

The Brooklyn Charter School of Environmental Studies

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of the Brooklyn Charter School of Environmental Studies (BCSES) is to increase students' motivation and achievement levels by integrating environmental studies throughout the academic core curriculum. The school will foster students' natural curiosity of the environment through hands-on experiences designed to encourage students' sense of responsibility to preserve the environment for future generations.

The growing momentum of initiatives in K-12 environmental themed and green schools seeks to increase public awareness of local and global environmental issues in the U.S. Research reports that American students have increasingly fallen behind international students in math and science (National Governor's Association, 2006). The proposed school will help bridge the gap in general science education between the U.S. and other nations by providing students with an in-depth science foundation. In addition, the proposed school will join the Green Charter Schools network, an organization that connects schools across the nation that focus on the environment and going green. Pending approval the school plans to visit successful school models and adapt effective teaching methodologies. This immersion in environmental studies will enable students to be at the forefront in research discussions concerning environmental conservation in years to come.

The proposed school's curriculum will meet and exceed NYS standards while integrating environmental studies into all core subject areas such as reading, writing, math, general science, physical education, social studies, and art. The school will run on an extended school day and extended year that will include a Saturday Academy and summer enrichment program. This cross-curricular approach enables students to develop a thorough understanding of the concepts because they are actively engaged and taught through effective teaching methods. Student learning will be enhanced with *project-based lessons*, which allows instruction to be tailored to the unique learning styles of all students. *Cooperative and student-led learning experiences* will teach the students social skills to work productively in group settings. *Community-based learning* will allow them to work alongside community members on field study assignments. Teaching students through an environmental studies themed curriculum will help them understand that they are part of a larger community, and how individuals and groups within the community can impact the environment.

The proposed charter school will be housed within New York City. Due to its large population and influence, it plays a large role in shaping the future of environmental policy and legislation in the U.S. NYC is one of the leaders in the implementation of green initiatives in large cities across the nation (Pogrebin, 2006). It has drastically reduced its environmental impact on the world by reducing their carbon footprint and green house gas emissions compared to the national average (NYC Office of Long Term Planning Sustainability, 2007). However, for NYC to be a true leader in environmental conservation, NYC must prepare successors to continue the city's vision. The proposed school will educate the next generation of environmental stewards of NYC.

Field Studies Program

Friday instruction will be reserved for on-site and off-site field study assignments at the proposed school. Securing partnerships with city, state and federal agencies and green community based organizations whose missions include preserving the natural environment will aid in developing our field studies program. These partnerships include but are not limited to the NYC Parks and Recreation Department, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, United States Environmental Protection Agency, National Grid, Urban Park Rangers, Brooklyn Botanical Gardens and Prospect Park Wildlife Center.

The proposed school's teachers will ensure that the field study assignments align with the school's curriculum and NYS Standards. A core group of parents and community volunteers will be trained to assist teachers with the implementation of the assignments. There will be a range of field studies depending on grade-level and season availability such as trips to local recycling plants, community clean up projects, special guest speakers and demonstrations, city beaches clean up projects, the measurement and charting of pollutants in nearby rivers and oceans, etc.

For example, a city beach clean up field assignment will include the actual work assignment to clean up the beach and the reflection of the assignment - discussing the ramifications of polluted city beaches for the community and the environment at large; what were some of the pollutants found on the beach and what are some ideas we can implement to discourage this type of pollution?

Founding Team

The founding team is composed of educators, parents, school administrators, scientists, business men and women, a grant writer, medical and legal professionals and community members who have a genuine concern for student achievement in Brooklyn, NY. The team collectively has over 40 years of teaching experience, 20 years of school administrative experience and over 20 years of business and legal expertise.

Similarly, the team understands, embraces, and shares in the mission and philosophy of the proposed school. They believe that all children no matter their circumstances can and will learn. They will secure a partnership with a Charter Management Organization, which will allow the team to effectively launch, oversee and govern the proposed school.

No findings pursuant to Education Law subdivision 2852 (9) (a) are needed because this application is not being issued pursuant to that subdivision. Consistent with the May 2010 amendments to the Charter Schools Act, this proposal for the Brooklyn Charter School for Environmental Studies rigorously demonstrates the criteria detailed in Section 2852 (9) (a).

