

11. Executive Summary

Provide an “Executive Summary” for the proposed charter school. The Executive Summary should provide an overview of the proposed charter school, be “jargon-free” and include the following elements:

- a brief explanation of why you are seeking to open a public charter school, including why the charter school is necessary at this time and in the proposed location;
- a brief but precise discussion of how the school would improve student learning and achievement, i.e., the particular elements of the school’s program and the capacity of those implementing the program that would make it succeed where others have failed;
- a discussion of the proposed charter school’s educational program together with a presentation of research supporting the school’s proposed academic program design;
- a discussion of the specific measures to be used to determine the “success” or effectiveness of the school; and
- a demonstration that the proposed educational program would implement one or more of the statutory purposes of charter schools [see §2850(2)(a)-(f)].

The Rationale For Leadership Prep

We are proposing to open Leadership Prep Charter School in Bedford-Stuyvesant for two reasons. First, we believe the communities of central Brooklyn–Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, East New York, Bushwick, and Crown Heights–have a deep and longstanding need for such a school.¹ As the test and educational attainment data below indicate, families in these communities need more schools that ensure children are fully prepared for the rigors of high school and college. As the economic and social indicators below further demonstrate, our communities need greater numbers of highly educated, committed citizens who can help lead the way to a brighter future.

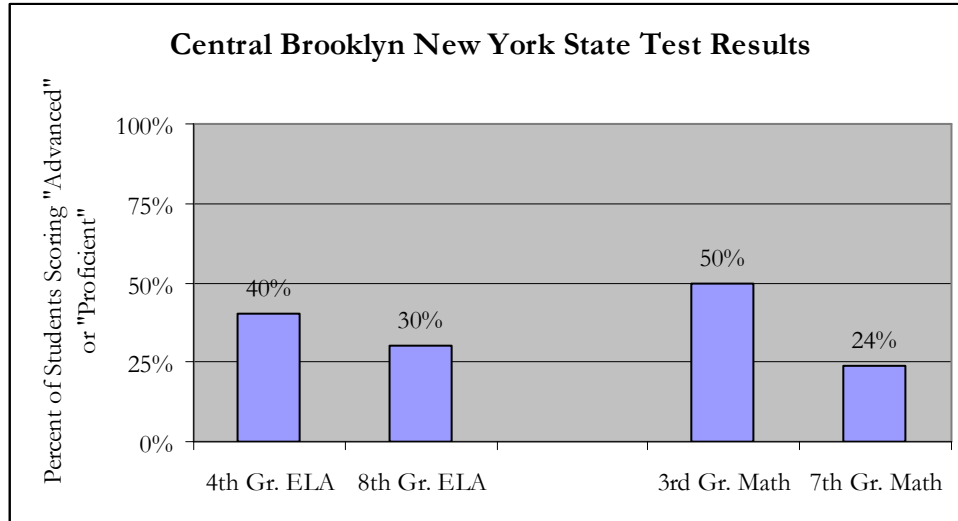
Second, we believe we can succeed at bringing students to academic mastery where other public schools have struggled. As a charter school, we will have freedom to choose staff who are fully committed to our mission, select curriculum that builds strong literacy and numeracy, set schedules that best serve the needs of our students, and make budgetary decisions that further our mission. These freedoms will enable us to base our school on approaches and practices that have proven effective at existing high-performing urban schools serving similar populations.

The Need

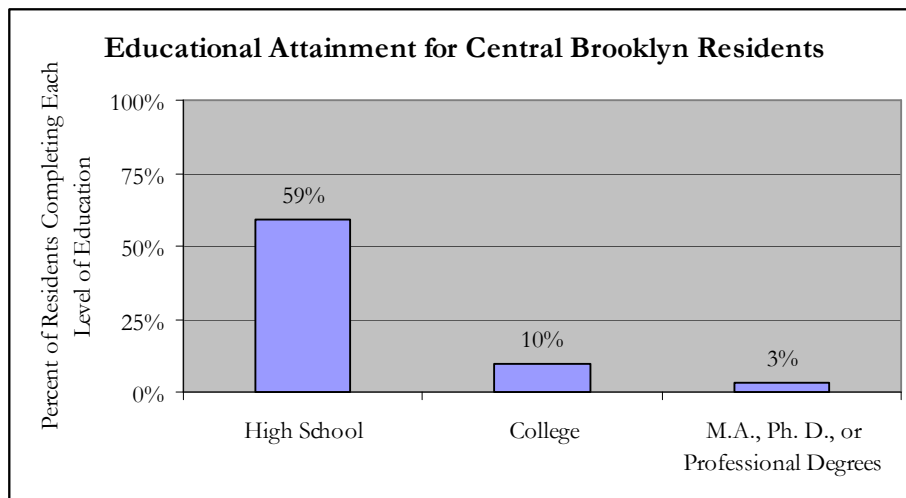
Bedford-Stuyvesant and the surrounding communities of Bushwick, Crown Heights, Brownsville, and East New York face difficult social, economic, and educational challenges. Of the 35 New York City schools placed on the Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) watch list by the State Department of Education, more than one-quarter – some 10 schools– are in these communities.²

¹ While all families who reside within the five boroughs would be eligible to enter our lottery, we plan to focus our recruiting efforts in these communities and anticipate that the majority of our students will hail from these neighborhoods. Within central Brooklyn, we choose to locate Leadership Prep in Bedford-Stuyvesant because the neighborhood’s rich history, vibrant cultural life, and strong community organizations will help us succeed in our educational mission. The benefits of our locating in Bedford-Stuyvesant are further discussed in the “Why We Will Succeed” section below.

