

# Recommendations and Findings of the Review Team for “Environmental School at Frick Park . . . An Imagine School” Charter School Application

Pittsburgh Board of Education  
Education Committee Meeting  
January 8, 2007

*Presentation to Board Education Committee 1/8/07 RE:  
Review of "Environmental School in Frick Park . . . an  
Imagine School" Charter School Application*

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# Contents of the Presentation

- Review Team Membership
- Review Process
- PA Charter School Law (Act 22) “Yes” Test for Granting a Charter
- Review Team’s Findings and Recommendation
- Questions and Answers

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# Members of the Review Team

- John Vater – Chair
  - *Principal, Peabody High School*
- Joseph Kaye Cupples
  - *Executive Director, Student Support Services, Pittsburgh Public Schools*
- John Garrow
  - *Director of Child Accounting, Pittsburgh Public Schools*
- Tracey Gilliard
  - *Budget Development Supervisor, Pittsburgh Public Schools*
- Virginia Hill
  - *Principal, Faison Intermediate*
- Richard Mathews
  - *Assistant Principal, Carmalt Technology Academy*
- Vidya Patil
  - *Chief of Construction, Pittsburgh Public Schools*

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# “Environmental Charter School at Frick Park . . . An Imagine School” Application Review Process

- Application submitted on October 13, 2006.
- A public hearing was held for the applicant on November 13, 2006.
- A site visit was made by the review team on December 13, 2006.
- The review team’s recommendation is being brought forward today, January 8, 2007, for the Board’s review.
- The formal Board vote on this application is scheduled for January 24, 2007.

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# Act 22 Charter Application Requirements

- The PA Charter School Law, section 1719-A, sets forth a list of information that must be a part of a charter school's application. This information includes, but is not limited to:
  - the mission and education goals of the charter;
  - curriculum to be offered; and
  - methods of assessing whether students are meeting educational goals.
- The School District's application form was developed in order to insure that all applicants are given the opportunity to submit the required information.

# Act 22 Criteria for Granting or Denying a Charter

- Charter schools must meet the “yes” test for all of the following questions in order to meet Act 22 requirements for the granting of a new charter:
  1. Is the charter school nonsectarian and nonprofit?
  2. Does it have sustained support from teachers, parents, students, and the community?
  3. 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?
  4. Does the charter provide the school district 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?
  5. Does the charter have plans to meet the needs of students with disabilities, bilingual and at-risk students?
  6. Does the charter comply with all federal, state, and local regulations pertaining to the health, safety, civil rights and education of students?

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# Background on Proposed Charter School

- Number of Students
  - Year 1: 252 students, grades K-3
  - Year 2: 324 students, grades K-4
  - Year 3: 396 students, grades K-5
  - Year 4: 486 students, grades K-6
  - Year 5: 578 students, grades K-7
- Grades Served
  - K through 8<sup>th</sup>
- Community to Be Served
  - All Pittsburgh communities
- Length of School Calendar
  - 192 days
- Proposed Location
  - 829 Milton Street, Pittsburgh, PA (PPS former Regent Square Elementary School)

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# Background on the Proposed Charter School

- Parent Involvement and Community Support are particularly strong as evidenced by the application and the public hearing.



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# Review Team Findings

- The following items are deficient and are significant weaknesses in the application:
  - ❑ Mission
  - ❑ Strategic Planning
  - ❑ Governance
  - ❑ Education Program

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# Review Team Findings: Mission of the Proposed Charter

- Focus of the School Program is on environmental education; however, the school's mission statement does not reflect this purpose.
  - *The mission of The Environmental Charter School at Frick Park . . . An Imagine School is to educate each student to high academic learning standards using an especially themed curriculum that will foster knowledge, love of and respect for the environment and the will to preserve it for future generations. The school will provide a comprehensive academic curriculum with character education integrated into the subject areas. The curriculum will promote excellence in all areas: cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development. Students will experience learning gains each school year to attain learning growth and proficiency, and the community, parents, and staff will participate meaningfully in the school to continuously improve its potential for success.*

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# Review Team Findings: Strategic Planning for the Proposed Charter

- 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 too low or too high” (pg 13 of the Charter Application.”

