

Key Charter

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our proposed charter school is born of a partnership between educators and entrepreneurs, all united and driven by a passionate belief that we can improve the quality of educational opportunities for our City's children. We have no other agenda. Our only objective is to channel some of the skills and resources we have amassed over the course of our careers into building a charter school (and eventually a charter school network) delivering a world-class education, especially for children in under-served neighborhoods whose schools presently fall short. By providing access to a first-rate education, our plan is to open doors for those children to all sorts of opportunities in life for which those children might otherwise be all-too-often locked out. Hence our school's name: Key Charter.

Some of our school's Founding Members recently launched Beacon Academy in Evanston, the first Montessori-based private high school in the Chicagoland area. Our intention is to make the same first-rate private education now available to families at Beacon equally available to families in under-served communities in Chicago's low income neighborhoods.

Our other Board members are equally accomplished. John Whitehurst (captain of the Design Team) is a retired principal from Antioch, where he led an above-average performing school with a sizable portion of low-income students. Debbie Senoff-Langford is presently the Principal at Rogers Park Montessori School, a very successful elementary/middle school currently in the process of completing an \$8M expansion. Other members of our team include: the Honorable Arlander Keys, a retired Federal Judge; Jose Prado, an Assistant Vice President at a national bank who is active in various community organizations; Jamie Hague, a finance professional; Joy Baer, the president of a large technology company; Rich Silverstein, founder of his own real estate development company; Jackie Kaplan-Perkins, founder of a consulting firm for social justice-oriented community organizations; Ross Kimbarovsky, founder of internet start-up companies; Steven Loevy, founder of a fund-raising company serving schools and other community organizations; and Sam Harris, President Emeritus of the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, who personally captained the effort to raise \$45M to create this teaching center dedicated to educating people about the importance of tolerance and the dangers of hate.

As stated, our team has come together to launch this charter school because of our core belief that all children deserve a world-class education, including children living in neighborhoods with limited resources. Our goal is to create a first-rate school at which the vast majority of students perform at or beyond grade level, after which most will not only enroll in colleges and universities, but they will thrive there, having been taught the critical thinking and learning skills necessary to succeed in life. In short, we intend to build a top-tier school located in some of the most resource-challenged neighborhoods in Chicago, a school with standards of excellence on par with the highest-performing schools in the State.

To achieve this, one of our founding principles is the importance of high expectations. While the social problems associated with poverty are very real and cannot be discounted, children can nonetheless succeed in school with the proper support. We remain firmly convinced that *all* children are capable of excelling academically, regardless of circumstance, if provided the appropriate environment within which to learn. While not underestimating the undeniable challenges associated with low-income neighborhoods, our school flatly refuses to lower our expectations as to what these children can achieve. Put simply, we will not cease our drive toward excellence until our school's children perform at the same level, or better, as the children from highly privileged neighborhoods. Nothing short of that will be acceptable.

Our school will also emphasize the importance of the child's end of the proposed bargain. For one thing, the children who choose to attend must be prepared to put in far more hours than are required at other schools: To help compensate for some of the structural disadvantages facing our families, our school features extended school days and an elongated school calendar. Much as everyone wishes it were otherwise, there are no easy short-cuts to a first-rate education. We will provide a world-class school and the opportunity for a world-class education, but that is not something that can just be "given" to someone. Rather, it must be earned through diligent hard work. Students and their families (supported socially and emotionally to the maximum extent possible) will be expected to make the commitment and sacrifices necessary to succeed.

By far the most critical defining feature of our school as we see it is the goal of attracting the very best educators. We believe that assembling a group of extremely talented teachers is the single most important component in the formula for a school's success. Everything else follows from that. Central to our mission, therefore, will be an effort to recruit from the very top tier of the profession. Our school will conduct a national search for the best candidates in the entire country. To be attractive to the best possible teachers, we will offer the majority of the teachers at our school at least \$100,000 per year, with the potential for more, plus generous benefits.

A world-class school must be sufficiently capitalized to execute its mission. To that end, we are committed to contributing the money necessary to make it work. Specifically, the Founding Members are prepared **to donate at least \$2 million** at the outset in order to put the school on firm ground, with additional funds to be contributed as the venture progresses.

We are no doubt not the first wealthy entrepreneurs from outside the education field who believe we can contribute to the effort to improve schools for under-privileged children. But there is a variable here that we believe truly distinguishes our effort. Our Founding Members earned the money that we are proposing to invest in this school by founding a civil rights law firm, thus demonstrating our long-standing commitment to social justice. The vision of the type of firm that we built from scratch was originally viewed as hopelessly unrealistic, if not impossible. Having nonetheless succeeded, we have developed an exuberant, almost "unreasonable" confidence in the concept that very talented people, guided by good leadership, can create extraordinary organizations to carry out missions in which they passionately believe. We are very eager to apply that same model to a charter school.

Our foundation in civil rights predicts success for another reason as well. In the course of our work on behalf of victims of injustice, the school's Founding Members have built close ties with dozens of present and former clients living in the New City / Back of the Yards and Humboldt Park neighborhoods that we propose to serve. We are excited to contribute to these neighborhoods by drawing on our close relationships to build a school together. We have also partnered with key community leaders, including for example, one of our Board members, Father Dave Kelly, Executive Director of Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation. And we intend to use the remaining time before the Tier II deadline to continue to build partnerships with more community members and stakeholders whose "buy in" we regard as important to our success.

In sum, the founding principle of our charter school is that all students, no matter what neighborhood they live in, are capable of academic excellence. We propose to build a world-class school in under-served neighborhoods, a school that will produce students whose achievements and accomplishments will match those of graduates from the most prestigious and highest-funded schools in the State. We view that goal as perfectly realistic, and are prepared to donate several million dollars of our money (up front) to make it happen.