

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NEW YORK CITY CENTER FOR CHARTER SCHOOL EXCELLENCE

CHARTER SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Concept Paper

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT	3
New York City Public Education: A Crossroads of Opportunity.....	3
The Children First Agenda—and Challenge.....	3
A New Schools Strategy	3
The Critical Role of Charter Schools.....	3
THE CHANCELLOR’S CHARTER SCHOOL INITIATIVE	4
Goal 1: Create Fifty Excellent New Charter Schools	4
Goal 2: Create “The New York City Center for Charter School Excellence”.....	5
Goal 3: Make NYC “Charter Friendly”	5
THE NEW YORK CITY CENTER FOR CHARTER SCHOOL EXCELLENCE.....	5
1. Stimulating the Supply of Charter School Developers	5
2. Providing Charter Industry-Wide Assistance	7
3. Coordinating with the Department of Education.....	7
4. Administering Technical Assistance Grants	8
5. Building a Charter School Network.....	8
6. Studying and Advocating for Systemic Reform	8
MAKING NYC CHARTER FRIENDLY.....	9
Internal Policies Generating Support for Charters.....	9
Lobbying for Policy Change.....	10
THE ROLE OF THE OFFICE OF NEW SCHOOLS.....	11
1. Rigorous Review and Recommendation of Applications.....	11
2. Meaningful Accountability and Quality Assurance.....	12
3. Rigorous Charter Renewal.....	12
LOOKING AHEAD	13
Will it Work?	13
Timeline	13
On the Horizon.....	13

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

New York City Public Education: A Crossroads of Opportunity

New York City is at the crossroads of the future of urban public education in the United States. With their dramatic school reform agenda, *Children First*, Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein are targeting the structural and cultural impediments to the creation of effective schools for urban children. Central to this agenda is recognition that the system of public education rooted in the early 20th century industrial model of district organization is fundamentally ill-equipped to meet the goal of educating all students to high standards. Bureaucratic school districts are outmoded and dysfunctional. The needs of schools have been subordinated to a set of rules and rationales designed for bureaucratic ends or interest group satisfaction. This monopoly has stifled innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurialism, leaving a school system that is unable to generate the capacity for teaching and learning at the individual school level for the majority of our students—evidenced by data collected under the federal No Child Left Behind Act which identified 331 of the City's 1,200 schools as needing substantial improvement.

The Children First Agenda—and Challenge

The *Children First* reform agenda is a dramatic challenge to this organization of public education. *Children First* recognizes that public schools today must support every student to master high level mathematics and communications skills; acquire the ability to solve problems as well as the social skills to work as a member of a team. *Children First* recognizes that we cannot reach these standards for all without fundamentally reshaping the system to make its primary focus the creation and support of individually effective schools for all students.

A New Schools Strategy

To meet the *Children First* goal of providing an effective school for every child, Chancellor Joel Klein has made new school development an essential element of the *Children First* reform strategy. Two hundred new small schools, designed around proven characteristics of highly effective schools, will be created in the next three to five years. These schools serve a number of functions: they will operate in healthy competition to the status quo of existing schools; they will provide opportunities for entrepreneurs to bring their talent to public education; and through greater regulatory freedom and decision making autonomy, these new schools will focus our attention on the vision of the future: on “what can be” in a dramatic rather than an incremental way.

The Critical Role of Charter Schools

Charter schools are a critical element of Chancellor Klein's new schools strategy. Charter schools are public schools governed by a not-for-profit board of trustees and operating by the terms of a five-year performance contract or “charter.” Charter schools are publicly funded, may not discriminate in their admissions, and must meet the same state standards and Regents requirements that are in place for all other public schools. In the charter, each school commits to meet or exceed ambitious goals and objectives for student performance. Schools are accountable for this performance, as a charter can be revoked if outcomes are not met. In return for this high degree of accountability, charter schools enjoy greater freedom from state and local regulations. Additionally, charter schools are:

- ***Schools of choice.*** Parents choose to send their students to a charter school. Teachers and administrators choose to work there. This choice is an investment in the school's enterprise;
- ***Free to design and operate their school program:*** Each charter school develops a rigorous curriculum and has the autonomy and flexibility to make necessary adjustments and mid-course corrections.
- ***Free to manage their human resources:*** Each charter school develops their own personnel manual. Although charter school teachers may organize at any time, charter schools that open with fewer than

- 250 students do not inherit pre-existing work rules and consequently may be innovative in their organization of the school day, management of human resources, and employee compensation;
- ***Free to manage their finances.*** Charter schools must manage their public funding in a responsible manner, but they are free from the public system's regulated budget process, expenditure system, and accounting requirements.

This freedom introduces market forces long since absent from public education. It stimulates innovation. It reduces barriers to entry by allowing entrepreneurs to take a fresh look at public education and envision it with a new set of assumptions. This freedom allows parents to choose from a variety of options in the education marketplace. And as each charter is essentially a terminable performance contract, charter schools are more accountable than traditional public schools: charters must capitalize on this freedom and translate it into clear and demonstrable student achievement.

