



New York State Education Department Charter School Office

Charter School Application Summary, Findings, and Recommendation

*Application in response to the
New York State Education Department 2012 Request for Proposals to
Establish Charter Schools Authorized by the Board of Regents
to establish the proposed:*

**Math, Engineering, and Science Academy (MESA)
Charter High School**

October 2012

Summary of the Proposed Math, Engineering, and Science Academy (MESA) Charter High School

Name of Charter School	Math, Engineering, and Science Academy (MESA) Charter High School
Lead Applicant(s)	Arthur Samuels and Pagee Cheung
District of Location	Brooklyn, CSD 32
Opening Date	Summer/Fall 2013
Projected Charter Term	November 5, 2012 – June 30, 2018
Management Company	None
Partners	None
Facility	Seeking public co-location space
Projected Enrollment and Grade Span during Charter Term	Opening with 125 students in grade 9 in 2013-2014; growing up to 500 students in grades 9 through 12 in 2017-2018.
Maximum Enrollment and Grade Span	500 students in grades 9 through 12
Mission Statement	<i>“Math, Engineering, and Science Academy (MESA) Charter High School will provide a rigorous education that equips each student with the ability to succeed in college and in life. MESA students will develop a passion for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and, through a comprehensive college readiness program, critical thinking and self-advocacy.”</i>

The intent of the Math, Engineering, and Science Academy Charter High School (MESA) is to graduate students who will have internalized the connection between academic excellence, perseverance, and success in college and in life. Accordingly, each aspect of the MESA Charter School design is built around enhancing academic rigor and promoting student learning.

Key elements of the school’s design include:

- *Standards-Referenced Grading:* MESA’s Standards-Referenced Grading (SRG) system focuses exclusively on student mastery of learning goals measured through multiple forms of formative and summative assessments. Students will become accustomed to tracking their own progress on assessments and empowered to take ownership of their performance.
- *Universal Design for Learning:* MESA will utilize Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which is described in the application as a set of principles that provides teachers with a structure to develop instruction to meet the needs of a diversity of learners. UDL incorporates three features: multiple means of representation of material to students, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement. The aspect of choice embedded in UDL planning empowers students to find aspects of classroom content that interest them, and to approach learning from a place of strength, which is particularly beneficial for students with disabilities and English language learners.
- *STEM Block:* Twice per week, students will have a double period of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics or (STEM). This block provides an inquiry-based complement to core Math and Science courses. The kinesthetic nature of this allotted time allows STEM subjects

to be more accessible to students who have not yet developed the language or computational skills to navigate traditional textbook- and classroom-based learning.

- *College Bound*: College Bound is a project-based course designed to increase college awareness and readiness. The course provides an opportunity to explicitly teach students throughout their four years of high school the difference between meeting minimum high school graduation requirements and the high standards of achievement required to be a candidate for a four-year college. MESA will provide dedicated college counselors for grade 11 and grade 12 students as well as an alumni counselor to support graduates through college.
- *9th Grade Writing Seminar*: Understanding the literacy gaps of most incoming grade 9 students, every MESA freshman will take a 9th Grade Writing Seminar that focuses on building basic arguments through writing. The Writing Seminar will teach basic spelling, sentence structure, writing conventions, and grammar.
- *Advisory*: MESA will incorporate Advisory four mornings per week. Advisories will be structured around common core anchor standards in speaking, listening and writing, allowing students to develop these skills in a safe, supportive, and structured environment. These skills are important not just in terms of strengthening English fluency, but also in boosting student confidence and self-esteem, and building relationships with peers and teachers. Topics covered in Advisory will revolve around ethics and character development.
- *Intersessions*: In February, April and July, MESA will hold four, day-long Intersessions. During these times, voluntary programming such as academic remediation and enrichment, or job and internship opportunities will be offered. Teachers will staff one Intersession per year creating intimate, creative, and fun programming allowing for higher levels of student engagement and understanding.
- *Common Planning Time*: Early release of students on Wednesdays will provide teachers with three hours of professional development (PD) and common planning time each week. MESA will have four full PD days and three full grading days at the end of each trimester.
- *Instructional Coaching*: The Principal is the instructional leader of the school, and will provide feedback to teachers. In addition, MESA also intends to employ Instructional Coaches to provide developmental, formative feedback. The coaches will observe every teacher weekly at minimum, and debrief with those teachers to promote high-quality planning, classroom management, delivery of instruction, and assessment. Instructional Coaches will also work closely with the Principal to develop support plans for developing teachers, and to help teachers understand and successfully implement the highly effective techniques of SRG and UDL.
- *Supplemental Instruction*: Students with diagnostic test scores in Math that indicate a need for additional remediation will be assigned to Math tutoring after school once per week from 4:30 PM to 5:30 PM. Two STEM teachers will work with students in small groups of five. In addition, the school will provide tutoring for all students after school on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays.