² Includes schools in Districts 16, 17, 19, 23 and 32. SURR status is as of 1/4/05, the most recent list available (<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/nyc/SURR/05-nyc-upstate.htm> accessed on 1/7/04). The desire for educational options for families who are served by these SURR schools is reflected in the nearly 12,000 families who have sought transfers out of such schools for their children over the last two years. As one Bedford-Stuyvesant mother put it, “I am desperate for help. I am very concerned about my son. I think he waste a whole year at this school. He have learned nothing [sic].” Joe Williams, “Let Kids Go, Parents Beg: Want Easier Transfers from City Hell Schools,” *The New York Daily News*, 9/12/04, p. 18.



In 2004, 50% of central Brooklyn third graders and 24% of seventh graders demonstrated mastery in mathematics by scoring in the “proficient” or “advanced” categories on the New York State math exam. 40% of fourth graders and 30% of eighth graders demonstrated mastery in English / Language Arts. This means that in 2004, some 6,154 children finished middle school without the reading and writing skills necessary to succeed in high school, and some 7,219 students completed seventh grade not yet ready for the challenging material that lay ahead in eighth grade and high school mathematics.³ These deficits in basic skills and knowledge will make it difficult for many of these students to keep up in high school and college, as evidenced by census data on educational attainment: 59% of students in central Brooklyn finish high school, 9% complete college, and only 3% receive masters, professional, or doctoral degrees.⁴



This academic underperformance occurs in communities beset by other challenges. Unemployment in central Brooklyn is nearly double the citywide average, depressing incomes and fueling wide-

³ These are weighted averages of 2004 test results from Districts 16, 17, 19, 23, and 32 (http://www.nycenet.edu/daa/test_results/ accessed on 1/16/05).

⁴ Weighted averages of 2000 US Census Data for Community Districts 3, 4, 5, 8, and 16 drawn from The New York City Department of City Planning Community District Profiles (<http://gis.nyc.gov/dcp/pa/address.jsp> accessed on 1/16/05).

spread poverty; the average family here earns 61% of what the average New York City family earns, and one in three people lives below the poverty line. This economic deprivation takes a particular toll on children, some 45% of whom live in poverty. Risks to safety and health are reflected by an infant mortality rate nearly double the citywide average and a crime rate that leaves a resident of central Brooklyn some 38% more likely than residents of the city at large to be the victim of a major crime.⁵ This threat too particularly affects children, who are 70% more likely than the average New York City student to be exposed to a “police involved incident” in their schools.⁶

Clearly, central Brooklyn needs more leaders—educated, committed adults who make positive contributions to the common good—to address the issues outlined above. We believe that an outstanding education in the earliest grades, based on strong mastery of academic skills and knowledge, prepares young people to build positive futures for themselves and become, as adults, these community leaders. Leadership Prep’s role in promoting the development of these adults is to ensure academic success for our students in the elementary school and middle school grades. By ensuring that our students develop exemplary academic skills and knowledge in elementary and middle school, we prepare our students for success in high school and college.

Simply put, the children of central Brooklyn will never develop into adult leaders if they do not learn to read, write, compute, and think clearly, accurately, and deeply. A culture of academic excellence—in which all children are expected to read on or above grade level, in which all children are expected to master one year of high school algebra by the end of grade 8, and in which all children are expected to act in respectful and honorable ways—is key to that development. Leadership Prep is dedicated to providing the outstanding education necessary to develop leaders.

Why we will succeed

We recognize that public schools in central Brooklyn face significant challenges in educating their students. Students arrive at school with minimal academic preparation. Families struggle to support their children's education amidst many other challenges. These schools also grapple with the constraints of limited funding and restrictive bureaucratic requirements.

Despite these challenges, we believe we can ensure our students' academic mastery. We will succeed for three reasons: first, as a charter school, we will enjoy freedom in how we design our educational program; second, this flexibility will enable us to build a program based closely on the “best practices” of existing high-performing urban schools serving low-income students; third, our location in Bedford-Stuyvesant will give us the opportunity to draw on considerable community resources.

As a charter school, we will enjoy freedom and flexibility that existing traditional public school do not. Specifically, we will be able to:

- Select, reward, and retain staff based on their ability to move students to mastery within our educational program
- Choose curricula which are effective for our students and alter those choices as appropriate based on the results we produce

⁵ Economic data is from 2000 US Census Data drawn from The New York City Department of City Planning Community District Profiles for Districts 3, 4, 5, 8, and 16 (<http://gis.nyc.gov/dcp/pa/address.jsp> accessed on 12/14/04). Crime data is for the 67th, 70th, 73rd, 75th, 79th, 81st, and 83rd Precincts (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/pct/cspdf.html> accessed on 1/16/05).

⁶ 2003-2004 Annual School Reports for Districts 16, 17, 19, 23, and 32 (<http://www.nycenet.edu/daa/SchoolReports/> accessed on 12/11/04).

- Deploy our human and financial resources in ways that support our mission at all times (e.g., having two teachers per classroom in the early grades)
- Increase our learning time through an extended school day, an extended school year, and abundant daily and weekly time for one-on-one and small group tutoring
- Engage families more effectively based on the explicit choice they will have made in selecting our program

These freedoms will allow us to align every decision and policy in our school with our mission of preparing every child to succeed in high school and college. In addition, we will enjoy the freedom to change course to better serve our students' academic needs over time. This "nimbleness," not available to local public schools, is key to our ability to deliver on our ambitious mission and produce superior results.