II. STUDENT POPULATION

A. Student Enrollment

Grades	Projected Enrollment Table				
	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2017-2018
K	36	36	36	36	36
1st	40	40	40	40	40
2nd	0	48	48	48	48
3rd	0	0	48	48	48
4th	0	0	0	48	48
5th	0	0	0	0	48
6th	48	48	48	48	48
7th	0	48	48	48	48
8th	0	0	48	48	48
9th	0	0	0	0	0
10th	0	0	0	0	0
11th	0	0	0	0	0
12th	0	0	0	0	0
Ungraded					
Totals	124	220	316	364	412

B. Target Population

Brooklyn Charter School of Environmental Studies

Proposed Location Profile of District 17

Enrollment (2008 – 09): PreK -12	27,264
Percent (2008 – 09):	
White:	1
African-American:	86
Hispanic:	11
Other:	2
Percent Qualified for Free or Reduced Priced Lunch (2008 – 09)	88
Percent of English Language Learners	8
Percent of Students with Disabilities	19

English Language Arts (2008 – 09)		Mathematics (2008 – 09)	
Grade	Percent Proficient	Grade	Percent Proficient
3	65%	3	87%
4	66%	4	82%
5	68%	5	80%
6	68%	6	69%
7	65%	7	75%
8	49%	8	60%

Science	
Grade	Percent Proficient
4	77%
8	34%

Source: Demographic data is from the New York State Accountability and Overview Report 2008-2009; test data are from the 2008-2009 results released on the New York City Department of Education's Website.

The proposed school intends to recruit a diverse student population in District 17. During the first year of operation, 2012-2013, the school plans to enroll 124 students (see projected enrollment table for the next four years). The school plans to implement a number of strategies to publicize and market the program.

The proposed school will:

- Establish rapport with elementary and high schools in the neighborhood to get acquainted with diverse population of students and win the support of parents from the community.
- Send out direct mails to parents within the neighborhood (East Flatbush, Remsen Village, Farragut, Rugby, Erasmus and Ditmas Village).
- Use radio and local television, billboards and newspapers.
- Distribute multilingual fliers, brochures, and other literature to local businesses such as supermarkets, day care centers, churches and to other interested parties.
- Hold informational sessions with elected officials, community board members and the general public.
- Create a website for easy access to information about the proposed school.

The proposed school realizes that some parents are less informed about their educational options. Research has shown that when schools collaborate with parents, students will become successful both academically and for life (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Mapp, 1997). The most successful predictor of student achievement is an encouraging home environment, high expectations from parents, and parental involvement (Epstein, 2001; Zellmann & Waterman, 1998). Therefore, the proposed school will hold additional informational sessions for prospective families in the desired language. During this time, the families will learn about the school's philosophy, academic goals, and environmental studies theme.

The proposed school will have high standards for all students including students with disabilities and English Language Learners. Some research has shown that students tend to develop the strongest sense of intrinsic motivation when the teacher creates a climate of high expectations in the classroom and when these expectations are supported through encouragement at home (Roderick & Engle, 2001). The proposed school intends to attract, serve and retain English Language Learners, Students with Special Needs and those who are eligible for Federal Free and Reduced Priced meals at a percentage comparable or greater than District 17.

Students with Disabilities

The proposed school will comply with all federal, state and city requirements related to students with disabilities, including the IDEA, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), that are applicable. The proposed school,

consistent with applicable law, will work with LEA school districts to ensure that all students with disabilities that qualify under the IDEA:

- have available a free appropriate public education (FAPE);
- are appropriately evaluated;
- are provided with an IEP;
- receive an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment;
- are involved in the development of and decisions regarding the IEP, along with their parents; and have access to appropriate procedures and mechanisms, along with their parents, to resolve any disputes or disagreements related to the school's or school district's provision of FAPE.

The proposed school will use a number of strategies to identify students with disabilities. The school or the parent will initiate an initial referral for the student in question based on behavioral, social, emotional and/or academic problems. The child will be evaluated within 60 calendar days from the receipt of consent. Once the child's evaluation is complete, the parent will meet with the IEP team, consisting of the child's teacher, special education teacher, school psychologist, parent advocate, school social worker, district representative and/or school physician. The school will determine academic areas at risk and areas of strength in order to target student-learning needs. At this IEP meeting, the plan will be written with specific goals, objectives, monitoring schedule and persons responsible for monitoring. The School-Based-Support Team (SBST) combines existing resources for students who are having difficulties with academic, behavioral and/or social-emotional problems.

