

Scoring Sheet: Pittsburgh Public Schools Charter Application Review Process

Name of Charter Applicant: The Environmental Charter School at Frick Park...An Imagine School
Name of Review Team Reviewer: Group Consensus
Date of Score Submission: 01/08/07

<u>Section</u>	<u>Possible Points</u>	<u>Actual Points</u>
Part I: Mission, Purpose and Needs, and Marketing Data:		
a) mission statement	18	<u>10</u>
b) purpose and needs	18	<u>10</u>
c) marketing data	18	<u>15</u>

Notes:

1. The proposed plan includes a clearly stated mission but does not include a statement regarding environmental education and therefore is not aligned. The mission is generic in nature and is in need of further development to exemplify the proposed "uniqueness" of the environmental focus.
2. The Applicant provides an assessment of the needs and strengths of the students and the community, describes the need for the school, and explains why the charter school model is an appropriate vehicle to address the need. The Applicant attempts to explain how its proposed charter school will provide expanded educational opportunities beyond those currently provided by the Pittsburgh Public Schools and references details of the current education opportunities available to students (an environmental school and a longer school day, pg. 3). However, PPS offers longer school days and year through the Accelerated Learning Academies. In addition, the district is using reformed-based instructional materials.
3. The Applicant conveys the scope of backing for the proposed Charter School, describes the community support provides evidence of support and describes its marketing plan. However, there is concern about student diversity. Based on the location of the school, the demographics of the area, and the Applicant's recruitment plan, the student population may be predominately white. The Applicant states they will "actively recruit and enroll a diverse student body including racial, ethnic, socio-economic, academic proficiency, physical ability, and primary language diversity" (pg. 3 of Charter Application). However, they fail to articulate how they will ensure this diversity.
4. The Purpose and Needs section of the Charter Application contains a large amount of information concerning the uniqueness of this school via the greening of the existing building and linking this greening to increased student achievement. The Facilities department of the School District of Pittsburgh presently employs many of the 'greening' initiatives outlined on page 6 of the charter application. Integrated Pest Management, asbestos abatement, and electrical energy conservation are additional forms of greening that are not specifically mentioned in the application but, are areas where the school district has won numerous awards for its efforts.

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Part II: Strategic Planning:		
a) measurable goals and objectives	18	<u>8</u>
b) best practices and habits of practice	18	<u>12</u>
c) school improvement planning	18	<u>18</u>

Notes:

1. The proposed planning goals are not associated with the mission statement and measurement is lacking. The plan does not provide measurable goals and objectives for the planning process. The Applicant "will set more specific goals when they know the academic performance levels of their students. Setting them now would run the risk of establishing them to low or too high." (pg. 13 of Charter Application)
2. The proposed plan does not concisely address the listed best practices identified by the Commonwealth of PA. The Applicant merely restates the best practices by changing some of the language. They are not specific to the mission, purpose and needs of the proposed Charter. The proposed plan does include statements regarding the habits of practice.
3. The proposed plan outlines vague involvement with business partners, community organizations, and local institutions of higher education. The organizations represented in Exhibit B of the Application Materials indicate support but most are not specific as to how they will enhance the school (funding, staffing, etc.). The Charter Review Team recognizes many of these organizations as present partners with the Pittsburgh Public Schools. We suspect the level of involvement with the Charter school will be to provide additional curriculum materials and enjoyable activities which are presently incorporated into many Pittsburgh Public Schools. These existing partnerships have been expanded upon by the District's Science Department for many years.