We have used this freedom to design a school plan which draws heavily on the approaches and practices proven effective at high-performing urban public schools that serve low-income student populations similar to the one we will serve in central Brooklyn.⁷ These schools include: Amistad Academy (New Haven, CT), the KIPP schools, North Star Academy (Newark, NJ), Bronx Prep, Roxbury Prep (Boston, MA), South Boston Harbor Academy (Boston, MA), the Academy of the Pacific Rim (Boston, MA), Lawrence Community Day Charter School (Lawrence, MA), The Marva Collins Preparatory Charter School (Milwaukee, WI), Kew-Bennett Elementary (Los Angeles, CA), Earhardt Elementary (Chicago, IL), and PS 141 The Crown School.⁸

As a Building Excellent Schools Fellow, Lead Founder Max Koltuv has spent the last eight months studying these schools intensively.⁹ He has visited them repeatedly and has had abundant access to their founders, leaders, students, and staffs. Such work has led to clear, strong conclusions about what it requires to plan, implement, and execute an urban charter school of not only high academic expectations but also high academic results. This reliance on what has been proven to work, rather than on what we believe *should* work, will enable us to deliver on our ambitious mission of preparing our students to succeed at the best college prep high schools and colleges in America.

We will be successful too because of our ability to draw on the considerable resources of Bedford-Stuyvesant. While itself a "high need" community by any educational, economic, or social indicator, Bedford-Stuyvesant also has a rich and illustrious history and strong community organizations. For decades, it has been a center of African-American culture and arts. It has some of the oldest and strongest community-based organizations in the country, including Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, the first economic development corporation in America, and Concord Baptist Church, the largest African-American church in the country. The rich cultural life and strong community-

⁷ This approach of relying on proven practices is one that we believe is too rarely followed in American education. The issue of educators' relying on their beliefs about what works rather than on objective evidence which proves efficacy was noted recently in a report by the National Research Council: "In no other field are personal experience and ideology so frequently relied on to make policy choices, and in no other field is the research base so inadequate and little used." ("The Best Ways to Make Children Learn? We Just Don't Know," *The Wall Street Journal*, 12/10/04, p. 18.)

⁸ We also studied several newer elementary schools which--while they do not have proven results--show significant promise based on the experience and strengths of their founders. These include: Excellence Charter School of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Elm City Academy (New Haven, CT), and KIPP: SHINE (Houston, TX).

⁹ The Building Excellent Schools Fellowship is a year long, practitioner-based national training program which supports Fellows in designing high-performing urban charter schools.

based organizations of Bedford-Stuyvesant will ensure that Leadership Prep has access to the resources and partnerships needed to fulfill our educational mission.

Core Programmatic Elements

The leader of one of the high-performing schools we studied has said, “In running a successful school, there are no 100% solutions. Rather, there are a whole series of 1% solutions that add up to success.”¹⁰ The founders of Leadership Prep share this view. Fostering dramatic academic success for our students and preparing them for the mantle of leadership will demand constant attention to a multitude of details. There are, however, a core set of approaches and practices, drawn from our observation of high-performing schools, that are central to our academic program and to meeting our mission of preparing students to succeed in high school, college, and beyond:

- Expect Excellence
- Recruit, Develop, and Retain Great Teachers
- Assess Early and Often to Inform Effective Instruction
- Focus on Literacy
- Employ Research-Proven Curricula
- Make More Time
- Help Students Until They Master It
- Provide Structure and Order
- Keep It Personal
- Develop Character
- Involve Families
- Help Students Envision a Bright Future Which Inspires Them To Achieve

Expect Excellence

Schools that produce amazing results do so in large part because they *expect* amazing results of both staff and students. Research on high-performing, low-income schools has demonstrated again and again that a high bar, calling forth the best efforts of children and adults alike, is essential to producing high levels of academic mastery.¹¹

At Leadership Prep, we set high standards, aligned with the New York State Performance Standards and commensurate with a future of college prep high school and college for all our students.¹² We expect our students to perform well ahead of grade level in all subjects; by eighth grade, under the

¹⁰ Brett Peiser, Founder and Executive Director of South Boston Harbor Academy (Site *Visit by Lead Founder*, 11/15/04).

¹¹ See Samuel Casey Carter, *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools*, The Heritage Foundation (2000); U.S. Department of Education, *Successful Charter Schools* (2004); and Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* (2003).

¹² Recent work by State University of New York indicates that many urban students long to be challenged by highly demanding teachers. The researchers found that the teachers that urban students wanted “pushed students to complete their work.” Several of the students interviewed put it quite eloquently: “I prefer a teacher who makes sure that I do it right. If they know I can do it better, I want someone who will push me.” “It is not that I’m lazy, but I like a teacher that push me to learn [sic]. I might not be that confident at first, but then I’ll get it.” Bruce L. Wilson and H. Dickson Corbett, *Listening to Urban Kids: School Reform and the Teachers They Want*, (2001), p. iv, 70.

term of our second charter, we expect our students to have all of the academic skills required to succeed at demanding high schools and to have mastered one year of high school algebra. Our standards for mastery are clearly defined: teachers, families, and students will know what is expected and work toward a shared goal. The standards are also immutable: before progressing to the next level, students must demonstrate mastery on class assignments, comprehensive exams covering each school term, and year-end comprehensive exams.

We recognize that many of our students will come from difficult home environments. While some schools and educators believe that such students must receive special allowances and dispensations, we reject this idea. We believe that schools must challenge students to transcend difficult circumstances through diligence and hard work. As the principal of a high-performing elementary school in Detroit put it, “We teach the children that being smart is something earned through hard work. We don’t ask the children, ‘How bad off are you?’ We say, ‘Find out how good you can be.’”¹³ At the center of our academic program is a series of academic supports—described below—which will ensure that all students, including those identified as having disabilities or as English Language Learners, and those “at-risk” of academic failure, find out “how good they can be” by meeting or exceeding our exacting standards.

Recruit, Develop, and Retain Great Teachers

Research shows that teacher quality is the most significant indicator of a student’s academic performance. In fact, one recent study found that students with teachers who rank in the top quartile in effectiveness make gains over the school year that nearly quadruple those of the students with the least effective 25% of teachers.¹⁴

High-quality teaching will be the hallmark of our school. We will recruit the brightest, most committed, most capable teachers, enticing them with the promise of an environment that welcomes their contributions and seeks their input in refining and perpetuating the school, as well as with tools to empower them in their work (classroom supplies, computers, and professional development). In the hiring process, we will set clear expectations for the high level of professionalism and commitment that we expect of our teachers. Our starting salaries exceed the NYC DOE / UFT contract’s pay scale by at least \$5,000 per year, reflecting the extra hours and level of accountability that we require.¹⁵ We have kept our administrative and other overhead costs to a minimum so as to maximize the financial resources we have to invest in great teaching.