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# Review Team Findings: Strategic Planning for the Proposed Charter (continued)

- The proposed plan does not concisely address the listed Best Practices identified by the Commonwealth of PA, as required by the District's Charter Application.
  - 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.
  - PA Department of Education Best Practices include:
    - Rigorous and engaging curriculum
    - Innovative, unique and effective instruction
    - Artful use of infrastructure
    - Deep partnerships with community organizations, universities, businesses, and/or regional and national organizations
    - Intensive teacher and leadership training
    - Meaningful continuous assessment that is aligned with standards

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## Review Team Findings: Strategic Planning for the Proposed Charter (continued)

- The proposed plan outlines vague involvement with business partners, community organizations, and local higher education .
  - Organizations represented in the application indicate support but are not specific as to how they will enhance the school (funding, staffing, curriculum development, etc.)
  - Many of these same organizations are presently and have been partners with Pittsburgh Public Schools and with our Science Department for many years.

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# Review Team Findings: Governance

- The application is deficient in the area of Board Governance and the Operating Agreement with Imagine Schools.
  - There are several discrepancies that exist within the Charter's Bylaws.
    - Number of Board members is referred to as no fewer than nine, but then later the number is stated as eight.
    - Number of years each member is to serve is stated as five years, but then later stated as three.
  - There is a conflict between the board's governance power and the relationship with the charter management organization—Imagine Schools.
  - The Charter Board does not appear to have substantial authority and responsibility for the education of the students.

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# Governance: Discrepancies within the Operating Agreement Itself

## ■ Operating Agreement

- ❑ 33 1/3% of the board members are to be selected by Imagine Schools.
- ❑ school principal and personnel are to be selected by Imagine Schools (pg. 12)

## ■ Charter Application

- ❑ the number of Imagine representatives to the Board shall not exceed 40% (pg. 35)
- ❑ the Board will recruit and hire the principal and staff (pg. 56)

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# Governance: Discrepancies within the Operating Agreement Itself (continued)

## ■ Operating Agreement

- 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).

## □ Charter Application

- “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)



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## Imagine Schools Has A History of Having Terminated Operating Agreements, Leaving Charters in Debt

- Arizona State University reported in 2006 in its eighth annual Profile of For-Profit Education Management Organizations 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.”
- As of March 2006, 12 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 of 2004) including:
  - ❑ Central New York Charter School for Math and Science
  - ❑ Philadelphia—cancelled all of Chancellor-Beacon’s contracts in the city
  - ❑ Michigan—13 schools have discontinued their association with Imagine or have closed since 2002.
  - ❑ Massachusetts—all of Imagine’s 6 schools terminated contracts with the company.

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# Review Team Findings: Education Program

- The application is deficient in the area of curriculum and professional development.
- - While the applicant does include a curriculum framework (scope and sequence) for all basic subject areas (math, reading and language arts, science, and social studies), the environmental science curriculum has not been developed and was not included in any form, as required by the District's Charter Application materials. No specific references were made to environmental science in the standards alignment document sentence.
    - **The applicant states its innovative aspect is its environmental science curriculum. This cannot be attested to without the existence of the actual environmental science curriculum.**
  - The applicant proposes to develop the environmental science curriculum by a small team in 35 hours in August at the beginning of the school year—an inadequate approach and an inadequate amount of time.

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## Applicant does not demonstrate an alignment with PA Standards:

- ❑ There is minimal evidence of alignment between the proposed Science Curriculum and the PA Science Environment and Ecology Standards.
- ❑ Mathematics, Social Studies, Reading and Writing/ELA as described also indicate alignment issues
- ❑ In addition, Reading and Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies Assessment Anchors were not discussed.

<b>Documents Required</b>	<b>Evidence in Application</b>
Scope and Sequence K-8; i.e, a year overview showing the general gestalt of the curriculum	Included for Reading and Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies but Environment and Ecology missing.
Standards Alignment Document; i.e., showing alignment to PA standards	Included for grades 4 and 7, Environment and Ecology alignment minimal or missing altogether. No references to assessment anchors.
Curriculum; i.e., day-to-day learning sequences, activities, assessments, and instructional techniques.	Not included and not developed for Environment and Ecology.

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# Applicant Does Not Demonstrate an Alignment with PA Standards

- Alignment matrices indicate striking inadequacies:
  - There is a grade level scope and sequence, but it is not clear how this specifically aligns to the PA Standards and would contribute to the attainment of the standards that served as the basis of the review team's analysis.
  - Imagine School Science Standards address multiple PA Science and Technology Standards indicating topics may be covered superficially.
  - There are many instances where no alignment could be found based on the information provided in the application and its accompanying exhibits. Lack of alignment with PA Science Standards is shown on the following graphs.