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<u>Section</u>	<u>Possible Points</u>	<u>Actual Points</u>
Part III: Management Plan		
a) admissions policy and criteria	18	<u>15</u>
b) student discipline and expulsion criteria	18	<u>16</u>
c) governance (board)	18	<u>6</u>
d) plan for involvement of the community and the general public life of the school	18	<u>10</u>
e) description of how the charter will manage and administer the school	18	<u>10</u>
f) description of staff conditions, work, and professional development	18	<u>14</u>

Notes:

- The admissions policy and criteria are clearly defined and well articulated.
- The Applicant gives an assurance that it will not discriminate on any basis (pg. 24 of the Application). However, a plan for maintaining non-discriminatory admissions is not included.
- The applicant clearly describes procedures that will be used to suspend or expel students but they are vague in their description on page 29 of the application describing alternative education for expelled students.
- The Applicant failed to include the Board's meeting schedule.
- A complete description of the bylaws was provided. There are several discrepancies that exist within Charter's Bylaws. First, the number of years a Director will serve for each term is not clear. It states "Directors will be elected to serve terms of five (3) years..." (pg. 2). Second, it states "The Board of Directors shall be nine (17) but in no event shall the entire Board consist of fewer than five (9) Directors" (pg. 2). However, page 34 of the Application states "The Board will be composed of no less than eight (8) and no more than seventeen (17) persons." The other discrepancy in the Bylaws is on page 3 and in regards to the time limit for public comments. It states "limit public comments to ten (5) minutes per person or such lesser time period as the Board of Directors may set."
- The description of the governance structure is present but suspect. As indicated on page 35 of the Charter Application, "At any given point in time forty percent (40%) sitting Board members will have been selected by Imagine Schools, Inc. with the agreement of the Board." The attempt made by the Board to partner with Imagine Inc., is needed because of the limited background of the Board members. The principal will be selected by Imagine, as indicated on page 44 of the Charter Application, who is then supposed to carry out the wishes of the Board. This is a clear conflict that speaks to the heart of governance of the school. The building was sold to Schoolhouse Finance, Inc. the financial arm of Imagine Schools, Inc. and the administrative personnel will be selected by Imagine.
- The Applicant provided a copy of the Board Operating Agreement with Imagine Schools. The Agreement describes in detail the roles and responsibilities of Imagine Schools and its relationship to the Board. The Applicant does describe how it will oversee Imagine Schools. However, there are several concerns with the operating agreement. First, the Agreement states that "to the extent that there are not sufficient funds in the Charter School Operating Account to pay Operating Expenses, Imagine shall deposit funds into the Charter's Account. On the first date that funds reside in the Charter's Account, which funds are not otherwise reserved under the approved budget, Imagine shall automatically be reimbursed" (pg. 11). This was also addressed during the interview with the Applicant. The Applicant stated that if the Charter had insufficient funds, they would cover that amount and assist the Charter in "getting back on their feet." This contradictory to Article VII-A of the Agreement which states that "Imagine can terminate the Agreement for failure to receive for any reason, the contracted for revenues, compensation, or reimbursement as required by the terms of the Agreement" (pg. 13). This has happened many times. Imagine Schools Inc. has a proven track record of financial insolvency and Imagine Schools does terminate their Agreements, leaving Charters in debt. Second, Article VI-A (pg. 12 of Agreement) states "Imagine shall select and hire a qualified principal and other personnel to perform services at the Charter School." This is contradictory to page 56 of the application which states "the Board will recruit and hire the principal and the principal,

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Section

Part III: Management Plan (continued)

supported by a committee composed of board members, parents and community members will recruit and hire the staff." Third, "the number of Imagine representatives to the Board shall be determined by mutual agreement and shall not exceed one-third (1/3) of the total Board composition. This representation of one-third (1/3 or 33 1/3 %) is different than that on page 35 of the application which states forty percent (40% or 2/5). The fact that Imagine Schools has such representation on the Board, concerns the Review Team. The Charter Board does not appear to have substantial authority and responsibility for the education of the student.

9. As an external management company, Imagine Schools, Inc. has a history of terminated charters. Many of these failed schools site debt, low standardized test scores and high personnel turnover. This school will be run by a documented mismanaged company. According to the Profiles of For-Profit Education Management Organizations Eighth Annual Report (May 2006), Arizona State University reports that, "...stories of mismanagement and financial troubles continue to emerge. For instance, management turmoil at Imagine schools, Inc. – the firm changed ownership three times in four years-was blamed for the failure in 2005 of the Central New York Charter School for Math and Science, according to the former staff members. While promising curriculum assistance, staff development, marketing, and other services in its contract with the school, Imagines' actual work diminished, a school official told the Syracuse (N.Y.) *Post-Standard*. At the same time, however, Imagine Schools' contracted fees rose to \$475,616 for the 2004-2005 academic year."