In addition to instructional excellence, key qualities that we seek in teachers are the willingness to have frequent and honest dialogue about which children are learning, which are not, and what can be done about it; and the ability to take action consistent with the insights that process yields. Our teachers, believing that all students can learn, must be willing to be relentlessly and productively self-critical when students are not reaching mastery.¹⁶

¹³ Patricia Burke, Principal of Owen Elementary, Detroit, MI in Casey, *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁴ William L. Saunders and June C. Rivers, *Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement*, University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, 1996, p. 6.

¹⁵ We budget for modest raises each year (4%), but the realities of the NYS funding formula for charter schools dictate that we cannot match the steepness of the slope at which the NYC DOE / UFT pay-scale increases.

¹⁶ This attitude was well expressed by a school leader at the highly successful North Star Academy in Newark: “If you are really going to be a quality school or quality teacher, you’ve always got to be looking for things you could do better.” (*Site visit by Lead Founder, 10/4/04.*)

Teachers will be evaluated according to the academic results that they produce and by the progress they make towards pre-established professional development goals. At Leadership Prep, student academic outcomes are the bottom line; job security is based on those outcomes.

Given this level of accountability, it is important that we support our teachers in honing their craft. We do so everyday in a myriad of ways, including four important practices which were common to most of the high-performing schools we studied. First, we structure in time for professional development to occur. We provide three weeks of Professional Development before the school year, nine days during the school year, and three days following the school year, including training on successfully implementing the curriculum programs we have chosen. Our weekly schedules include seven hours for individual planning time and common planning time with grade-level and subject-focused teams, allowing teachers to share ideas and best practices and to get new perspectives on areas in which they are not being optimally effective. We provide coverage so teachers can leave the classroom to observe other teachers, both within our school and at other high-performing schools. Second, we provide abundant and on-going feedback to teachers. Teachers receive weekly feedback based on informal observations by the school leaders and other teachers and bi-annual formal observations for evaluation purposes. Third, we provide funding which teachers can apply towards outside professional development workshops. Fourth, we supply teachers with tools to enhance preparation, presentation, and organization, including personal laptops, easy access to copying and printing, a/v equipment, and working and meeting space.

Assess Early and Often to Inform Effective Instruction

While many in the education world criticize standardized testing, alleging that the tests “discriminate,” we believe testing is essential to ascertaining our students’ academic needs and measuring our effectiveness in meeting those needs. Prior to the beginning of school year each summer, we will assess our incoming students with age-appropriate, standardized assessment tools,¹⁷ giving teachers in the process of designing curriculum, lessons, and pacing a clear understanding of current student mastery. This assessment will also enable us to identify students who may need extra help to reach mastery including those with unidentified disabilities and English-language deficits. At the end of each year, we will administer these same assessments in order to measure progress and the efficacy of our curriculum and instruction, designing refinements and changes where needed.

For grades kindergarten through second, we will regularly administer a diagnostic reading and math assessment, such as the DIBELS or E-CLASS, to track student progress and identify students in need of intervention. Starting in third grade, at six week intervals, we will administer internal assessments in the format and covering the standards of the NYS assessments.¹⁸ This assessment system has several key advantages. It provides students with valuable practice and experience taking tests in a non-high stakes environment. Information, fed back to teachers quickly, permits them to self-assess their performance and determine what must be re-taught and how they might alter approaches and improve the efficacy of instruction. The information also enables the school leaders to closely monitor student progress and support teachers with targeted feedback, professional development, and other resources.

¹⁷ For students entering in kindergarten (as most of our students will), this assessment will likely be the DIBELS, which allows teachers to ascertain in a matter of a few minutes a student’s preparedness to learn to read and identifies students who may need intensive intervention to reach mastery.

¹⁸ Systems such as this one have been shown to be highly effective at high-performing schools including North Star Academy (Newark, NJ) and Amistad Academy (New Haven, CT).

Focus on Literacy

Literacy is the key academic skill on which all future skill and knowledge acquisition is based. Low-income children hear two-thirds fewer words in the home each hour than children of more affluent families. This means that between the ages of zero and three, a low-income child is exposed to some 30 million fewer words than a high-income child. This lack of exposure has the average low-income child arriving at the first day of kindergarten with only one half the vocabulary of her more affluent peers.¹⁹ Research has repeatedly demonstrated that success or failure in forming a foundation of basic literacy in the early grades is a strong indicator of later academic success. In fact, according to the National Research Council, “Academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone’s reading skill at the end of 3rd grade. A person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by that time is unlikely to graduate from high school.”²⁰

It is therefore not surprising that schools in which low-income students reach mastery maintain a relentless focus on developing literacy skills. In fact, a recent review of existing schools serving low-income populations found that a laser focus on basic literacy in the early years of schools, as represented by the many of the practices we employ, was a central commonality among high-performing elementary schools.²¹ Practices of these high-performing schools, which closely reflect the findings of the National Reading Panel, include: dedicating significant time to teaching reading and writing, explicitly teaching phonics and comprehension strategies; and fostering fluency through extensive practice reading and writing and by inculcating a deep love of reading. These practices are reflected strongly in our school plan:

- We provide 200 minutes of Language Arts instruction every day in kindergarten through third grades and 100 minutes per day thereafter.
- We employ a research-proven, balanced-literacy program which includes a significant focus on phonics such as Open Court Reading or SRA Reading Mastery.
- In the key literacy-building years of kindergarten through third grade, we staff our classrooms with two teachers, in order to ensure a low student-to-teacher ratio that never exceeds 16:1, allowing for more one-on-one and small-group instruction, as well as a deeper understanding of each child’s needs on the part of teachers.²² We also make a significant investment in the Waterford Early Literacy program, a computer-based literacy tool which will provide valuable literacy practice and skills while enabling us to reduce the size of our teacher-led reading groups to a maximum of 10 students.

