

MOHAWK VALLEY COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL

Letter of Intent to Apply

I. Applicant Information

a. Lead Applicant Name(s):

B. Ann Maher

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Tanya Perkins-Mwanatuali, M.D.

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b. Media Contact Name:

B. Ann Maher

MVCCS2012@gmail.com

315-891-3952

c. Founding Group:

The opportunity to help children of the Mohawk Valley meet their potential through high quality education has brought together a committed, caring group of individuals as our Founding Group. Experience, vision, and a willingness to volunteer the time necessary are common traits of our group, highlighted in the following chart:

Founding Member	Background/Expertise	Anticipated Role
B. Ann Maher	Educator/Administrator, SDA	School Administrator
Frank Sheldon	Business Management	Business/Operations Manager
Dr. Joanne Joseph	Clinical Psychologist, Professor	Curriculum Development
Dr. Tanya Perkins-Mwantuali	Physician	Board of Trustees
Donna LaTour-Elefante	Nonprofit/Executive Director	Staff Trainer
Courtney Hahn	Teacher/Educator	Educational Team
Edna Rivera	Parent/Community Volunteer	Board of Trustees
Christine Johnson	Charter School Consultant	Professional Development
Jason Tallman	IT/Business Owner	Board of Trustees
Betsy LaPorte	Educator/ESL Director	Board of Trustees
Bernadette Kapps	Educator/Teacher/Administrator	Educational Team
Heather Wixson	Educator/Parent	Educational Team

d. Board of Trustees

Dr. Tanya Perkins-Mwautali	President, Community Representative
Edna Rivera	Parent Representative
Gus DeTraglia	Attorney, Community Representative
Betsy LaPorte	Educational Representative
Jason Tallman	Technology/Business Representative
Colleen Cavallo	Non-Profit Representative

e. Replication or Network Information: Not Applicable

f. Application History: During the 2011 Application Cycle, several of our Founding Members were part of the Mohawk Valley Charter School for Excellence proposal. The Lead Applicant of that initiative withdrew the application on September 1, 2011. Many of the founding members reorganized in October, 2011 with a new initiative, a new school design plan, and a new name, “The Mohawk Valley Community Charter School” (MVCCS).

II. Proposed Charter School Information

- a. Proposed school name:** Mohawk Valley Community Charter School
- b. Proposed school location:** Utica City School District (UCSD), Utica, New York
- c. Planned grades and enrollment:**

Charter Term One Kindergarten - Grade 5 Total Enrollment: 450 Students

Grade	Ages	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
		2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
K	4-5*	75	75	75	75	75
1	6-7	75	75	75	75	75
2	7-8		75	75	75	75
3	8-9			75	75	75
4	9-10				75	75
5	10-11					75
Total # of students		150	225	300	375	450

d. Proposed Management and/or Partner Organization(s): Not Applicable

e. Proposed School Mission:

Mohawk Valley Community Charter School (MVCCS) students will become well-rounded, successful, global citizens prepared for higher education and the work force, empowered to effect positive change in the world. MVCCS students, representing diverse cultures, will accomplish this through an academically rigorous curriculum which will prepare students to think critically, problem-solve effectively, and to become engaged and responsible citizens.

f. School Overview:

Key Design Elements

MVCCS is committed to academic excellence. An academically rigorous curriculum will be cohesive and enable all students to attain appropriately high standards of academic achievement in every aspect of their learning. The following Key Design Elements will fulfill the mission:

- **Global Academic Curriculum**

Through an inquiry-based approach to learning, students will learn to work collaboratively, overcoming cultural and economic differences. Intense focus will be given to the New York State Common Core Standards, using evidence-based best practices in curriculum and instruction. Direct instruction, project-based learning and authentic experiences will provide a multi-faceted instructional approach. Students will choose from a menu of learning opportunities, leading students to achieve academic excellence and develop personal and civic responsibility. The curriculum will be implemented by certified and highly-qualified teachers who embrace multiculturalism and divergent learning approaches. Teachers will set high expectations for students, challenging them to meet and exceed all New York State Standards. Professional Learning Communities consisting of teachers, staff, community members, and parents will assist students to achieve academic success. A longer school day and school year will enable students to achieve mastery of academic concepts.

- **Individualized Approach to Learning**

A strength-based approach to instruction will be emphasized for every child. At entry, and at regular intervals thereafter, each child's academic, social, emotional, physical, and behavioral strengths will be assessed, and data-based instruction will direct the *Individual Achievement Plan (IAP)* for each child. MVCCS students will learn to understand their personal learning style, set personal goals and maintain a "growth mindset". Goals will be achieved through collaboration of students, family members and school personnel. Feedback will be provided to each student's family regularly and frequently.

- **Positive and Supportive Environment**

Teachers will employ evidence-based strategies to increase student motivation, focus, cooperation, and collaboration. Social-emotional awareness and skill development will augment each child's resilience, self-regulation and problem-solving capacity. Students will identify feelings, manage strong emotions, solve problems, and work collaboratively.