As of March 2006, Imagine Charter Schools in Florida had a combined debt of more than \$8 million according to the state's Auditor General Report, after five years of operation. Since 2002, at least 35 schools have cut ties with Imagine Schools or Chancellor-Beacon Academies (acquired by Imagine in June 2004) including:

Philadelphia – cancelled all of Chancellor-Beacon's contracts in the city.

Michigan – 13 schools have discontinued their association with the Imagine or closed since 2002.

Massachusetts – All of Imagine's 6 schools terminated contracts with the company

10. The Applicant describes how the school will be managed and provides an organizational chart and describes how it will periodically assess the effectiveness of the organizational structure.

11. A comprehensive staff development plan is described but the professional development hours attributed to each activity is shallow and minimal time is devoted to the opening of school. The 35 hours of professional development is inadequate due to the fact that on page 80 of the application they indicate the "uniqueness" of the curriculum. We disagree that curriculum is unique or even developed but if it were, 35 hours of professional development would not be adequate to provide training to teachers. In addition, Imagine Schools has a history of a teaching staff with a high "turn over" rate. Therefore, they must consider the differentiated professional development as new staff is constantly entering the system. There are tools to help systems gather data on implementation of innovations and use data to make midcourse adjustments in their professional development plan. Nothing like this is considered in the application.

The August professional development schedule is audacious. In the month of August the schools ENTIRE curriculum is going to be developed, along with gathering all the assessment data and developing individualized learning plans for each student? Given a month, it is hard to conceive that all these tasks will be completed with accuracy and depth. The curriculum and ILP's both consume more time than allotted in the proposal and would take on a cookie cutter approached if developed in this brief time frame.

There is no PD scheduled for November of 2007, March, June, July, or August 2008. Being that the charter is a new start up, Curriculum meetings should be frequent and at least monthly. After December 2008, there is nothing in the PD schedule that addresses curriculum issues. Based on the PD schedule and available information in regard to curriculum there appears to be a minimal understanding of the magnitude and effort needed for curriculum development, design, and implementation. The PD is not innovative. It is actually sparse and insufficient to meet the needs of an Environmental Charter.

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Part IV: Education Plan

a) education program	18	<u>4</u>
b) accountability, student assessment, and evaluation	18	<u>14</u>
c) meeting the needs of at-risk students, bilingual students, and students with disabilities	18	<u>18</u>

Notes:

1. Applicant does not include a full description of its environmental curriculum, nor does it include an appropriate environmental science scope and sequence (i.e. a concise identification of the skills and content to be mastered at each grade level and seamless sequence of how each grade level builds upon the knowledge and skills mastered at the previous level). The Applicant states its innovative aspect is its environmental science focus and curriculum. This could not be attested to without the existence of the actual curriculum.
2. The applicant does not demonstrate an alignment between the proposed Science curriculum and the PA and School District Science and Technology Standards & PA Science Environment and Ecology Standards. The Review Team views curriculum materials as a basic tool that allows teachers to do their best work with students. They provide a coherent science program for students. Accordingly, the Review Team's analysis of the charter's educational plan focused on an essential requirement. Does the Proposed Charter's curriculum material focus on a coherent set of age-appropriate student learning goals that are aligned to the Pennsylvania Standards of Science & Technology and Environment & Ecology?
3. Alignment matrices (see exhibits at end of document) indicate striking inadequacies. There is a grade level scope and sequence for Reading and Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies but is not clear how this would contribute to the attainment of the standards that served as the basis of their analysis. On page 63 of the Charter Application, the charter explains; "The standard-based curriculum is delivered at each grade level, with standards spiraled from one year to the next" but this curriculum could not be found. Second, the Imagine Standards address multiple PA Science Standards indicating topics may be covered superficially. Finally, there are many instances where no alignment could be found based on the information provided in the Charter Application and accompanying exhibits. The red areas in the matrices indicate places where no alignment between the Imagine School Science Standards and the Pennsylvania Science Environment and Ecology Standards could be found. There are a few Imagine Science Standards that are aligned to the PA Science Environment and Ecology Standards on the alignment matrices. The boiler plate standards written by Imagine in 2002 are very broad and attempt to cover as many standards as possible to be utilized across the country. These major gaps in alignment indicate the boiler plate matrix given to the Applicant by Imagine was not thoroughly supplemented further bolstering the notion that the curriculum is not unique.