The MESA school calendar consists of 187 days of instruction, divided into three trimesters during the school year. On Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, the instructional day will begin at 9:00 a.m. with a 27-minute advisory followed by seven 52-minute academic periods with the day concluding at 4:30 p.m. On Wednesdays, students will have seven 35-minute academic periods allowing for an early release at 1:33 p.m. Teachers will stay until 5:15 p.m. on Wednesday for planning and professional development.

Prior to opening for instruction, teachers will attend a twelve-day professional development program referred to as the Summer Institute. All grade 9 students and newly-admitted grade 10 students will attend the Summer Vista, a one week summer program during which the school administers diagnostic testing, provides students with an orientation to the school environment, and offers targeted remedial instruction.

Students will be released at 1:33 p.m. on these days, allowing teachers to use the afternoon to finalize planning and participate in professional development.

In accordance with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), MESA has set high learning standards and selected curricula “to prepare students to master the skills and understandings required for college and career readiness.” For each subject in which the school feels the existing curriculum does not meet or exceed these standards, the Principal will work intensively with curriculum specialists during the pre-opening period to adapt and amend the curriculum through the lens of the CCSS.

For English Language Arts, MESA will utilize McDougal Littell’s *Write Source* curriculum in ELA for grades 9 through 12 making modifications as needed to align with the CCSS. MESA will supplement the curriculum and focus on increasing text complexity, student exposure to expository and informational texts, and expanding students’ academic vocabulary, which are key components of the CCSS for literacy.

MESA will teach Integrated Algebra, Geometry, Algebra II/Trigonometry, and Pre-Calculus using the CCSS-aligned *University of Chicago School Mathematics Project (UCSMP)* curriculum. Beginning in year four, MESA will offer AP Calculus to students who demonstrate skills and abilities to succeed in the course. Students will also have the opportunity to take Statistics, Combinatorics, and other math courses through CUNY’s *College Now* program.

MESA has selected Holt McDougal Littell’s *Living Environment, Earth Science, World of Chemistry, and Physics* as its science curriculum based on its compatibility with UDL, clarity of content, and an inquiry-based, exploratory approach to foster investment in the scientific process and thinking. To maximize the rigor and quality of our science program, MESA will also adopt the principles of the newly released Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). MESA will offer AP Biology to 12th grade students who demonstrate skills and abilities to succeed in the course. Students will also have the opportunity to take Molecular Biology, Environmental Science, and other science courses through CUNY’s *College Now* program.

The curriculum design for the STEM Block is driven by teacher and student interest. Students will constructively form connections to and build learning upon content in their core Math and Science courses by collaborating with partners and small groups going through the extended process of inquiry in response to a complex question, problem, or challenge. In a course called the Physics of Sports, for example, students will perform physical experiments to answer such questions as “*How do the laws of gravity affect a skateboarder’s kick-flip?*” In a course called Money Math, students will compete in a stock market game which involves analyzing trends to answer the question “*How can we outsmart the stock market with linear regression and statistics?*” Engineering and technology components of STEM education that are often overlooked according to the Next Generation Science Standards will be emphasized.

MESA teachers will use assessments in its many forms to revise pacing, differentiate lessons, remediate skills or content, group students, select students for interventions, assess professional growth and progress, and communicate with students, parents, and families. The Principal will use assessments to design, review, and revise curriculum, evaluate teachers and instructional methods, and make decisions about PD and assess its efficacy. Assessment data will also be used to inform decisions about student promotion and determine school progress towards student achievement goals.