¹⁹ Betty Hart and Todd R. Risely, *The Early Catastrophe: “The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3,”* *American Educator*, (Spring 2003).

²⁰ National Research Council, 1998 (<http://www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads/ReadDiff/> accessed on 12/14/04). In addition, in his review of high-performing, high poverty schools, Samuel Casey Carter concludes that a laser focus on basic literacy and math in the early years of schools was a central commonality among high-performing elementary schools (Casey, *Ibid.*, p. 28).

²¹ Casey, *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²² While research on the effects of class size indicates that class-size reductions is mixed overall, the literature does indicate that reductions in class size can be particularly effective in helping poor and minority students to succeed and in developing literacy skills. These benefits have been shown to continue for these students after they move into larger classes. We therefore invest significant resources in limiting class size in the early grades, when our low-income students will be focusing on building a foundation of literacy. See Susie Boss, “Tapping the Benefits of Smaller Classes,” *The Northwestern Education Magazine*, (Winter, 2000).

- We impart the reading “habit” by requiring students to read 25 grade-level-appropriate books on their own over the course of each school year; requiring independent reading as part of homework each night for all students; providing a well-stocked lending library; starting each day with a 30 minute Drop Everything And Read period, beginning in fourth grade²³, and encouraging students to read at every spare moment during the school day (for example, when they finish an in-class assignment before their peers²⁴).
- We build familiarity with and increasing proficiency in writing by practicing writing in and using the same write/revise/edit/proofread process in every class.

This strong focus on ensuring early literacy for all students assists students with disabilities, those with limited English language ability, and those “at-risk” of academic failure to build the foundation in literacy skills that will prevent them from falling behind later, as so many of their peers do, when the focus of schooling shifts to content acquisition.

Employ Research-Proven Curricula

Leadership Prep’s academic program is rooted in research-proven curricula that have been shown to dramatically accelerate progress to mastery for low-income students, including those with disabilities and English-language deficits. In ELA, we employ a phonics-based reading program, such as SRA/Reading Mastery or Open Court Reading, to hone decoding skills; a guided reading program, such as Scholastic Guided Reading or Junior Great Books, to build fluency and comprehension abilities; and a vocabulary building program such as Wordly Wise 3000. In math, we use a systematic approach to basic math facts and computational skills, such as Saxon Math, coupled with a teacher-created curriculum that develops higher-level problem-solving skills.

In social studies, science, music, and art we rely on a content-rich curriculum of basic subject-area and cultural knowledge, such as the Core Knowledge Sequence. Recent cognitive research indicates “that the ability to learn something new depends on the ability to accommodate the new thing to the already known.”²⁵ Low-income children, often not as fully exposed as their more affluent peers to a breadth and depth of topics, can enter school at a disadvantage: their weak knowledge of the general topics addressed in school leaves them less prepared to assimilate new information. A content-rich curriculum such as the one we envision provides the basic knowledge that makes low-income students more effective learners later in their academic careers.

Make More Time

Because it takes time, effort, and practice to meet the challenge of high academic standards, our schedule is based on an extended school day (7:30 AM to 3:45 PM) and an extended school year (193 days) for all students. This arrangement allows for 28% more instructional time than that provided by NYC district schools each year. A student who attends Leadership Prep from kindergarten to eighth grade²⁶ will receive 2.5 years more learning time than students receive in the typical New York City district school. In addition, we provide small-group and one-on-one tutoring for students who

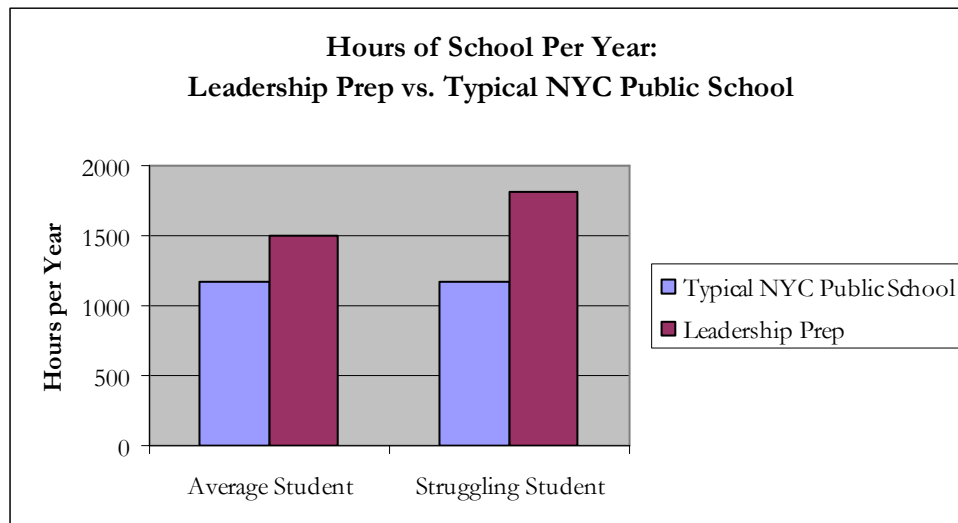
²³ Drop Everything And Read has been successfully employed at Academy of the Pacific Rim (Boston) and Earhart Elementary (Chicago). (*Site Visit by Lead Founder 9/14/04 & Casey, Ibid., p. 32*)

²⁴ Roxbury Prep has a similar practice in which students have a “challenge sheet” of work to do if they finish an in-class assignment or exercise early. (*Site Visit by Lead Founder 9/14/04.*)

²⁵ E.D. Hirsch, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don’t Have Them*, (1996), p. 23.