The Review Team could not specifically analyze the environmental curriculum because it has not been developed. It is scheduled to be developed during a week long session in August 2007 by the principal, environmental specialist teacher, four teachers representing grades K-3 and two parents. We do not feel the time and expertise allotted to professional development for Environmental Science & Ecology curriculum is sufficient. As indicated by Roger Bybee, the Executive Director of the Biological Science and Curriculum Study (BSCS) in the fall of 2006 News Journal of BSCS, "The 45-year history of the Biological Science and Curriculum Study demonstrates that the work of designing, developing, and implementing science curricula has become very specialized and quite sophisticated work. Most school districts and science teachers do not have the time, money, and expertise for the curriculum development of the quantity and quality produced by groups such as BSCS. Designing and developing innovative curriculum materials is not what professional teachers were trained to do. Their knowledge and skill center is on science teaching." This statement is in contradiction to the 'develop as you go' model the Charter wishes to utilize. On page 77 of the application the charter explains a seven step process of curriculum development. Similar processes have been used in the past to develop textbooks across the country by publishers and the results have been less than adequate according to Project 2061. Project 2061, the long-term science, mathematics, and technology education reform initiative of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) began an analysis of science textbooks based on the latest research. Not one of the widely used science textbooks for middle school was rated satisfactory by the expert reviewers. The review team mentions this point because the development of curriculum materials by publishers with large financial resources, expert developers and time, until now, have been unable to deliver quality instructional materials based on a similar plan. It is difficult to imagine how an entire curriculum can be developed in a week with a small group of charter school members as is discussed in the application.

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Part IV: Education Plan (continued)

The review team recommends that if a model curriculum is to be developed then recent recommendations from research be included as part of the plan. These recommendations are from "How People Learn: Bridging Research and Practice", National Resource Council.

- Curriculum development teams should be composed of discipline-specific experts, researchers in pedagogy and cognitive scientists, curriculum developers and expert teachers.
- Curriculum and their companion instructional techniques and assessments should be in alignment with the Principals of Learning outlined in "How People Learn".
- Curriculum developers need to consider the extent to which the curriculum emphasizes depth over breadth of coverage, the effectiveness of the opportunities provided to grasp key concepts related to the subject matter; the extent to which the curriculum provides opportunities to explore preconceptions about the subject matter; the adequacy of the factual knowledge base provided by the curriculum; the extent to which formative assessment procedures are built into the curriculum; and the extent to which accompanying summative assessment procedures measure understanding and ability to transfer rather than memory of fact.
- Curriculum should include companion teacher materials that explains links to the principles of learning, reflects pedagogical content knowledge concerning the curriculum, and promotes flexible use of the curriculum by teachers.

The references above are basic premises of current research-based curriculum development and yet no reference to these basic ideas can be found in the application. The application indicates that their educational and community partners will provide additional curriculum materials. This does not provide a "unique" curriculum nor does it provide comfort that the developers designed the curriculum with the understanding of current research. Members of the review team have used some of the partners' curriculum and have found curricula that may be highly rated on paper may be very difficult for teachers to work with, or in the light of classroom practice may fail to achieve the level of understanding for which they are designed. Therefore, measures of student achievement should take center stage to provide feedback. And yet the plan lacks a feedback loop. There must be some type of field test to provide data regarding teacher implementation and student achievement.