MESA teachers will use summative assessments at the end of units of study in a variety of different forms, including written exams, group projects, oral and visual presentations, laboratory reports, among other performance tasks. Students will also take benchmark Interim Assessments at the end of each trimester and at the end of the academic year. These assessments will be aligned with both New York

State Standards (NYSS) and CCSS and allow the school leaders and teachers to identify and address gaps in student learning. This may result in, but is not limited to, after school tutoring and adjustments to and differentiation of instruction to best address identified gaps. Using summative data, teachers will work in department teams during the Summer Institute to facilitate discussions about vertical alignment of curriculum and assessment across grade levels.

If a student has a Regents Exam that corresponds to a course, the Regents Exam will be taken in place of a MESA-created end of year exam. To ensure preparedness for the exams in both content knowledge and test-taking stamina, MESA will institute three days of mock Regents Exams in May and June.

MESA teachers will review all diagnostic assessment data from the Summer Vista at length during their pre-opening professional development in August and create a data profile for the incoming cohort to identify areas of strength and skills deficits and those students who may be at-risk of academic failure. This information, along with the previous year's state test data and other available data, will also be used to make necessary adjustments to curricular frameworks, to create groups for academic interventions, and to develop instructional targets for the coming year.

At the conclusion of each year, *TerraNova* assessments will be used to measure higher-order thinking skills as well as basic and applied skills in ELA and math. These assessments generate norm-referenced achievement scores, criterion-referenced objective mastery scores, and performance-level information that can be used to assess the school's academic program. This suite of exams will be used to measure student growth.

MESA Charter High School will also collect baseline data of college readiness skills of incoming 9th grade students through a multi-faceted performance assessment that will include interviews, written responses, and problem solving. The assessment will be administered in conference sessions in tandem with the math and ELA diagnostics. The assessment will gather data on communication skills, study habits, perseverance, attitude towards school, and learning styles. This similar assessment will be administered at the conclusion of students' senior year in order to measure growth in the college readiness domains.

The applicant group has engaged in rigorous, ongoing efforts of outreach to inform and solicit input from the CSD 32 community regarding how the proposed MESA Charter High School intends to address the educational and programmatic needs of students. The applicant group held a number of community forums, distributed informational brochures in various locations throughout the community, made presentations to community based organizations and local public school officials, met with members of State and local legislatures, and invited the public to comment via the proposed school's website, email address, or phone. The applicant group has considered community feedback in its school design. For example, MESA incorporated speaking and listening opportunities in the advisory program in response to suggestions that English language learners needed more such opportunities.

The draft Admissions and Enrollment Policies submitted with the application establish enrollment preferences for English language learners in accordance with the NYS Charter Schools Act. At a minimum, a percentage of the seats equal to the enrollment target set by New York State for English language learners will be set aside for English language learners. For example, if the enrollment target set for a charter school in CSD 32 is 12%, MESA will set aside 12% of its 9th grade seats aside for English language learners.

In addition to lead applicants Mr. Samuels and Ms. Cheung, the planning team consists of eight individuals, all identified as members of the school's initial board of trustees. Four other individuals are named in the application as advisory board members, who will provide expert guidance and advice to the

board and school leaders. Subsequent to the submission of the full application, two of these individuals agreed to join the school's founding board, bringing the total number of initial trustees to ten. One founding board member intends to serve only throughout the pre-opening period and will transition to the advisory board after the school opens. A School Trustee Background Information form, Statement of Assurance and resume or curriculum vitae was provided for each of the ten individuals who will compose the school's initial board of trustees. As required, the applicant group has provided a set of draft by-laws and a draft code of ethics.

The ten proposed initial members of the board of trustees are described below:

