students who are English Language Learners and students with disabilities. The school anticipates that student enrollment will mirror the district of location and has presented reasonable projections based on data included in the Rochester City School District 2009-2010 School Report Card.

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 six individuals, four 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 single-gender education), administration and policy development, curriculum development and effective instructional practices, law, financial planning, business management, not-for profit management, real estate, accounting, fundraising, and new school development (including charter schools).

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

- **Laura Rebell Gross**, the lead applicant, co-founder, and proposed Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees, has had a 15 year career as an educator, which includes seven years of experience as a teacher and Head of the English Department at The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem. Ms. Gross currently works as a consultant in the areas of curriculum and staff development. She has held a position on the Young Women's Leadership Network Board of Trustees the past seven years.
- **K. Brooke Stafford-Brizard, Ph.D.**, a co-founder, has worked in urban education for 12 years as a middle school teacher and as a Director of Research within New York City Department of Education's Division of Teaching and Learning Division. She is currently a consultant supporting schools and organizations in the practice of knowledge management (codifying and sharing effective practice).
- **Duffy Palmer**, the proposed Chair of the Board of Trustees, is currently a Vice President with Global Partnership Schools. He was a classroom teacher for over 30 years and holds several certifications. Mr. Palmer served as Director of Education Policy and was promoted by former Governor David Paterson to Deputy Secretary of Education, the most senior advisor to the Governor on education issues and initiatives.
- **Erika Duthiers** is Associate Counsel for the Rochester Institute of Technology. She has also worked with Nixon Peabody, a large law firm active with non-profit organizations. Ms. Duthiers brings that experience to the Board.
- **Flor Colon** is Associate Counsel for Xerox. Ms. Colon was a member of the founding Board of Trustees for the Maria Eugenio de Hostos Charter School in Rochester.
- **Howie Jacobson** is a managing partner at the Dixon Schwabl Marketing firm and an active community member who sits on boards of Hillside Work-Scholarship and the Golisano Children's Hospital.
- **Dennis Kessler** is co-owner of Kessler Restaurants LLC and a Professor at the University of Rochester William E. Simon Graduate School of Business Administration and Director of the Entrepreneurial Studies Program.
- **Jennie Schaff**, the proposed Board Secretary, is an Associate Professor at Nazareth College with expertise in the field of educational technology. Dr. Schaff was on the Board of the ARC of Monroe County and has served actively on numerous committees at Nazareth College in the areas civic engagement, social justice, and service learning.
- **Tonya Taylor** is currently the Development Director at The Harley School, an independent school in the Rochester community. Ms. Taylor formerly served as Executive Director of the Newark Wayne Community Hospital Foundation, as the Director of Marketing and Community Services for the Health System, and as Director of Development and Communications for Wilson Commencement Park.
- **Jennifer Vossler**, the proposed Board Treasurer, is Vice President and Controller at Paychex. Ms. Vossler has over 25 years of progressive finance experience. She has held executive and senior management positions with responsibilities including management of external reporting, internal control systems, international finance functions, banking and treasury operations, and corporate accounting and planning.
- **Susan Solomon** is a former Vice President of Marketing for Mercer Management Consulting in New York City. Currently a philanthropist, Ms. Solomon is active on the boards of Sesame Street, National Public Radio, and the Peace Corps. Ms. Solomon is a longtime supporter and donor to the Young Women's Leadership Network.
- **Ann Rubenstein Tisch** is the President and Founder of the Young Women's Leadership Network. Ms. Tisch took her vision for a public single-gender school for girls and transformed it into a network of some of the most high-performing schools in New York City.

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

- **Daniel Deckman**, the proposed Director of Operations, is the former Chief Operating Officer for the True North network of Uncommon Schools in Rochester and currently consults with operating and prospective charter in Western New York.
- **Kathleen Ponze** is the Director of New Initiatives for the Young Women's Network and former Principal of The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem. Ms. Ponze has supported the development and opening of more than ten schools, including the hiring of several principals.

The organizational structure of the proposed school includes a School Principal. The Principal will be the instructional leader of the school and will report directly to the Board of Trustees. A Director of Operations will be responsible for day-to-day non-instructional operations and will report directly to the Principal.

The proposed school has established a formal institutional Partnership with the Young Women's Leadership Network, which has developed a proven model for all-girls schooling and currently supports five such schools in New York City and Philadelphia and six affiliate schools across the country. The Network is committed to providing consultative services during the application and start-up phases, on-site support including mentoring for the proposed school leader, professional development, academic and advisory curricula, and support/guidance in the hiring of staff. The Network's support will not involve any fees.

The proposed school has extensive knowledge of school facility options in the city of Rochester and has identified several promising short- and long-term options. The founding group prefers to acquire permanent space through financing and purchase of a school building. Two former school facilities that are suitable and appear to be available for purchase include the Rochester Christian School located at 208 Goodman Street, N. and the St. Andrew School located at 923 Portland Ave. Additionally, one former school building is available for lease (the Corpus Christi School located at 546 Oxford Street) and various other incubation facility options are currently under review.

Fiscal Impact on District of Location

The projected fiscal impact of the Young Women’s College Prep Charter School of Rochester during its first five-year charter term 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	75	\$12,090	\$906,750	\$33,000	\$681,165,332	0.14%
2016-17	375	\$14,533	\$5,449,875	\$93,000	\$667,643,860	0.83%

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 are 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: Young Women’s College Prep Charter School of Rochester 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.

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
7	20%	23%
8	21%	15%
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. Three community members spoke at the meeting, with one voicing support and two voicing opposition. Those in opposition cite the loss of funding by the public school district of location and the perceived opinion that charter schools are not successful at raising student achievement.

The Department directly notified the school district, as well as public and private schools in the region, of the charter school application, and also issued an open call for written public comment via the State Education Department Charter School Office website. The Superintendent of Rochester City School District was contacted by letter and invited to comment directly. In a January 27, 2011, the Department received a letter from the Ms. Mary Doyle, Senior Director of School Innovation for the Rochester City School District, expressing the District’s support for the establishment of the Young Women’s College Prep Charter School of Rochester. Ms. Doyle wrote, *“There is a great need in Rochester for high-quality school options at the middle and high school levels and an all-girls public school currently does not*

⁶ Source: 2009-2010 New York State School Report Card

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).

exist...The Rochester City School District supports the partnership with the Young Women's Leadership Network and the school's core values...In addition, the school's core values reflect the district's commitment to academic rigor and supporting students...This school is an important addition to Rochester's portfolio of schools."

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 Young Women's College Prep 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

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

- 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)
- 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 Young Women’s College Prep Charter School of Rochester to open in 2012 in the city of Rochester.

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.

¹⁰ Education Law §2852(2)(b).

¹¹ Education Law §2852(2)(c).

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