²⁶ This would only be possible if we are re-chartered after our initial five year charter expires.

need extra help and attention in order to reach mastery. This tutoring consists of 75 minutes of instruction from 3:45 PM until 5:00 PM four days per week and 160 minutes on Saturdays. Under these programs, Leadership Prep students most in need of extra help benefit from 54% more instructional time each year than they would receive in a typical district school. Between kindergarten and eighth grade this amounts to an additional 4.9 years of schooling.²⁷ All of the high-performing schools we studied have an extended day: increased learning time is essential to enabling students who enter school with skills and knowledge deficiencies, those with disabilities, and those with limited English language proficiency to achieve at the highest levels.



Another way in which successful schools create additional learning time is by assigning a significant amount of nightly homework that allows students to review, practice, and solidify skills and knowledge they are learning in the classroom.²⁸ At Leadership Prep, we will build the habit and ritual of “homework time” early by assigning kindergarteners 30 minutes of homework each night. This increases to 60 minutes per night in third grade and 90 minutes per night by sixth grade.²⁹ Students will be held accountable for completing their work. Accountability extends to families, who will be required to sign off on their child’s work each night. Assignments will be available for both families and students to confirm via a recorded homework telephone number each day. There will be no excuses for not completing homework; non-completion will result in mandatory attendance at Homework Club, held between 3:45 PM and 5:00 PM each day.³⁰

²⁷ Comparisons based on a 6.5 hr. school day and 181 school days per year for NYC DOE schools. Please note as well that during our first year of operations we plan to explore the possibility of having 75 minutes of after school enrichment from 3:45 PM to 5:00 PM four days each week for *all* students and hope to implement this program during the latter years of this charter.

²⁸ A recent study of the link between homework policies and academic success found that “excellent schools assign significant homework.” See: H, Cooper, J. Lindsay, & S. Greathouse, “Relationships Among Attitudes About Homework, Amount of Homework, and Student Achievement,” *Journal of Education Psychology*, (Vol. 90, No. 1).

²⁹ Again, this practice would hinge on our being re-chartered after five years.

³⁰ Such policies have been successful at many of the school we studied, including KIPP, North Star, Amistad, Bronx Prep, Roxbury Prep, South Boston Harbor Academy, and the Academy of the Pacific Rim.

Help Students Until They Master It

Students learn at varying rates. Schools that expect all students to meet high standards must be prepared to support students—regardless of the pace at or style in which they learn—until they reach mastery. At Leadership Prep, this learning support comes through multiple means:

- Clear, engaging, high-quality lessons in the classroom fostered by a low student to teacher ratio (especially in the lower grades, where it is no higher than 16:1)
- The increased learning time that we provide relative to district schools
- Pull-out and push-in instruction by our full-time Learning Support Specialist and related services such as counseling, speech, and occupational and physical therapy for student who require it
- Mandatory after-school and Saturday program tutoring for students who require additional individual and small-group attention

All of these strategies and supports ensure that students with disabilities, students with limited English language proficiency, and students “at-risk” of academic failure meet the high standards that we set at Leadership Prep.

Provide Structure and Order

Effective learning cannot occur in an atmosphere of chaos and disorder. Creating an environment of order and structure, in which teachers can focus on teaching and students can focus on learning, is essential to our ability to deliver on our mission. We will therefore hold students to an explicit and high Code of Conduct, presented to students repeatedly to keep it in the forefronts of their minds.³¹ The Code is clear and detailed and includes consequences both positive and negative.³² Staff will enforce the Code uniformly—even provisions that may seem inconsequential, such as keeping shirts tucked in. The Director of the highly successful Roxbury Prep Charter School in Boston summed up that school’s approach by saying, “We make a big deal, a HUGE deal, about small things so that big things never happen.”³³ By focusing seriously on rules and behavioral standards in the early grades,

³¹ Moments at which our Code of Conduct is presented and re-presented include: during a meeting at the student’s home before their first day of school with us; on a family compact that must be signed by families (and students in third grade and above); in classrooms during orientation and during the first days of school; and on inspirational posters throughout the school.

³² Students who violate the Code of Conduct lose privileges such as playtime, field trips, and after-school enrichment programs, while students who exemplify it earn rewards such as points which they can redeem at our school store and the opportunity to go on extra field trips. Families are notified of their child’s behavior on a weekly basis so that they can be involved in helping students to maintain these standards. Significant and repeated violations result in families being called into school to create a solution and, if sufficiently disruptive, can eventually result in more serious disciplinary action.

³³ Director Josh Philips, *Site Visit by Lead Founder* (9/14/04). A recent study by Public Agenda, a public policy research organization, concluded that strict enforcement of all rules, especially those pertaining to “small” infractions, is the best means of preventing more serious discipline issues. See *Teaching Interrupted: Do Discipline Policies in Today’s Public Schools Foster the Common Good?*

(www.publicagenda.org/research/pdfs/teaching_interrupted.pdf accessed on 5/12/04). In fact, the NYC DOE recently adopted this approach with great success in its most troubled schools. One high DOE official described the strategy in this way: “If you concentrate on the small things, you will send an unequivocal

we believe we can have this same effect and thereby create an environment conducive to effective learning.