- **Hilary Allen**, currently the Associate Director of Math for America, is a founding teacher at Achievement First, East New York. She has expertise in teacher training and development as well as charter school start-up. She contributed extensively to the development of the mission statement and strategies for staff recruitment and retention.
- **Tracie Benjamin-Van Lierop**, currently the Director of Instruction for Special Education for the Newark Public School System, is a former Special Education Senior Instructional Facilitator with the NYCDOE and an Adjunct Professor of Education at The City College of New York with expertise in teacher training, curriculum development, and special education. She contributed to the design of MESA's special education program and served as MESA's liaison to the NYCDOE in general and CSD 32 in particular.
- **Rebecca Daverin**, currently the Director of Reporting and Compliance for the Explore Charter Schools Network. She has expertise in charter school operations, reporting, start up and compliance and contributed extensively to the design of the mission statement, charter goals, school calendar, and strategies for serving at-risk populations.
- **Jon Davidson**, currently is a Senior Manager of the Internal Audit Operations Department at Morgan Stanley. With an expertise in budgeting, finance, and financial planning, he has contributed extensively to the budget, staffing plan, and financial plan.
- **Rajeev Nath**, currently the Director in Global Finance and Procurement of ANN Inc, is a former Management Consultant at Accenture with expertise in finance, strategic planning, and personnel. He contributed extensively to development of mission statement, budget, financial management and strategies for recruitment and retention of staff.
- **Paul T. O'Neill** will transition from the Board of Trustees to the Advisory Board at the conclusion of the school's start-up phase. He is a partner at Cohen, Schneider & O'Neill LLP; is a founder & President of Tugboat Education Services; a former General Counsel of the SUNY Charter Schools Institute; a Board Chair of Manhattan Charter School I and II; and an Adjunct Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. He has expertise in charter school start-up, design, and law. He contributed extensively to the overall school design, Board recruitment and application strategy, including development of the mission statement, special education plan, and discipline policy. Mr. O'Neill.
- **Ralia Polechronis**, currently an Associate at Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, LLP, is a member of the NYC Bar Association's Education and the Law Committee and has expertise in education law and charter school litigation. Ms. Polechronis contributed extensively to the mission statement, admissions policy, school culture design, and discipline policy.
- **Raul Rubio, Jr.**, currently the Coordinator of the Community Partnership Program for Episcopal Community Services of Long Island, New York which provides technical assistance to partnership project focused on child welfare issues. Mr. Rubio has a background in psychology and expertise in community based human services programs.
- **Ellis E. Scope**, currently an Adjunct Faculty member at Bank Street College who teaches graduate courses on instructional needs of students with disabilities, behavior management and positive approaches for supporting students with challenging behaviors, and school leadership.

Mr. Scope is a former Principal of the Jeffrey M. Rapport School, a high school for students with disabilities, and a former special education teacher.

- **Bill Short**, currently the Director of Arthur O. Eve Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) at St. Lawrence University, is a former President of the statewide HEOP Professional Association. He has expertise in partnership building and college readiness and contributed extensively to development of mission statement and college readiness plan.

The founding group has identified an advisory board consisting of experienced individuals who will provide school's leadership and board of trustees with ongoing advice and support. The following individuals are named as members of the advisory board:

- **Richard Berlin** is the Executive Director of Harlem RBI and the Board Chair of DREAM Charter School. Mr. Berlin has experience in non-profit management, charter school start-up, charter school administration.
- **Stacey Gauthier** is Co-Principal of Renaissance Charter School. Ms. Gauthier has experience in charter school administration and operations.
- **Paul T. O'Neill** will transition from the Board of Trustees to the Advisory Board at the conclusion of the school's start-up phase.

The founding group has proposed that the co-applicants and primary authors, Arthur Samuels and Pagee Cheung, serve as the Executive Director and School Principal respectively, stating that both are uniquely qualified to open, operate, and lead the charter school.

- **Arthur Samuels** holds a J.D. from Harvard Law School and an M.A. in Education Leadership Studies from Columbia University. He founded the College Guidance program at Williamsburg Charter High School and the College Bound Program at The Renaissance Charter High School for Innovation where he has been employed since 2010. He has a track record of successful program design, partnership building and project management.
- **Pagee Cheung** holds an M.A. in Secondary Math Education from Columbia University. As a teacher at Baruch College Campus High School and Harlem Village Academy High School, she had a 100% pass rate on the Integrated Algebra Regents Exam for every year she taught. She has also served as the Director of Operations, and now as the Dean of Instruction, at Brooklyn Ascend, which scored in the top ten of all charter schools on the 2011-2012 NYS assessments.

The organizational structure of MESA Charter High School is designed to maximize support for teachers by creating an Executive Director position to oversee the school as a whole and to allow the School Principal to focus entirely on teaching and learning. The Executive Director (ED) will report directly to the Board of Trustees (Board); serve as the "public face" or chief liaison between the school and its external stakeholders, such as parents, community leaders, and the authorizer; manage all operations; and oversee fundraising and development. The ED will hire and fire all staff, subject to consultation with and recommendation of the Principal for instructional and program staff.