**Matrix to identify standards alignment between Pennsylvania Standards and Imagine Schools Standards/Objectives**

[illegible]





Pennsylvania Academic  
Standards for Science  
and Technology

### Imagine Schools Standards/Objectives

[illegible]



Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Science and Technology  Grade 4			Imagine Schools Standards Objectives																	
Earth Science	<b>Land Forms and Processes</b> Know basic landforms and earth history.	ES 2	ES 3																	
	<b>Resources</b> Know types and uses of earth materials.	ES 2	ES 3																	
	<b>Meteorology</b> Know basic weather elements.	ES 2	ES 3																	
	<b>Hydrology and Oceanography</b> Recognize the earth's different water resources.	ES 2	ES 3																	
	<b>Biotechnology</b> Know that biotechnologies relate to propagating, growing, maintaining, adapting, treating and converting.	SS 3																		
Technology Education	<b>Information Technology</b> Know that information technologies involve encoding, transmitting, receiving, storing, retrieving and decoding.	SS 3																		
	<b>Physical Technologies</b> Know physical technologies of structural design, analysis and engineering, finance, production, marketing, research, and design.	SS 3																		
	<b>Tools</b> Explore the use of basic tools, simple materials and techniques to safely solve problems.																			
Technology Devices	<b>Instruments</b> Select appropriate instruments to study materials.																			
	<b>Computer Operations</b> Identify basic computer operations and concepts.																			
	<b>Computer Software</b> Use basic computer software.																			
	<b>Computer Communication Systems</b> Identify basic computer communication systems.																			
	<b>Constraints</b> Know that people select, create, and use science and technology and that they are limited by social and physical restraints.	SS 1	SS 2	SS 3	SU 1	SU 2														
Science, Technology, Human	<b>Meeting Human Needs</b> Know how human ingenuity and technological resources satisfy specific human needs and improve the quality of life.	SS 1	SS 2	SS 3	SU 1	SU 2														
	<b>Consequences and Impact</b> Know the pros and cons of possible solutions to scientific and technological problems in society.	SS 1	SS 2	SS 3	SU 1	SU 2														

• NOTE: Incorrect reference # on Imagine Schools alignment document. The 1<sup>st</sup> page should be 3.1.4 (Unifying Themes) not 3.3.4 (Life Science).

Standard Matrix Elem

The RED squares indicate areas where standards are non-existent.

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Strand Key  
ES – Earth & Space Science  
LS – Physical Science  
PS – Physical Science  
SS – Science and Society  
SU – Science as Universal Inquiry

Matrix to identify standards alignment between Pennsylvania Standards and Imagine Schools Standards/Objectives

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Environment & Ecology Grade 7		Imagine Schools Standards/Objectives																		
Watersheds and Wetlands	<b>Cycles</b> Explain the role of the water cycle within a watershed.																			
	<b>Role of Watersheds</b> Understand the role of the watershed.																			
	<b>Physical Factors</b> Explain the effects of water on the life of organisms in a watershed.																			
	<b>Characteristics and Functions of Wetlands</b> Explain and describe characteristics of a watershed.																			
	<b>Impacts of Watersheds and Wetlands</b> Describe the impact of watersheds and wetlands on people.																			
Renewable and Nonrenewable	<b>Uses</b> Know that raw materials come from natural resources.																			
	<b>Availability</b> Examine the renewability of resources.	PS 4																		
	<b>Management</b> Explain natural resource distribution.																			
	<b>Influential Factors</b> Describe the role of recycling and waste management.																			
Environmental Health	<b>Environmental Health Issues</b> Identify environmental health issues.																			
	<b>Human Actions</b> Describe how human actions affect the health of the environment.																			
	<b>Biological Diversity</b> Explain biological diversity.																			
Agriculture and Society	<b>Society's Needs</b> Explain society's standard of living in relation to agriculture.																			
	<b>Agricultural Science</b> Investigate how agricultural science has recognized the various soil types found in Pennsylvania.																			
	<b>Agricultural Systems</b> Explain agricultural systems' use of natural and human resources.																			
	<b>Technology</b> Explain the improvement of agricultural production through technology.																			