The proposed school will employ, at a minimum, a properly certified individual as the school's special education coordinator, whose responsibilities will include coordinating with the Committee on Special Education (CSE); providing information to and obtaining information from CSEs as needed throughout the year; determining if entering students have IEPs; and working with CSEs and school districts to ensure that all required special education and related services are being provided and that all IEPs are appropriate in the context of the charter school setting. The school may permit the special education coordinator to take on additional administrative duties to the extent that they do not interfere with the coordinator's responsibilities to ensure the school's compliance with the IDEA, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1974 and Title II of the ADA.

The proposed school will make available, as required by law, a student's regular and special education teachers (and other required school personnel) for meetings convened by such student's CSE, and provide such teachers and personnel with copies of the student's IEP. The proposed school will ensure that parents of children with special needs are informed regularly of how their children are progressing on annual IEP goals and in the general curriculum.

The proposed school will comply with its obligations under the Child Find requirements of IDEA, including 34 C.F.R. § 300.111, and will provide appropriate notification to parents in connection therewith, including notifying them prior to providing a child's name to a CSE for potential evaluation. The school will not convene its own CSE, make evaluations of children suspected of being disabled, create IEPs, reevaluate or revise existing IEPs or conduct due process hearings. BCSES understands that these responsibilities are left solely to the CSE of the student's district of residence and will implement IEPs as written. Appropriate charter school personnel at the proposed charter school will attend such training and technical assistance seminars regarding the education and servicing of special education students as is required by the State University of New York, including those sponsored by the State Education Department.

Services that can be provided directly to a student at the proposed school in efforts to support them in their quest for academic success are:

1. Counseling services: services provided by qualified social workers psychologists, guidance counselors, or other qualified personnel.
2. School health services: services provided by a qualified school nurse or other qualified person.
3. Early identification and assessment of disabilities in children: implementation of a formal plan for identifying a disability as early as possible in a child's life. In addition to the assessment and identification process, referrals for other related services that can be provided by a third party will also be provided.

Students with disabilities will be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment appropriate to the child's needs. The proposed school will utilize the collaborative team teaching model for the students and Special Education Teacher Support Services. The teacher will modify instruction according to the academic and emotional needs of the students. Some of these examples include highlighting worksheets, simplifying directions, adapting the content, incorporating visual aids and using bridge books. Students will be assessed on performance-based tasks and held to high standards.

English Language Learners

In accordance with New York Public Education Statutes, BCSES will identify English Language Learners (ELL) as:

- An individual who was not born in the United States and whose native language is a language other than English.
- An individual who was born in an English speaking country and whose educational experiences were in a non-English speaking country

- An individual who comes from a home environment where a language other than English is spoken at home; or
- An individual who is an American Indian or Alaskan native and who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on his or her level of English language proficiency.

The school will survey all students, using the Home Language Survey at the time of registration. If English is the only language spoken in the home as indicated on the Home Language Questionnaire (HLQ), then the screening process need not continue. If the home language is other than English or the student's native language is other than English, then appropriate school staff should informally interview the student and the parent/guardian in English, or when necessary in their native language. If the student speaks a language other than English and speaks little or no English, then the school should administer the Language Assessment Battery-Revised (LAB-R). A student who scores below the designated proficient level is limited English Proficient (LEP), thus eligible for ESL services. The LAB-R is administered only once to each incoming student.

After placement into ESL services, student achievement or progress in the English language is measured annually (usually in April and May) with the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT). The scores on the NYSESLAT indicate the proficiency level the student has achieved each year: Beginning, Intermediate, or Advanced. This determines whether or not the student's level of English proficiency is high enough to exit ESL services.

Qualified staff members and teachers will ensure that the students are being properly serviced and provide an individual ELL plan to inform instruction and provide opportunities for reclassification from the ELL program. Provide equal access to other programs for eligible ELLs based on need. Similarly, provide parental involvement opportunities such as ESL classes, culture appreciation themed-nights, etc.

The school will abide with the requirements of the LULAC et al. vs. State Board Of Education Consent Decree. Depending on the needs of the ELL students based on the NYSESLAT scores, the proposed school will either use a self-contained model or pull-out resource model. The proposed school intends that through the use of certified teachers, qualified consultants and materials in the native language, ELL students will have equal access to all programs and services including the following: instructional services (e.g. tutoring); support services (guidance and counseling); all school programs (such as music, art, and technology programs); after school enrichment programs and individualized student progress plans.

In addition, the proposed school will retain ELL students by translating parent communication materials into all home languages of the students. Written communication will be translated and parent meetings will have translators available. The school will also ensure that parents are aware of their rights and options as parents of ELL students. All ELL students are expected to become proficient in English language at a rapid rate.