The ED will supervise the Principal. The Principal as the instructional leaders will focus on curriculum and instruction and planning professional development. The Principal will supervise and evaluate all instructional and program staff including teachers, counselors, Instructional Coaches, and the Director of School Culture (DSC). The Principal ensures that the educational program meets the goals of the charter by coordinating the educational programs, professional development, curriculum design, and staff accountability.

The Director of Operations (DOO) is responsible for ensuring the effective management of the non-instructional functions of the school. The DOO manages admissions, facilities, student records, food

services, the generation of required reports, and other operational and compliance responsibilities. The DOO will supervise and evaluate non-instructional, non-program staff.

MESA has incorporated into the school design several mechanisms to attract and retain high-quality teachers. For example, MESA will offer an average starting salary at MESA of \$62,000, nearly 10% higher than the DOE salary for a sixth year MA-level teacher, with a standard 3% raise each year for all teachers, and match up to 3% of an employee’s contribution to their retirement plan for those employed with MESA for more than one year. MESA will also provide an opportunity for experienced, proven teachers to serve as department heads, grade leaders, coaches, or curriculum developers and receive an extra \$5,000 stipend. Additionally, MESA will offer competitive professional growth travel fellowships of \$4,000 each to teachers, counselors, and junior level staff for professional growth purposes, such as teacher language immersion program to improve foreign language skills.

MESA seeks to co-locate within an existing NYCDOE public school facility in CSD 32 and has pursued this possibility with NYCDOE Charter Schools Office staff. If DOE does not make public space available, MESA has identified a potentially viable private space within CSD 32.

Projected Fiscal and Programmatic Impact on District of Location

The applicant group provided an analysis of the fiscal and programmatic impact of the proposed school on public and non-public schools in CSD 32, indicating that the fiscal impact of the Math, Engineering, and Science Academy (MESA) Charter High School on NYC Department of Education public schools is expected to be nominal (approximately 0.0346% of the total NYC Department of Education budget. The impact on student enrollment of other district and charter public and non-public schools in the Community School District is also expected to be minimal, as they expect to be an alternative for students who would otherwise go out of the district for high school. The applicant group stated they stated that they would be eager to share resources and successful practices with other schools in the district in the hope of having a mutually positive impact. In addition MESA hopes to co-locate with minimal impact.

The New York State Education Department (“Department”) also conducted additional analysis on the projected fiscal impact of the Math, Engineering, and Science Academy (MESA) Charter High School on its district of residence, the New York City School District (“NYCSD”), summarized below.

Year	Number of Students Enrolled in Charter Schools Per Year ¹	Charter School Basic Tuition Rate ²	Total Charter School Basic Tuition Only	Estimated District Special Education Payment ¹	Total District General Fund Budget ³	Percent of District Budget
2013-14	125	\$15,089	\$1,886,125	\$155,850	\$19,724,841,088	0.010%
2017-18	500	\$17,903	\$8,951,500	\$436,380	\$19,724,841,088	0.048%

The calculations above assume charter school basic tuition rates in the charter period (2013-14 thru 2017-18) based on a trend analysis provided by the Department’s State Aid Office. In order to conservatively

¹ Source: MESA Charter School Application

² Source: Education Law §2856(1)(a)(iii) and NYS Education Department Office of State Aid Charter School Basic Tuition Rate Analysis, October 2012.

³ Source: New York City DOE Financial Status Report September 2012; <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/DBOR/FSR/default.htm>.

avoid underestimating the fiscal impact that the charter school will have on the district going forward, the Department is assuming no growth in the NYCSD budget during the duration of the school’s charter.⁴

It should be noted that, given the nature of district-based per-pupil funding, the estimates made by the Department in conducting this analysis are subject to unpredictable financial fluctuations. For forecasting purposes, the fiscal impact of this charter school on the district in which it will be located assumes that: there will be no fluctuations in the grade levels served by existing charter schools over the course of the charter term; the charter school will be able to meet its projected maximum enrollment; all students will come from NYCSD; and, all students will attend every day for a 1.0 FTE.

The specifics of the school’s enrollment composition are still unavailable; however, the Department acknowledges that the programmatic and fiscal impact of the proposed charter school on other public and private schools in the same area will also be influenced by the proportion of charter school enrollees that would have attended a same-district public or private school had it not been for the presence of this charter school.