We also create structure and order by placing special emphasis on our daily, weekly, and annual rituals. We believe, as does Dr. Lorraine Monroe, the founder of the Frederick Douglass Academy, that such rituals serve the essential purpose of enabling students to “anticipate a routine within the charter school that is often lacking in their families and their communities.”³⁴ Each day will begin with a community meeting that builds a sense of inter-connectedness and starts students off with a “can-do” mindset. Uniformity in practice cuts across our classrooms: students will know what to expect and how to succeed. They will see the same blackboard configurations, the same organizational structures around homework, and the same writing process in every grade and subject.³⁵

Keep it Personal

Feeling known, cared for, and respected is a prerequisite to the sense of personal value and well-being necessary for effective learning.³⁶ In order to maintain this “small feel,” Leadership Prep will ultimately operate as three semi-independent “Academies” (Foundations Academy – K-3; Scholars Academy – 4-5; and eventually Seniors Academy – 6-8), ensuring that every student is part of an intimate community of fewer than 275 students. Because of this design, students will be known well by the teachers who work tirelessly to ensure that all students meet the high standards we have set. As students overcome the authentic challenges set by our high standards, and as they gain strong literacy and math skills, they will come to see that with enough hard work they can meet any challenge and surpass any obstacle. This, in turn, will enable them to tackle ever increasing magnitudes of challenge. They will see their education not as a waste of time or a path to more of the same mediocrity or failure but as the means of attaining a future full of choices and possibilities. This “small school” or individualized approach also best allows students with special needs or limited English language proficiency to progress academically within the regular education classroom.

Develop Character

For many of our students, who will be the first members of their families to attend college, the path to higher education will be a long and arduous climb. A school can encourage, cajole, and prepare a student academically, but ultimate success relies on a student’s internal belief in and commitment to his or her own success.³⁷ To get our students through the long climb to college, we will inculcate

message that order is the order of the day.” (Susan Saulny, “City Adapts Policing Strategy to Violent Schools,” *The New York Times*, 10/19/04)

³⁴ From *Transforming Children’s Lives*, a talk that Dr. Monroe delivered at a Building Excellent Schools conference in Boston, MA, 2000.

³⁵ This uniformity will be established by having the staff spend time in the summer working with school leaders through discussion and role-play to design standards and practices to which all can adhere.

³⁶ Research has repeatedly indicated that small schools are highly effective in ensuring that urban students reach proficiency. A recent study by Bank Street College of Education found that “small schools established between 1990 and 1997 in the Chicago area found that students in these schools had lower dropout rates, completed more courses, made higher grades and showed some improvements in standardized test scores.” Education Commission of the States (<http://ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/issuesK12.asp>, accessed on 12/11/04).

³⁷ The role of a student’s belief in their own ability to succeed based on the strength of their own efforts in overall academic achievement has been closely documented by a variety of studies. See Carol Dweck, *Self Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development*, (2000).

perseverance and courage. In order to fulfill our long-term goal of having students become leaders in their communities, we will inculcate commitments to excellence, compassion, and entrepreneurship.³⁸

Because developing these personal qualities is inextricably linked to delivering on our mission, our academic program is paired with a character education curriculum. This curriculum will be designed internally by our staff to ensure that it meets the specific needs of our students; it will draw, however, on both off-the-shelf programs, such as Heartwood Ethics (a literature-based program), and school-developed programs, such as the ones employed at Boston Preparatory Charter School, Marva Collins Charter School, Elm City College Preparatory Charter School, and Excellence Charter School of Bedford-Stuyvesant. Our schedule includes 100 minutes per week in grades kindergarten through third and 140 minutes per week thereafter to focus on character development through exploration of poems, fables, fairy tales, and other literature with morals or messages. In addition to classroom activities, the program includes periodic assemblies, outdoor education, service learning, internships, and extracurricular activities.

Involve Families

There are many obstacles to successfully involving families in their children's academic lives. Families often have many competing demands on their time and attention. Based on their own school experiences, some do not have positive feelings about schools or teachers. Some avoid involvement in their children's schoolwork because their own academic skill deficits make them feel embarrassed or unable to help. Moreover, many school-parent relationships suffer because the first time that the parent hears from the school is when there is a "problem" to discuss.

Yet active family involvement in school and learning is essential to meeting our mission of preparing students to succeed in high school and college.³⁹ We will therefore foster family engagement in our students' learning and success through abundant and on-going communication between the parent and school, creating a dynamic in which we are partners with families in promoting their children's academic success. We will build this relationship by:

- Conducting information sessions during the application process and for new families after the lottery
- Visiting each new student's family in their home before their child begins at the school
- Providing a voluntary Contract of Commitment which lets families know what they can count on from the school and clarifies the school's expectations of students and families

³⁸ Our efforts to foster entrepreneurship will be supported by curriculum and materials from the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship. Research by Harvard and Brandeis Universities indicates that programs designed by the foundation increase student interest in attending college and improve occupational aspirations, team work, organizational, and planning skills. (<http://www.nfte.com/impact/> accessed on 12/14/04.)

³⁹ In fact, one recent study found that students from families with above-median parental involvement showed success rates 30% higher than those from families with below-median parental involvement, as measured by GPAs, test scores in math, science, reading, and social studies, and retention rates. See Xitao Fan & Michael Chen, *Parental Involvement and Student's Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis*, National Science Foundation (1999). Another study found that benefits of increased parental involvement include higher test scores and grades, higher graduation rates, and higher enrollment rates in post-secondary education. See A. Henderson, *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Crucial to Student Achievement*, The National Committee for Citizens in Education, (1994).

- Sending home a weekly newsletter of classroom and school-wide news and information
- Meeting with families for at least three formal conferences each year to discuss their child's progress
- Issuing three formal Progress Reports and three formal Report Cards that include quantitative and qualitative evaluation of student performance each year
- Handing report cards to families in person so that there are opportunities for questions and discussions
- Sending home weekly behavioral updates
- Having a dedicated Dean of Students for each Academy who works to build strong relationships with families
- Providing a summary of homework assignments for all classes each night through a voice mail system and asking families to check and sign that their child has completed all homework each night
- Providing periodic evening or weekend workshops designed to help families hone the skills they need to be effective teachers for their children
- Creating regular events in which families are invited into the school to celebrate student work

Help Students Envision a Bright Future Which Inspires Them To Achieve

Research indicates that children who have a clear and positive image of their futures are better able to overcome the hurdles that being born into low-income communities can place before them.⁴⁰ Beginning in kindergarten, we will expose our students to the world of high school and college with the implicit and explicit message that with hard work they have all the tools and ability necessary to succeed in these institutions. We will present this message through classroom lessons, exposure to mentors and tutors from institutions of higher learning, and real and virtual tours of campuses.