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Environment & Ecology Grade 7		Imagine Schools Standards/Objectives																	
Integrated Pest Management	<b>Effects, Benefits and Impacts</b> Explain benefits and harmful effects of pests.																		
	<b>Health Risks</b> Explain how pest management affects the environment.																		
	<b>Management Practices</b> Explain various integrated pest management used in society.																		
Ecosystems and their Interactions	<b>Living and Nonliving Components</b> Explain the flows of energy and matter from organism to organism within an ecosystem.																		
	<b>Cycles</b> Explain the concepts of cycles.																		
	<b>Change Over Time</b> Explain how ecosystems change over time.																		
Threatened, Endangered and Extinct Species	<b>Diversity</b> Describe diversity of plants and animals in ecosystems.																		
	<b>Adaptation</b> Explain how species of living organisms adapt to their environment.																		
	<b>Management Strategies</b> Explain natural or human actions in relation to the loss of species.																		
Humans and the Environment	<b>Societal Needs</b> Describe how the development of civilizations relates to the environment.																		
	<b>Sustainability</b> Explain how people use natural resources.																		
	<b>Human Impacts</b> Explain how human activities may affect local, Regional and national environments.																		
	<b>Supply and Demand</b> Explain the importance of maintaining the natural resources at the local, state and national levels.																		
Environmental Laws and Regulations	<b>Environmental Laws and their Impact</b> Explain the role of environmental laws and regulations.																		

One standard from the Imagine School alignment document was referenced PS4 = E&E 4.2.7

[illegible]



Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Science and Technology  Grade 7		Imagine Schools Standards/Objectives															
Earth Science	<b>Land Forms and Processes</b> Describe earth features and processes.	ES 4	ES 5														
	<b>Resources</b> Recognize earth resources and how they affect everyday life.	ES 4	ES 5														
	<b>Meteorology</b> Describe basic elements of meteorology.	ES 2	ES 3														
	<b>Hydrology and Oceanography</b> Explain the behavior and impact of the earth's water systems.	ES 2	ES 3														
Technology Education	<b>Biotechnology</b> Explain biotechnologies that relate to related technologies of propagating, growing, maintaining, adapting, treating and converting.	SS 3															
	<b>Information Technology</b> Explain information technologies of encoding, transmitting, receiving, storing, retrieving and decoding.	SS 3															
	<b>Physical Technologies</b> Explain physical technologies of structural design, analysis and engineering, personnel relations, financial affairs, production, marketing, research and design.	SS 3															
Technology Devices	<b>Tools</b> Describe the safe and appropriate use of tools, materials and techniques to answer and solve problems.																
	<b>Instruments</b> Use appropriate instruments and apparatus to study materials.																
	<b>Computer Operations</b> Explain and demonstrate basic computer operations and concepts.																
	<b>Computer Software</b> Apply computer software to solve specific problems.																
	<b>Computer Communication Systems</b> Explain basic computer communication systems.																

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Science and Technology  Grade 7		Imagine Schools Standards/Objectives														
Science, Technology, Human	<b>Constraints</b> Explain how sciences and technologies are limited in their effects and influences on society.															
	<b>Meeting Human Needs</b> Explain how human ingenuity and technological resources satisfy specific human needs and improve the quality of life.															
	<b>Consequences and Impact</b> Identify the pros and cons of applying technological and scientific solutions to address problems and the effect upon society.															

The RED squares indicate areas where standards are non existent.

Strand Key

ES – Earth & Space Science  
 LS – Physical Science  
 PS – Physical Science  
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 SU – Science as Universal Inquiry

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# Review Team Findings: Education Program (continued)

- Adequate professional development to support curriculum is lacking.
  - Imagine Schools has a history of a teaching staff with a high turnover rate, but no differentiated professional development is included in this plan.
  - The proposed training schedule has minimal hours devoted to infusing environmental education throughout the curriculum and the culture of the school.
    - There is no professional development scheduled for November of 2007, or March, June, July, or August of 2008.
    - After December 2007, there is nothing in the professional development schedule that addresses curriculum issues.

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# Review Team Findings: Education Program (continued)

- Adequate professional development to support curriculum is lacking.
  - Based on the Professional Development Schedule and available information in regard to curriculum, the applicant fails to demonstrate a minimal understanding of the magnitude of the effort needed for curriculum development, design and implementation.
  - The Professional Development is not innovative. It is sparse and insufficient to meet the proposed school's needs.



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# Review Team Findings: Education Program (continued)

- The applicant states it intends to “develop as you go,” relying heavily on its teachers to do the curriculum work; however, this is contradictory to what most eminent national curriculum experts recommend:
  - “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. . . . Designing and developing innovative curriculum materials is not what professional teachers were trained to do. Their knowledge is on science teaching.”—Roger Bybee, Executive Director of the Biological Science and Curriculum Study (BSCS), Fall 2006 *News Journal of the BSCS*

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# Review Team Findings: Education Program (continued)

- 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.
- The 7-step process of curriculum development referenced by the applicant has been used in the past to develop textbooks across the country by publishers, and the results have been less than adequate, according to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) per the results of their Project 2061—the AAAS' long-term science, mathematics, and technology education reform initiative.