Below, for your reference, please find additional data on New York City Community School District 32.⁵

New York City Community School District 32

Enrollment Data	CSD 32
Total District Enrollment:	14,994
Grade 9 through 12 Enrollment:	8,476
White:	1%
Black/African-American:	23%
Hispanic/Latino:	74%
American Indian/Alaskan Native:	0%
Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander:	2%
Free/Reduced Priced Lunch:	90%
English Language Learners:	20%
Students with Disabilities:⁶	13.6%
Graduation Rate	CSD 32
2007 Graduation Cohort:	50%

⁴ Additional notes: While the school has included other federal grants and/or funds that may flow through the district to be received by the school in its proposed budget, this analysis does not account for these sources of potential revenue, nor does it include the value of certain services (e.g., transportation) that the district is required to provide the charter school. However, the analysis also does not account for district per-pupil expense and overall resource savings that are likely to result from a reduction in the number of students attending district public schools attend the nonpublic schools located in the school district.

⁵ Source: 2010-2011 New York State School Report Card (<https://reportcards.nysed.gov/view.php?schedist=district&county=none&year=2011>); 2011-2012 state assessment data for Grades 3 through 8 English language arts and mathematics (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/ela-math/>); 2007 cohort graduation rates (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/pressRelease/20120611/home.html>).

⁶ Source: Special Education School District Data Profile for 2010-11 <http://eservices.nysed.gov/sepubrep/>. This figure is the available city-wide classification rate: the ratio of the count of school-age students with disabilities (ages 4-21) to the total enrollment of all school-age students in the school district, including students who are parentally placed in nonpublic schools located in the school district. The numerator includes all school-age students for whom a district has Committee on Special Education (CSE) responsibility to ensure the provision of special education services. The denominator includes all school-age students who reside in the district. In the case of parentally placed students in nonpublic schools, it includes the number of students who attend the nonpublic schools located in the school district. Source data are drawn from the Student Information Repository System (SIRS) and from the Basic Education Data System (BEDS).

Grades 9-12 (2007 cohort) State Assessments (% proficient)	
English Language Arts	61%
Mathematics	61%

Public Hearing and Public Comment

As required by the Charter Schools Act, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) held a hearing on Tuesday, August 28, 2012 to solicit comments from the community concerning Math, Engineering, and Science Academy (MESA) Charter High School. No comments in support or in opposition from community members were provided.

The Department directly notified the Chancellor of the NYCDOE, as well as public and private schools in the region, of the charter school application and issued an open call for written public comment via the State Education Department Charter School Office website. The Chancellor was contacted by letter and invited to comment directly. Chancellor Walcott submitted a letter in support of the Math, Engineering, and Science Academy (MESA) Charter High School, noting, “The NYCDOE found this proposal to be well-designed and features a rigorous educational model. Chancellor Dennis Walcott recommends this charter application to support the children of New York City. There is need for higher quality high school seats in District 32 and we will work with the applicant on space availability in their identified CSD, if available.”

Application Review Process

On January 3, 2012, as required by the New York State Charter Schools Act, the New York State Education Department (the “Department”) released the 2012 Request for Proposals (“RFP”) to Establish Charter Schools Authorized by the Board of Regents. The charter school application process utilized by the Board of Regents and the Department during the 2012 RFP cycle is multi-stage and designed to ensure that any charter school applicant presented to the Board of Regents for possible approval demonstrates a detailed and complete school design plan that:

- includes a clear plan to meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets for students with disabilities, students who are English language learners, and students who are eligible to participate in the federal free reduced-price lunch program;
- provides evidence of public outreach that conforms to the process prescribed by the Regents for the purpose of soliciting and incorporating community input regarding the proposed charter school;
- meets all requirements set forth in the Charter Schools Act as well as all other applicable laws, rules, regulations;
- demonstrates the ability to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound manner;
- is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Act; and
- would have a significant educational benefit to the students expected to attend the proposed charter school.

In addition, the applicant group and founding board of trustees must demonstrate appropriate knowledge, capacity, and abilities to effectively create, maintain, and oversee a high-quality charter school.