If somehow the charter could design an excellent curricula with the resources outlined in the application the potentially excellent curricula can fail because teachers are not given adequate support to use them. Teacher guides need to be provided and be both comprehensive and user friendly. And if the instructional guides were deemed excellent they cannot replace teacher training efforts. The proposed teaching training schedule has seven hours devoted to infusing environmental education throughout the curriculum and culture of the school. Therefore, the charter is going to develop an environmental curriculum in 35 hours at the beginning of the school year while opening a new school, with new teachers who probably will not be there the following year due to the high turn over rate and train the staff to implement the "unique" curriculum with seven hours of professional development during the year.

5. The Review Team is concerned that the PA Reading and Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies Assessment Anchors were not discussed. The purpose of the Assessment Anchors is to articulate essential and assessable elements, and to provide clarity for instructions.
6. The Mathematics, Social Studies, Reading and Writing/ELA also indicate alignment issues. It is the evaluative opinion of the Review Team that little thought was given to PA Standards and Assessment Anchors when the Applicants composed the curriculum portion of the Application. A boiler plate curriculum was given to the applicants by Imagine Inc. that needs additional professional development, much more than the Charter Application permits, to realize a coherent curriculum with a meaningful scope and sequence across all grades level and content areas.
7. The educational program of the Proposed Charter is flawed. Based on the lack of curriculum materials, it is the view of the Charter Review Committee that the Charter can not provide the School District of Pittsburgh with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities currently being offered by the school system, nor can it serve as a model to other schools in the system.

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<u>Section</u>	<u>Possible Points</u>	<u>Actual Points</u>
Part V: Operations		
a) budget and fiscal operations	18	<u>12</u>
b) facilities, transportation, and food services	18	<u>13</u>
c) liabilities, insurance, and risk management	18	<u>18</u>
d) legal issues	18	<u>18</u>

Notes:

1. The Applicant provided the PDE – 2028 (General Fund Budget) and a detailed line item budget for five years.
2. The Applicant included a five year financial plan based on realistic assumptions and included an equity position, cash flow for essential and non-essential operations, financial management history, operating efficiency and contract to revenue alignment.
3. The Applicant describes how the financial staff will be selected. However, there is a concern about the discrepancies between the Application and Operating Agreement. It is not clear if (1) Imagine Schools selects and hires (pg. 13 of Operating Agreement-Section C), (2) The Board and the Principal will select (pg. 112 of the application) or (3) the Principal will recruit and hire the staff, supported by a committee composed of board members, parents, and community representatives (pg. 56 of the Application).
4. The Applicant states that, "Non-instructional personnel shall receive such professional development as IMAGINE determines reasonable and necessary under the circumstances" (pg. 13 of the Operating Agreement). The financial staff is also not included within the professional development calendar (pg. 58 of the Application).
5. The Applicant describes its financial software, MAS500.
6. The Applicant fails to describe its budget planning process. The budget timeline only includes two dates: (1) the preliminary budget will be presented to the Board in April and (2) the Board will approve the annual budget at its June Board meeting. The Applicant provides an assurance that the budget planning process will align the strategic plan and goals of the proposed Charter. However, it fails to explain how.
7. The Applicant describes its process for amending its budget. The principal will review the recommended revision and then present it to the Executive Committee. If the Executive Committee supports the revision, it will be brought before the full Board for a vote.
8. The Applicant's plan to maintain an appropriate level of unreserved fund balance is to budget for a 5% contingency. It also states that student counts will be projected conservatively which will result in higher revenues than budgeted.
9. The Applicant describes its policies and procedures for cash management, student activity accounts, investment of public funds, effective management of capital assets, effective debt management and purchasing.
10. The Applicant describes its policies and procedures for accounting for grants after they've been approved by the granting agency. However, these policies and procedures do not include the Charter's process for the submission of a proposal.
11. The Applicant provides evidence that provisions are in place for the annual auditing of the school by a certified public accountant.
12. This building was built in 1928 as a school, and was recently closed in June of 2004. The facility is in well maintained condition with recent renovations completed for the auditorium, roof, electrical distribution, LAN network, boiler and cycle painting. However, the facility has the following existing conditions that will need upgrading through a capital improvement program:
 - A. Provide a new elevator for ADA accessibility.
 - B. Provide ADA counter for the main office
 - C. Renovate toilets throughout the building for compliance with ADA regulations.
 - D. Repair plaster and paint in the existing cafeteria, kitchen and other areas of water damage.

