

Denver Public Schools



**THE DISTRICT SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY COUNCIL (SIAC)
RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS
TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
ON
CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATIONS**

NOVEMBER 2010

Introduction

The Charter Schools Act requires the District School Improvement and Accountability Council (District SIAC) to review Charter School applications. This responsibility was delegated to a subcommittee. This report is the result of that process for the Fall 2010 new school application process. The persons who participated in a portion or all of the subcommittee work included the following:

Paula Ortlieb, DPS Parent, Chair of District SIAC, Subcommittee Chairperson
Loralie Cole, DPS Teacher and DPS Parent
Jorge Merida, Community, DPS Parent and Grandparent
Rita Montero, Community
Joan Poston, DPS Employee
Jacqui Shumway, DPS Parent
Dr. Jesse Sutherland, Community

After the subcommittee members received the two charter school applications on September 28, they engaged in several meetings in which they discussed the merits of each application. On October 15, Denver High School of Accelerated Learning withdrew their application.

On October 26, the subcommittee presented District SIAC with its recommendations. After discussion, the full council approved the recommendations of the subcommittee.

We would like to thank Carol Mehesy of the Office of School Reform and Innovation for providing the subcommittee with information and assistance during this review process. We would also like to thank Sherry Eastlund for providing guidance during this process.

Criteria and Analytical Process

In reviewing charter school applications, District SIAC's principal test has consistently been whether the proposed school is likely to be successful in providing its students with an educational environment that results in high levels of academic achievement. To meet this test, the school must, of course, also be functionally sound, both in terms of its educational program and its financial operation.

This test remains of critical importance and represents an initial condition that must be met before any charter application will be successful in gaining our recommendation. However, under the process now being followed by the Administration, District SIAC has concluded that other factors are also of vital significance to whether a proposed school should be granted a charter.

Among these additional issues are the following:

- The relationship between the proposed charter school and other nearby schools, especially when the proposed school will be co-located with an existing school;
- The relationship between the proposed charter school and any educational management company or educational network that will be involved in the school's operation;
- The relationship of the proposed charter school and other District schools that are designed to serve students of a particular type or demographic character;
- Enrollment and transportation policies that may affect the access of neighborhood families to nearby schools;
- The existence of alternative arrangements, such as creating a performance school, a contract school, or redesigning an existing program that would address the circumstances underlying the proposed charter.

Recommendations

Independence High School

This application is for an alternative school that would enroll 200 students age 14-18 who have either dropped out of high school or are substantially deficient in completing the coursework necessary for graduation. The students would be offered “pathways”: engineering technology (IT Tech, electronic engineering and computer graphics) or the trades (carpentry and electrical). As part of the vocational education provided, the school would have partnerships with unions and businesses so that the students could participate in the apprentice programs offered by such entities. The school would be located in Far Northeast Denver.

This application proposes a school which, if successfully implemented, would be a valuable addition to DPS and would be of assistance to a segment of students who presently have few opportunities to complete their high school education. Also, the subcommittee is convinced that the persons participating in the formation of this school have the commitment, experience, and expertise that are needed to work with these kinds of young people who have difficulty in a traditional school.

Further, the applicant's recognition that this school's enrollees may be more successful in pursuing a vocation, rather than a college degree, is a concept we support. We commend the applicant for seeking to provide this option within DPS.

In Fall 2009 and Spring 2010, the applications for Independence High School included five pathways and the subcommittee was concerned that the school's plan to form educational partnerships with unions and business is not yet fully realized. With the

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narrowing of pathways to two in this application, the subcommittee felt the partnerships were more solid and the direction of the school more focused.

One concern from the previous applications was the initial proposed average salary for teachers of \$35,000 was inadequate to attract and retain the effective teaching staff that will be a necessity for the school to be successful. For this application the initial average salary for teachers of \$40,000 thus easing that concern.

Finally, we approve of the fact that the proposed budget is premised almost entirely upon general fund revenue, rather than relying on the uncertainty of grants or donations.

One minor concern is worth noting. Presently, the proposed school is to be located in a building in northeast Denver. Given that the students who could benefit from this school live in all parts of the city, we believe it would be better if a more central location for the school could be found.

The subcommittee unanimously recommends that the charter application of Independence High School be granted.