During 2012 Round 2, 54 letters of intent were received in June 2012 and, after an initial review process, 37 applicants were invited to submit full applications. The Department received 25 full applications, including the application for Math, Engineering, and Science Academy (MESA) Charter High School.

To assess whether to recommend approval or denial of the charter application to the Board of Regents, the Department established multi-person review panels to thoroughly evaluate each full application. Each of these panels was comprised of professional expert consultants, peer reviewers who are school leaders and educators active in charter and public schools in New York, as well as qualified Department staff members. The review panel members reviewed, rated, and commented on each section of the application according to the criteria published in the Application Kit.

Department staff conducted a two-hour capacity interview with the seven initial board members of the proposed school and one additional founding group member, on Tuesday, September 18, 2012. Questions posed to the proposed initial trustees included general questions around New York State Charter School Law, roles and responsibilities of the school community and the board to the community and various stakeholder groups as well to as the Board of Regents as authorizer. To fully understand the proposed academic program, governance role and fiscal viability of the proposed school, targeted questions were asked to clarify information provided in the full application.

The responses demonstrated adequate knowledge and grasp of key areas. Members of the applicant group as a whole and individually demonstrated knowledge of the charter school application and the proposed school. Structures, systems, protocols and procedures are in place to permit the board to effectively govern the school. The applicants addressed questions posed with specific and detailed information that presented a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate.

Findings

Based on the comprehensive review of the application and of the applicant, founding group, and proposed board of trustees, the Department makes the following findings:

1. The charter school described in the application meets the requirements of Article 56 of the Education Law (as amended) and other applicable laws, rules, and regulations.⁷ This finding is based on the following (among other things):
 - the applicant has included in the application the information required by §2851(2)
 - the proposed charter school would meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets, as prescribed by the NYS Board of Regents,⁸ of students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the federal free and reduced price lunch program as required by Education Law subdivision 2852(9-a)(b)(i)
 - the applicant has conducted public outreach to solicit community input regarding the proposed charter school and to address comments received from the impacted community concerning the educational and programmatic needs of students in conformity with Education Law subdivision 2852(9-a)(b)(ii).

2. The applicant has demonstrated the ability to operate the proposed charter school in an educationally and fiscally sound manner.⁹ This finding is based on the following (among other things):

⁷ Education Law §2852(2)(a).

⁸ Note, the data upon which to base the enrollment and retention targets mandated by the amendments to the Act was not available at the time the statute mandated the RFP be issued. As a result, the Department evaluated the plans for student enrollment, recruitment, and retention plans of each class of student referenced in the amendments to the Act such that the Department could make the determination that the applicant would meet or exceed the enrollment and retention targets when developed. During the first year of the charter term, the Department will develop such targets and incorporate these targets into the school's charter agreement performance expectations.

⁹ Education Law §2852(2)(b).

- The presentation in the application of a sound description of key features that are core to the school’s overall design, and which rigorously addresses the criteria outlined in the Department’s RFP in the areas of mission; key design elements; enrollment, recruitment and retention;, and community to be served.
 - The presentation in the application of a sound educational plan, which rigorously addresses the criteria outlined in the Department’s RFP in the areas of achievement goals; school schedule and calendar; curriculum and instruction; assessment; school culture and climate; and special student populations and related services.
 - The presentation in the application of a sound organizational and fiscal plan, which rigorously addresses the criteria outlined in the Department’s RFP in the areas of founding group capacity; board of trustees and governance; management and staffing; evaluation; professional development; facilities; insurance; health, food and transportation services; family and community involvement; financial management; budget and cash flow; pre-opening plan; and dissolution plan.
 - An understanding of the New York State Charter Schools Act, and the skill, will and capacity to successfully launch and operate a high quality public charter school.
3. Granting the proposed charter is likely to improve student learning and achievement, will materially further the purposes of the Act¹⁰ and will have a significant educational benefit to the students expected to attend the charter school.¹¹ This finding is based on the totality of the information presented in the application and during the application review process, as summarized in this document.

Recommendation

Based on the Department’s review and findings, Commissioner John B. King, Jr. recommends that the New York State Board of Regents approve the proposal to establish the Math, Engineering, and Science Academy (MESA) Charter High School to open in 2013 in New York City.

¹⁰ Education Law §2852(2)(c).

¹¹ As applicable pursuant to §2852(2)(d).