- **Parent and Community Involvement**

Student achievement is strengthened by parent and community involvement. MVCCS parents and caregivers will be partners in learning, through shared-decision making and an active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Students and families will benefit from our strong school

partnerships with family service agencies and community organizations. For example, we will teach parents and students about resiliency and nurturing through workshops and lessons.

- **School-Wide Accountability**

All personnel and students at MVCCS will be held to high standards. A model of data-driven decision-making will assure that instructional methods and curricular designs lead students to academic success. Mastery of New York State Common Core Standards will be a priority. Technology systems and electronic resources will contribute to efficient data analysis, collaborative practices and an effective instructional design.

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

Our student population is expected to mirror the profile of the Utica City School District (UCSD). Utica has the fourth highest concentration of refugees per capita in the United States; therefore, we anticipate a high enrollment of English Language Learners (ELLs). According to the latest UCSD Report Card, 74% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. ELLs comprise 13% of the student population while 16.5% of students were classified as students with disabilities (SWDs). Census data cites that 26.6% of the population in Utica lives below the poverty line, substantially higher than the state average of 14.1%. Analyzing this data and applying it to our planning is critical to our outreach.

Applications for MVCCS will be accepted from any family interested in participating. Preference for attendance will be given to Utica City residents, as we believe we can most easily involve parents who are geographically available. Additionally, the UCSD is ranked academically inferior to neighboring districts, citing a stronger need for choice within the city boundaries. In subsequent school years, priority will be given to siblings of students already enrolled. MVCCS expects to be an attractive school choice option for students who experience learning and behavioral challenges in a traditional school setting.

III. Enrollment and Retention of Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners, and Students Eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program.

The goal of our school is to provide a strength-based, individualized approach to learning for every student. We believe that this approach will attract percentages of ELLs, SWDs, and low-income students that are comparable to or greater than those currently served by the UCSD and the surrounding area school districts.

A relationship with preschools in the Mohawk Valley has been cultivated and plans for informational meetings are currently being organized. Distribution of information to locations and persons most involved with young children (preschools, daycare, Head Start programs, pediatricians and family practice physicians) has begun. Plans to disseminate information to community organizations serving the targeted clientele of MVCCS has started (Family Nurturing Center, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Utica Zoo, Children’s Museum, Kids Oneida, Refugee Center, Welcome Hall, Catholic Charities, Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency). The Jewish Community Center, one of the largest preschools in Mohawk Valley, is on the contact list to distribute informational pamphlets and to present our initiative. An enrollment petition drive is currently underway.

Recruitment of ELLs is being done in collaboration with agencies that have a long history

with and are trusted by the refugee and immigrant communities such as the Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency. Some founding members are strategically involved with Utica's Refugee Center. Providing interpreters at our informational meetings is planned, as well as working with them to recruit students and inform families.

MVCCS will be a highly attractive option for families in our community. Enrollment petitions are being completed to demonstrate strong parental interest in our initiative. MVCCS will initially open with 150 students, enrolling new students in grades K-1. One grade will be added annually. Presently there are no other viable tuition-free educational alternatives in the Mohawk Valley area; therefore we do not anticipate significant attrition rates. If seats become available, they will be filled with students from the waiting list. It is our belief that students who are exposed to our teaching practices will succeed in all areas of development, and that parents will be inclined to enroll younger siblings as we grow. By having direct access to our target population through community partners, the planning committee fully expects sufficient applications to meet the projected enrollment.

Because this will be the first Charter School in the Mohawk Valley, the initial response to the initiative has been promising. Providing strong parent and community communication will assist MVCCS in maintaining and expanding the projected enrollment. Meetings discussing each child's progress will be held frequently and will include parents /guardians, teachers, and students. It is anticipated that all parties working collaboratively will enhance student progress and ensure the population will remain constant.

IV. Public Outreach and Community Support

The MVCCS Founding Group has embarked on an outreach initiative to ensure that families, parents and community leaders are given a voice in the planning process. These various constituencies are providing feedback to the planning team about the problems facing the Mohawk Valley, as well as what they are hoping for in a charter school. Several prominent politicians in the community have previously announced their support for MVCCS, agreeing with the founders that offering parents a choice would benefit the entire community.

A Town Hall meeting already has been held at the State University Institute of Technology Library. Other informational meetings have been scheduled. Representatives of our founding team have reached out to the Utica City School District to provide information and solicit their support. Two articles have already been published in the Utica Observer Dispatch, letting the public know of the new initiative. Pamphlets have been published describing the mission and goals. A post office box has been established and a website has been developed.

Presentations for community groups such as Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, and local groups that support the needs of families have been scheduled. Parent awareness and involvement will be built through individual and small-group meetings. Technology tools including our website, email distribution list, and Face Book page will inform and invite a broad base of community involvement in our proposal.

It is our intention to offer a collaborative, strength-based educational opportunity through the Mohawk Valley Community Charter School. We will strengthen the community through connected families and successful children.

**MOHAWK VALLEY
COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL**

Letter of Intent to Apply
Signature Page

Lead Applicant Name(s):

B. Ann Maher

[Redacted]

Tanya Perkins-Mwanatuali, M.D.

[Redacted]

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January 13, 2012

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