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Section

Part V: Operations (continued)

- E. Remove graffiti at the rear of the building.
- F. Replace aged/worn carpet in the office and several classrooms with VCT or new flooring.
- G. Repair masonry cracks and repoint around the base at the rear of the building.

13. Obtain current inspection reports for the heating system, Allegheny County Health Department (for cafeteria/kitchen), fire alarms, sound system and pest control treatment. The building is considered safe for use as a school ONLY AFTER these necessary certificates are secured.

14. Applicant specifically describes policies and procedures for ensuring appropriate and safe transportation services for eligible students during the regular school day and extended day programs. The Application did not contain their transportation handbook as referenced on page 121. Therefore, it is undetermined if the handbook contradicts the policies and procedures set fourth by the District. Additionally, the Applicant indicates it will provide the District with necessary information to develop efficient and cost effective transportation routes. The applicant must be aware that the routes developed may not only include the proposed charter students, but students from our public schools and from non-public schools as well.

15. The Applicant describes its food service program and explains how it is aligned with the school's strategic plan. By agreeing to contract with the Pennsylvania Department of Education to offer the Federal Child Nutrition and School Lunch Program all state and federal requirements must be met including PL 108-265 (Wellness Policy). All program requests should be indicated within this area inclusive of the description of the proposed Wellness Policy Additionally, program management inclusive of staff and food service policies incorporating all required local, state and federal requirements, should be indicated within this area. All requirements regarding fiscal management of the food services plan and meal procurements were absent in this area.

16. The Applicant describes its policies and procedures for effective risk management and provisions for insurance.

17. The Applicant provides an assurance that it understands and intends to abide by the requirements of the Sunshine Law and Public Officials Act.

18. Applicant demonstrates knowledge of overall due process requirements, criminal record and child abuse clearances and provides a specific written procedure demonstrating knowledge of due process requirements pertaining to students with disabilities.

19. The Applicant provides an assurance that the charter agrees to (1) comply with all local, state, and federal laws and regulations, (2) comply with NCLB requirements and regulations and (3) be a non-profit-non-sectarian entity.

20. The Applicant demonstrates knowledge of the Safe Schools Act (Act 26 of 1995).

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Part VI: Personnel/Leaders

a) information on key personnel 18 18

Notes:

1. The key personnel and their organizations have extensive experience, expertise and background to contribute to developing a charter school. The key personnel are also able to commit the necessary time to the planning process.

TOTAL 360 259

What the score means:

- components scoring at 18 meet the full requirements of the application
- components scoring at 12 meet some of requirements of the application
- components scoring at 6 fail to meet the requirements of the application

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FINAL CHECKLIST FOR COMPLIANCE UNDER ACT 22

Charter schools must meet the following criteria under this Act. Please indicate whether or not each individual criterion has been met.

Is the charter school nonsectarian and nonprofit? X Yes
 No

Does it have sustained support from teachers, parents, students, and the community? X Yes
 No

Does it agree to enroll all students who wish to attend, conduct a lottery if the school is oversubscribed, and only give preference to students whose parents have been involved in the process to plan the school?
 X Yes No

Does the charter provide the School District of Pittsburgh with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities currently being offered by the school system, and is it able to serve as a model to other schools in the system?
 Yes X No

Does the charter have plans to meet the needs of students with disabilities, bilingual students, and at-risk students? X Yes
 No

Does the charter comply with all federal state and local regulations pertaining to the health, safety, civil rights, and education of students?
 X Yes No

Use the space below for any additional comments concerning the application:

Do you think this application should be approved? Yes X No

Use the space provided below to state your reasons. Why do you think that this application should or should not be approved. Use additional space if necessary.

- Charter applicant does not provide expanded choice and cannot serve as a model for Pittsburgh Public Schools.
- Charter applicant failed to complete the requirements of the application as required by PA Charter School Law, sections 1717-A and 1719-A.