The proposed school intends to set realistic assessment for the ELL students:

- They will be assessed on content and not on their ability to write;
- Make accommodations such as simplifying instructions, using peer interpreters; and
- Double grading students as they become more proficient - one grade for content and one grade for grammatical correctness.

III. School Design

a. Increase student achievement and decrease student achievement gaps in reading/language arts and math

There is a huge disparity in the achievement levels of New York City public school students based on race. Results from the 2009 New York State Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) examinations showed that African American and Hispanics in both 4th and 8th grades scored significantly lower than their White and Asian counterparts. Almost 80% of white students scored a level 3 and above compared to 52 % of African American and Hispanic students. The proposed charter school intends to increase all students' achievement levels by actively engaging students in an innovative and integrated curriculum.

Researchers stated that student engagement plays a pivotal role in student achievement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris 2004). They included emotional or affective aspects into their conceptualization of engagement (Connell 1990; Finn 1989). The definition also involves feelings of belonging, enjoyment, and attachment. Recently, researchers have studied aspects of cognitive engagement, such as students' motive in learning, perseverance in the face of challenges, and use of deep rather than superficial strategies (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris 2004). Some have also included self-regulation (the extent to which students demonstrate control over their learning actions) as a part of cognitive engagement (Pintrich and DeGroot 1990; Miller et al. 1996). At the proposed school, educators will use project based learning techniques, technology, hands-on experiences, on and off-site field studies and interest-based assignments.

b. Increase high school graduation rates and focus on serving at-risk high school student populations (including re-enrolled drop-outs and those below grade level);

The proposed school understands that most future dropouts begin to disengage from school during early adolescence and in middle school the achievement gaps often grow (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Moore, Fox, 2010). With producing college bound students as our top priority, the proposed school is likely to increase high school graduation rates by providing a relevant curriculum that is engaging yet rigorous. The proposed school's curriculum will help students understand the natural environment while preparing students with the core subject knowledge needed to be successful in higher education.

The school will maintain adequate use of data to evaluate the teacher effectiveness as well as monitor at-risk students' academic progress. Data will be reviewed and discussed among board members, teachers and other members of the school community. The school will utilize the data to assist at-risk students by providing tutoring and extended day programs.

Parental support is also a key pillar in the academic success of at-risk students. The school will work hand in hand with the home and the community to build a network of support for the students. Research conducted by Henderson and Mapp (2002) concluded that there is a positive relationship between family engagement and improved academic achievement. The proposed school recognizes that all parents, regardless of culture, education, or socio-economic status would like to be involved in their child's education and would like to see their child do well in school. With the aforementioned fact in mind, efforts will be focused on providing extensive parent involvement opportunities in school as well as in the community.

c. Focus on academic achievement of middle school student populations and preparation for transition to high school;

The proposed school will use multiple teaching formats to assure academic achievement for the middle school population. The school will implement a Saturday Academy, summer enrichment sessions, foreign language classes, individual, small and whole group instruction, and college preparation courses. The school will not only implement engaging literacy and math curriculum components but also an environmental studies curriculum that will expand on the scientific process and provide plentiful opportunities for scientific investigation.

The proposed school will provide a challenging and supportive middle school environment as well as a high school transition program that will (1) provide information about various high schools to our students and families; (2) provide students with emotional and social support during the transition; and (3) collaborate with high school personnel to learn about their curriculum and admissions requirements. The proposed school will remain in constant communication with prospective high schools by attending assemblies, fairs, and all informational sessions regarding application and the middle school transition process.

d. Utilize a variety of high-quality assessments to measure understanding and critical application of concepts;

The proposed school will utilize the following process of assessment in order to monitor student performance:

- **Diagnostic Assessments** – to ascertain, prior to instruction, each student's strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, and skills.
- **Teacher-Made Tests** – i.e. end of a chapter/unit, midterms that will be reviewed by administration periodically to ensure that students are meeting grade-level standards and academic benchmarks (can be viewed as both formative and summative forms of assessments)

- **Product and Process Assessment-** projects based on environmental studies.
- **Formative Assessment** - i.e. teacher conferencing, peer reviews, student portfolios, student journals, anecdotal records, these all coincide with the instructional mission of the proposed school as formative assessments rely on the teacher to feed information back to the students “in ways that enable them to learn better, or when students can engage in a similar, self-reflective process” (National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 1999) Ex. Classroom assessments.
- **Summative** - students at the proposed school will be fully prepared based on classroom instruction delivered and assessments used throughout the course of the school year to build upon prior knowledge and demonstrate grade level mastery of content through New York State administered ELA, Math, and Science exams (where applicable).