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# Review Team Findings: Education Program (continued)

- The Education Program is not innovative and cannot serve as a model for Pittsburgh Public Schools.
  - Applicant indicates that their educational and community partners will provide additional curriculum materials. This does not provide a “unique” curriculum. Pittsburgh Public Schools already is using some of these same materials in its own classrooms.
  - The uniqueness of the school as a green environment does not provide a model of expanded choice. Pittsburgh Public Schools already employs many of the same greening initiatives and has won numerous awards for this work.

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# Examples of Environmental Science in Pittsburgh Public Schools

- **Research Partnerships – University of Pittsburgh**
  - *Implementing Inquiry Pedagogy in Elementary and Middle School Science Classrooms*
  - *Pittsburgh Partnership for ENERGIZING Science in Urban Elementary and Middle Schools*
- **Learning Research and Development Center**
  - *Infusing Design Projects into the Science Curriculum*

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# Examples of Environmental Science in Pittsburgh Public Schools

## ■ Other Partnerships/Collaborations

- ❑ **Pennsylvania Resource Council:** *teacher professional development and student lessons on recycling and waste management*
- ❑ **Creek Connections:** *hands-on inquiry based investigations of local waterways*
- ❑ **EarthForce:** *teacher professional development and student activities that engage students as active citizens to improve their environment.*
- ❑ **Voyager:** *teacher professional development and student activities regarding the study of our local waterways.*

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# Examples of Environmental Science in Pittsburgh Public Schools

- **Other Partnerships/Collaborations (continued):**
  - ❑ **Department of Environmental Protection, Southwest PA Air Quality Partnership, Group Against Smog and Pollution:** *teacher professional development*
  - ❑ **Pittsburgh Tissue Engineering Initiative:** *teacher professional development*
  - ❑ **Pittsburgh Plate Glass:** *teacher professional development and classroom visits*
  - ❑ **University of Pittsburgh Medical Center:** *teacher professional development and student visitations*
  - ❑ **Westinghouse Electric:** *teacher professional development*

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# Examples of Environmental Science in Pittsburgh Public Schools

## ■ Other Partnerships/Collaborations (continued):

- ❑ **American Geological Institute:** *teacher professional development*
- ❑ **Carnegie Mellon University:** *teacher professional development and classroom visits*
- ❑ **National Aeronautics and Space Administration:** *teacher professional development and classroom visits*
- ❑ **Allegheny Singer Research Center:** *teacher professional development*
- ❑ **Conservation Consultants, Inc.:** *teacher professional development*

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## Review Team Findings: Facilities

- This building was built in 1928 as a school, and was recently closed in June of 2004.
- The facility is in a well maintained condition with recent renovations completed for the auditorium, roof, electrical distribution, LAN network, boiler and cycle painting.



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# Review Team Findings:

## Facilities (continued)

- However, the facility has the following existing conditions that will need upgrading through a capital improvement program:
  - ❑ Provide a new elevator for ADA accessibility.
  - ❑ Provide ADA counter for the main office.
  - ❑ Renovate toilets throughout the building for compliance with ADA regulations.
  - ❑ Repair plaster and paint in the existing cafeteria, kitchen and other areas of water damage. Remove graffiti at the rear of the building.
  - ❑ Replace aged/worn out carpet in the office and several classrooms with VCT or new flooring.
  - ❑ Repair masonry cracks and repoint around the base at the rear of the building.

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## Review Team Findings: Facilities (continued)

- Also, the following is necessary:
  - Obtain current inspection reports for the heating system, Allegheny County Health Department (for cafeteria/kitchen), fire alarms, sound system and pest control treatment.
- Upon the obtaining of the inspection certificates as noted above, the building is considered safe for use as a school.

## Review Team's Findings and Recommendations on the Application

### 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?      ☒ \_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ No

Does it continue to have sustained support from teachers, parents, students, and the community?  
                                         ☒ \_\_\_\_\_ 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?  
                                         ☒ \_\_\_\_\_ 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      ☒ \_\_\_\_\_ No

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

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

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# Review Team's Findings and Recommendations on the Application

Do you (the team members) think this application should be approved?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_ no

## Reasons:

- ✓ 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.

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