Because we want our students to strive academically in order to earn life choices, we will also expose them to as much of the wider world of art, music, recreation, and nature as possible. Such exposure is essential to helping students to see the life that is possible for them (and for their communities) through their own perseverance and commitment. This exposure includes art, music, martial arts, and other enrichment classes as well as single and multi-day field trips to museums, local and national parks, high schools, colleges, and adventure programs such as Outward Bound.

⁴⁰ See: E. Werner, "Resiliency in Development," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, (June 1995), p. 81-85 and R. Brooks, "Children at risk: fostering resilience and hope," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, (1997), p. 545-553.

Organizational Strengths

While the academic challenge of ensuring that low-income students achieve academic mastery is a significant one, we recognize that the majority of charter schools nationwide whose charters have been revoked or not renewed have failed as a result of their non-academic operations. We have therefore put significant thought and analysis into designing an organization that is fully prepared for the challenge of supporting our academic mission:

Able and Eager Leadership

We have strategically crafted a Board of Trustees with the skills and commitment to make the school a success. We have focused on recruiting accomplished professionals who bring a range of experiences in managing and governing for-profit and not-for-profit organizations and who, most importantly, stand committed to investing the time and attention necessary to make the school a success. Our Board has met twice a month since December, 2004; we have been in touch with one another and with our Lead Founder on a daily basis to craft and refine our school plan. As a Board, we are committed to ensuring that the school has the resources and governance that it needs to deliver on its mission of preparing students to excel in college preparatory high schools and colleges. We are united by our common conviction that at Leadership Prep student achievement drives decisions, governance, and leadership.

Max Koltuv, our Lead Founder, whom we intend will serve as the founding Head of School for Leadership Prep, brings a valuable set of skills and experiences that will ensure our success. As a former strategy consultant to Fortune 500 companies, Mr. Koltuv brings a strong private-sector sense of accountability and efficiency. As a former teacher at a high-performing, urban, charter elementary school, and an Outward Bound instructor, Mr. Koltuv has first-hand knowledge of what it takes to ensure academic success and character development for students. As a founder of the World Academy for Total Community Health, a New Visions high school in Brownsville, Brooklyn, Mr. Koltuv is familiar with the challenges of launching a new school. This knowledge has been enhanced during the last nine months through Mr. Koltuv's participation in the Building Excellent Schools Fellowship. As a Fellow, Mr. Koltuv benefited from visits to more than 20 schools and more than 600 hours of training in best practices of urban school design led by experts from across the country.

An Effective Management Structure

Without a central district office to provide administrative services, charter schools face the significant challenge of managing their own logistical and financial operations. We have therefore chosen the two-role management structure commonly used by high-performing charter schools. Our Head of School reports to the Board and is ultimately responsible for all aspects of the school's operations, focusing primarily on external and non-academic functions, including Board relations, regulatory reporting, financial operations, and fundraising. The Principal reports to the Head of School and focuses exclusively on issues of teaching and learning. We believe that by having the Head of School address all external issues and by enabling the Principal to maintain a tight focus on academics we ensure our ability to deliver on our core academic mission.

A Sound Financial Plan

The school that we have designed cannot function, especially in its early years, solely on the resources provided by our per-pupil allotment and other governmental grants. We have therefore based our financial projections on anticipated philanthropic revenue from individual, foundation, and corporate sources. Our founding group brings significant experience in fundraising and access to those with

philanthropic capital. While we firmly believe that our Board and school leadership have the skills and experience to raise the money we require, we recognize the need for a contingency plan to maintain our program and mission should our best fundraising efforts fall short. We have included such a contingency plan in Attachment 47.

In addition, our financial plan relies on securing space in existing New York City Department of Education buildings (NYC DOE). Based on the Chancellor's public commitments to such arrangements, and the relatively low capacity utilization rate in Bedford-Stuyvesant (69%), we believe that this is a prudent and realistic plan.⁴¹ However, because we cannot be entirely certain that we will secure DOE space, we have also included in our financial planning a contingency plan that could be invoked if we fail to secure DOE space.

With or without philanthropic funding or DOE space, we stand ready to deliver on our educational mission while maintaining the school's firm financial footing.

Measures of Success

We recognize and welcome the fact that the freedom that we enjoy as a charter school is closely tied to an increased level of accountability for results. We will measure our performance as an organization just as we measure our students' academic performance. While specific measures of success will be developed in our Accountability Plan during our first year of operations, essential measures of our success or effectiveness include:

- The proportion of our students who demonstrate mastery as measured by New York State assessments
- The performance of our students relative to the performance of students in our community, city, and state, as measured by New York State assessments
- The performance of our students relative to the performance of students nationwide, as measured by a nationally-normed assessment
- Our students' annual rate of progress relative to their own mastery and to grade level, as measured on a nationally-normed assessment
- The maintenance of a positive cash-flow and strong overall financial position
- Attendance rates that exceed community and city-wide averages
- Strong interest in and satisfaction with the school as measured by student attrition rates and the length of our waiting list

The Head of School and Board of Trustees set annual performance goals for the school relative to these metrics; quarterly, we will formally review our progress toward them.

⁴¹ 2003 – 2004 New York City Department of Education School Construction Authority Enrollment, Capacity, and Utilization Report, <http://www.nycsca.org/html/bluebook03-04.html> accessed on 12/14/04.