Assessing student learning is a complex process, and teachers must have a wide variety of tools at their disposal to evaluate students’ progress. Students improve their skills when teachers are able to determine students’ learning needs and understand how instruction can be modified to meet those needs (Janney & Snell, 2004).

To assist student learning and identify students’ strengths and weaknesses, teachers will utilize multiple assessment measures to create a comprehensive picture of student learning. Assessments will include the state-mandated assessments, norm-referenced assessments, as well as individual student assessments, performance assessments, portfolios, and anecdotal records. These assessments will be aligned with the curriculum and the appropriate standards.

Data Management System: To provide data that assists in decision -making and assesses the effectiveness of a particular instructional strategy.

Our school will employ a data management system to collect essential information on students’ learning so that teachers can review the effects of their teaching in an easy and timely fashion. Teachers will be trained in how to analyze assessment information to make decisions about student grouping, differentiated instruction, promotion, and graduation. Teachers will also maintain class assessment binders.

Reflection and Adjustment: assess and improve teaching effectiveness/assess and improve the effectiveness of curriculum programs.

Review of data will allow the school personnel and Board of Trustees an opportunity to make programmatic decisions about the impact of curriculum, after school initiatives, and family support programs. If students are not making reasonable progress with the systems in place, the school community will have the information necessary to find new strategies.

e. Increase implementation of local instructional improvement systems to assess and inform instructional practice, decision-making, and effectiveness;

Each year, teachers would receive approximately 400 hours of quality professional development, beginning with the 4 week summer enrichment program before the school year begins and would continue once a week for 3 hours throughout the school year. Teachers will also have the opportunity to share and observe best practices. The administrative team will create ongoing individualized professional development plans for teachers who will be observed and assessed on a monthly basis. Data from the 8-week student assessments will be used to further assist teachers in informing instructional practice, decision-making and effective delivery of instruction.

f. Partner with low-performing, local public schools to share best practices;

The proposed school will create an outreach program with low-performing schools in District 17. The school will offer professional development that demonstrates good instructional practices. Similarly, the proposed school will facilitate an online exchange forum (blog) where school teachers and administrators from local schools can collaborate and share strengths and weaknesses. The ability to embed hyperlinks, hypermedia (such as video and audio), and images into the blog also serves to improve the schools and teachers. Although blogs are generally used to reflect personal opinions, they have communication with others at the center of their purpose (Kop, 2007) and are therefore potentially effective dialogic tools. They promote learning through collaboration, and the sharing of knowledge and best practice (Hramiak, Boulton, & Irwin, 2009; Ojala, 2005). Finally, blogs encourage deep and continuous learning through regular reflection and also through knowledge management (O'Donnell, 2006). Through this use of technology, school leaders can also offer recommendations and develop action plans to enhance their school. Inter-visitation schedules would also allow schools to create an educational partnership that will be geared to improve the overall quality of education available to students in District 17.

g. Demonstrate the ability to overcome start-up challenges to open a successful school through management and leadership techniques;

In addition to the founding team's collective 20 years of school administration experience, the team will enhance our management and leadership techniques through an educational partnership with an established Charter Management Organization (CMO). The team will partner with a CMO that has a philosophy that is aligned with our school's mission and the experience of creating and sustaining high-quality charter schools in urban areas. The CMO's extensive experience, support and research-driven best practices will allow the proposed school to avoid common startup challenges faced by stand-alone charter schools.

h. Demonstrate the support of the school district of location and the intent to establish an ongoing relationship with such district;

The initial support from District 17 for the proposed school has been gathered from parent interviews, round table discussions with school administrators and teachers and conversations with community stakeholders (i.e. elected officials, business owners, community based organizations, etc). If invited to remit a full application, the proposed school will include letters of recommendations from community leaders, business owners, parents, educators and community stakeholders. Similarly, the proposed school will include signed petitions from community residents who support the proposed charter school.

The proposed school will stay in constant communication with District 17 by opening their doors to the community. This will allow the community to utilize school facilities when feasible to facilitate community forums, workshops, and wellness classes, etc. The proposed school will also keep the community informed on all school events through the school's website and bi-monthly newsletter.

i. Provide access to viable education alternatives to students in regions where there are a lack of alternatives

The proposed school will extend our marketing campaign to include attracting students from over-crowded and failing schools within other regions. The proposed school will provide transportation services to these students.

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