

Executive Summary

The founding board of Chicago Classical Academy Charter School (CCA) is pleased to present Chicago Public Schools this application to establish the first classical charter school in Chicago. We are requesting a 5-year contract to begin operations fall of 2018 as a K-8 charter school in the South Loop area. It is our intent to open with grades K-5, and growing one grade per year. In addition, we will be submitting an application for a high school extension in year three of operation.

Classical education for a diverse city

"With every ounce of our energy, we must continue to rid this nation of the incubus of segregation," said Martin Luther King in a 1963 sermon recorded in his book *Loving Your Enemies*. In 2016, CNN Money dubbed Chicago the most segregated city in America. 73% of the population would have to move census tracts to even out these disparities; this is higher than New York City (65%) and Philadelphia (63%). Nowhere in the city is this segregation more evident than in our schools. Experience shows that children from all backgrounds benefit from diversity at school. But when a city is so partitioned, it is not an easy environment to create. Teaching what it means to be an American citizen through a classical, liberal arts model, will get us there. E.D. Hirsch, founder of Core Knowledge, says, "Cosmopolitanism means being... a member of humanity as a whole." CCA believes in the possibility of an integrated school, one that "invites all children to become active, effective members of the larger cosmopolis." With a core curriculum devoted to mastery of the fundamentals and to introducing young minds to the great human achievements of past and present, CCA will develop independent, critical thinkers who strive for human excellence – all this is the ultimate purpose of a classical, liberal arts education.

Putting a diverse group of students under one roof is step one; this can be accomplished in an accessible and open-minded neighborhood - the South Loop. The South Loop is not only experiencing significant growth, thus overcrowded schools, it has diverse neighbors: Bronzeville (America's historically Black neighborhood), Pilsen (largest Latino population in Chicago), Chinatown (highest density of Asians), McKinley Park and Bridgeport (diverse and growing). Cultivating integration is step two, three and beyond. To truly integrate the student body, teaching a core body of knowledge, shared by all students, is needed. This is the founding philosophy supporting E.D. Hirsch's approach.

Chicago and the city's schools are segregated. Moving 73% of the city isn't going to happen anytime soon. But we can support school models that unite us. Classical time-tested content and method unify generations, equalize races, and level out socio-economic status. King called segregation an incubus, a devil, a violent disease. Let us respond with proactive healing; through a school: Chicago Classical Academy.

Mission & Vision

As a K-12 classical charter school in the greater South Loop, we will unify a diverse student body by providing a rich, classical, liberal arts curriculum with a strong civics and character component coupled with a commitment to the overall health and wellness of every child. We believe that any student will succeed with this approach, and, with open enrollment, we hope to offer the benefits of a classical education to any family that seeks this option.

CCA will develop students with intellectual and personal habits and skills, upon which responsible, independent, and flourishing lives are built, in the firm belief that these are the basis of a free, equal and just society. CCA strives to teach to the whole student through both academic and extracurricular offerings, to nurture the child's humanity with an awareness of the potential role they have in the world. The time-honored, liberal arts curriculum and pedagogy direct students toward a mastery of the basics, an exploration of the arts and sciences and an understanding of the foundational tenets of our heritage. The curriculum, by purpose and design, is a survey of the best intellectual and cultural traditions as they have been developed and refined over many generations.

At CCA, high academic achievement, personal discipline, ethics, and responsibility will be consistently reinforced through the study of subjects in the classical tradition. CCA students will graduate as highly literate, well-rounded, open-minded and ethical citizens who are well-prepared to pursue any endeavor and inspire others to do the same.

Educational Philosophy

A classical education is defined by both content - a thorough and cumulative study of the liberal arts - and by method - a traditional approach to teaching that relies on a child's natural stages of mental development. CCA teachers will emphasize the mastery of basic content (grammar), development of abstract thought (logic), and the art of expression (rhetoric). There are five key elements to our philosophy: a core foundation in the liberal arts, a language-based approach, highly-structured curriculum, a strong civics component, and emphasis on character and virtue. This will provide CCA students with a strong, common body of knowledge enabling them to think critically and positively impact the world around them.

School Model & Culture

CCA will offer a classical, content-rich, liberal arts education and will adopt Core Knowledge in grades K-8, a proven curriculum that integrates content across subjects by grade level, and builds on previous learning. In addition, CCA will use Riggs, an explicit phonics program, and Singapore math, a conceptual approach to skill building and problem solving. Language mastery is a key goal, thus, Greek & Latin will be introduced in fourth grade through the study of roots and etymology; formal instruction in Latin will begin in sixth grade.

High academic achievement, personal discipline, ethics and responsibility will consistently be reinforced through a climate of respect and decorum, which are vital for intellectual development and character growth. CCA will be founded on the four classical virtues: moderation, justice, wisdom and courage, as indicated on our seal. With the conviction that a high-quality education should be available to every child, CCA is committed to supporting any student who is willing to work hard and put forth the effort to succeed, regardless of socio-economic status or current academic achievement level. To provide a strong sense of community and a coherent, challenging and integrated K-12 curriculum, we intend to apply for a high school charter in the third year of operation.

Demonstrated capacity

CCA is closely modeled after the existing and highly successful classical, liberal arts program shared by 17 classical schools across the country through the Barney Charter School Initiative (BCSI). This no-fee initiative provides detailed academic resources, curricula, and program of study for the entirety of the K-12 model. In addition, BCSI support continues with teacher training, recruitment and ongoing professional development. The existing 16 schools (one will begin operations in the fall of 2017) have a total of 7,829 students enrolled as of Nov. 2016, with an average waiting list of 394 students. Savannah Classical, an urban school that matches our anticipated student profiles has a waiting list of 934 students in its fourth year of operation.

CCA will also adopt best practices from other urban classical schools past and present, including, Hellenic Classical and South Bronx Classical in New York City, Oaks Academy in Indianapolis, Logos Academy in York, PA and the highly revered Marva Collins' Westside Preparatory School. CCA has collaborated with many Chicago charter school leaders to build a financially sound school with a strong operational plan.

Parent and Community Engagement

CCA believes the family is and should be the primary educator. As a community driven school, CCA has been actively engaging with our target location and recruitment areas through an active online presence, including social media, postings on Every Block and monthly newsletter updates. We have held parent information sessions. We have reached out to the aldermen, local organizations, churches, daycares and other family-friendly businesses and presented to their boards, met with pastors and provided materials for parents. We are conducting a parent survey (offered in Spanish, Chinese and English) and have engaged 89 parents. 71 parents say they would consider a classical, liberal arts option for their child. This support for our school and the curriculum model has been inspiring. We have also mailed over 4500 postcards to Chicago residents to inform them of CCA.

We propose to open the school in the greater South Loop, a highly accessible neighborhood that has seen significant population growth leading to overcrowded schools, and will actively recruit from Bridgeport, Chinatown, McKinley Park, Pilsen, and Bronzeville. We expect approximately 40% our students will come from the greater South Loop, 50% from the neighboring recruitment area, and 10% from city-wide enrollment.