The "freedom for accountability" contract is at the heart of all charter schools. They will succeed or fail based on the quality of their product, customer satisfaction, and organizational discipline. Charter schools must demonstrate real results or face real consequences. Although these market principles are largely foreign to traditional public schools, charter school founders have accepted the challenge and are meeting their commitments to students, parents, and other stakeholders.

The Critical Role of the Charter School Philanthropic Community

The Chancellor recognizes that New York charter schools exist and have succeeded because of the foresight and leadership of the philanthropic community. Philanthropies provided start-up funds, when no public resources were available. Philanthropists and foundations provided capital to support charter school facilities projects. Funders took the lead in strategic solutions, such as supporting Civic Builders and its innovative model of not-for-profit charter school real-estate development. In many regards, there would be few to no charter schools without this support.

The Chancellor's Initiative builds on the groundwork of support, planning, and thought that the philanthropic community has committed to charter schools. In one of the best examples of public private partnership, this Initiative represents how small-scale innovation will now have a broader application to the benefit of New York City's students and families.

THE CHANCELLOR'S CHARTER SCHOOL INITIATIVE

For the first time in the brief history of New York City's charter school movement, the DOE will marshal internal and external resources and expertise, connect the many charter school supporters and service providers, and mobilize significant philanthropic support to launch a landmark charter school initiative to meet three primary goals:

- 1) **Create 50 excellent new charter schools**
- 2) **Create the "New York City Center for Charter School Excellence"**
- 3) **Make NYC "Charter Friendly"**

Goal 1: Create Fifty Excellent New Charter Schools

Chancellor Klein believes in the importance of charter schools, their regulatory freedom, their accountability for results, and the market-based competition that they introduce into public education. As a result, the Chancellor will create and support the development of 50 excellent charter schools over the next three to five years. These new charter schools will span K-12 grade levels with the expectation that many will address the K-8 needs of the city. These schools will be carefully planned and supported through technical assistance provided by the DOE and third-party organizations and partnerships.

Goal 2: Create “The New York City Center for Charter School Excellence”

The Chancellor, in close coordination with the philanthropic community, is supporting the development of a new intermediary organization, the New York City Center for Charter School Excellence, whose mission will be to stimulate the supply of excellent charter schools in New York City by providing support services, advocacy, and the strategic use of public and private resources and expertise.

The Center will be constituted as a not-for-profit organization, governed by a private board of trustees representing the public, private, and non-profit sectors and who are strong advocates of charter schools. The Chancellor or his designee will serve on the Board and will appoint a limited number of members who have demonstrated support of charter schools. Founding funders of this Center will select the remaining and majority of board members. The autonomy of a separate 501-c(3) organization will provide to the Center the flexibility and longevity to operate with an entrepreneurial philosophy and independent voice. The Center will stimulate the supply of school founders and quality school proposals. It will provide charter industry-wide support services and will coordinate with DOE to promote institutional solutions. The Center will administer start-up and technical assistance grants to schools and will act as a charter school network facilitator. Lastly, the Center will study and disseminate information about the Chancellor’s Charter Initiative to inform policy development and system-wide reform.

See page 5 for greater detail on the role of the Center.

Goal 3: Make NYC “Charter Friendly”

The New York City charter school movement is subject to “market barriers” that limit its growth and success. Dramatic action is necessary to address these market barriers. New practices must be put into place if the sizable resources of the DOE will be brought to bear to support charter schools. To that end, the Chancellor is building a solid foundation of strong public support through (1) precedent-setting internal policies and (2) aggressive lobbying for supportive legislative change. These policies are among the strongest supports provided by a school system to charter schools—anywhere in the country.

See page 9 for an outline of these policies and proposed legislative agenda.

THE NEW YORK CITY CENTER FOR CHARTER SCHOOL EXCELLENCE

To accomplish its mission of stimulating the supply of excellent charter schools in New York City, the work of the Charter Center would fall into the following general categories:

- 1) Stimulating the supply of charter school developers
- 2) Providing charter industry-wide assistance
- 3) Coordinating with the DOE
- 4) Administering technical assistance grants
- 5) Building a charter school network
- 6) Studying and advocating for systemic reform

A description of each category follows.

1. Stimulating the Supply of Charter School Developers

Locally and nationally, charter school authorizers have experienced a leveling or decline in the number of new charter school applications. Observers suspect that the charter school movement’s initial group of founders and entrepreneurs has been exhausted. Furthermore, the challenges of starting a charter school pose a disincentive for would-be founders. As a result, the charter movement has individual examples of excellence started by “genius” founders but few examples of scalable models that cultivate and stimulate the supply of charter schools and school founders. To meet this structural challenge, the Center will employ a variety of strategies to stimulate supply including:

- **Recruit Outstanding Individuals:** The public supports provided through the Chancellor's Charter Initiative, in particular access to facilities, will motivate entrepreneurs who already have the desire to create and run an extraordinary charter school. By promoting the Chancellor's Charter Initiative through direct marketing strategies, the Center will tap into a rich stock of potential charter school leaders and founders. To support their school planning, the Center will issue a competitive Request for Qualifiers. Individuals selected through this RFQ will be eligible to receive up to \$50,000 as a performance-based planning grant, approved by the Center's Board, to prepare a first-rate charter school application.
- **Recruit Outstanding Intermediaries:** A number of not-for-profit organizations have the interest and capacity to develop and support a network of new charter schools. To attract these intermediaries, the Center will issue a nationwide RFQ to identify the best intermediary organizations to develop New York City charter schools. Intermediaries qualified through the RFQ process will be eligible to receive up to \$150,000 as a performance-based planning grant, approved by the Center's board, to prepare first-rate charter school applications and a network business plan. Furthermore, as each intermediary will require school planning teams for each school project, the Center will broker relationships between individuals and intermediaries.
- **Engage Local and National "Suppliers" of School Leaders:** Numerous organizations and universities are in the "leadership business." For example, New Leaders for New Schools, the Building Excellent Schools Fellowship, and the DOE's Leadership Academy all develop new school leaders. To connect to their work, the Center will either enter into performance contracts with such entities or fund individuals to take advantage of the training they provide.
- **Replication of Successful Charter Schools:** The Chancellor's Charter Initiative provides a unique incentive for founders of successful charter schools to open additional schools. The added resources of the Chancellor's Initiative will create an opportunity to turn school-level success into a network of successful schools. To facilitate this process, the Center will simplify the charter school application process by adding "terms of agreement" to the pre-existing charters.
- **Application Preparation:** The Center recognizes that effective school planning is a prerequisite to an excellent school. Effective planning often requires expert assistance. Consequently, the Center will require, as a term of a planning grant, that qualified individuals and organizations enter into intensive relationships with people or organizations that will provide meaningful and high-quality technical assistance throughout a school's planning and start-up. By funding schools rather than support organizations, the Center employs a customer-driven model of technical assistance in which school founders can choose service providers that best match their needs and interests.

A number of New York City organizations support charter school planning and application development including the New York Charter School Resource Center and the Center for Educational Innovation-Public Education Association. The Local Initiative Support Corporation and Civic Builders provide technical assistance and financing options for innovative facilities solutions. Additionally, the work of a number of New York City organizations that support non-profit organizations is also applicable to charter schools. By actively facilitating partnerships between new school founders and groups such as these, the Center will support school planning by building upon the expertise and capacity that currently exists in the New York charter and non-profit market and will stimulate the supply of additional service providers. In the event that some support services are not available through existing providers, or to guarantee higher quality of services, the Center will directly provide planning and support services to charter school founders.

2. Providing Charter Industry-Wide Assistance

Although various organizations provide a variety of support services, there is no coherent mechanism for charter school operators to access expertise and support across the varying challenges posed by simultaneously starting a new school and new business. These challenges include fundraising to meet start-up costs, real-estate identification and development, effective school governance, and other organizational and business aspects of running a charter school. To meet this pressing need, the Center will facilitate industry-wide solutions. The Center will address a variety of industry-wide challenges by prioritizing and building business functions over time, starting with the following:

- **Facilities:** The Chancellor recognizes that access to quality facilities is arguably the single greatest barrier to charter school development. In response to this challenge, the Chancellor has thrown wide open the door of public school facilities to charter schools. For the 2003-2004 school year, seven of New York City's 24 charter schools will be located in public space with additional projects underway. Also, included in this Initiative will be capital funding to support a variety of facilities projects. In many respects, these are national precedent-setting policies. But they are only as effective as they are successfully implemented. Consequently, the Center will work with both applicants and the DOE's Office of New Schools to match facilities needs and opportunities. Through close work with the Department's School Construction Authority and Regional Superintendents, the Center will broker facilities solutions for new charter projects.

One expectation is that the Department's capital support can be enhanced with private equity through alternative public-private financing. To enhance these efforts, the Center will work with organizations such as Civic Builders and the Local Initiative Support Corporation to identify affordable, convertible commercial real estate for planned charter schools. In all cases, the Center will help charter operators evaluate possible sites, review zoning, building codes and regulations, and make an appropriate site selection.

- **Private Start-Up Funds:** Fundraising of public and private dollars, particularly for start-up funds, is a make-or-break issue for all charter schools. To meet the pressing demands of start-up costs, the Chancellor has made available to charter schools \$400,000 public grants. To match this public support, the Center will provide or facilitate as much as an additional \$1,000 per pupil in private support for school start-up costs. For a school of 500, this represents as much as \$500,000 per school. Any grants administered by the Center will be approved by its Board. The Center may also broker philanthropic support directly between schools and private foundations or benefactors.
- **Human Resource Support:** All charter schools need strong school leaders and teachers as this resource is a linchpin to any successful school. Currently, each charter school relies on their own networks and contacts to advertise and recruit potential employees. In an effort to gain greater economies of scale, the Center will serve as a clearing house for job postings and resumes. Ultimate decision making remains with each school to respect their charter autonomy.

3. Coordinating with the Department of Education

Critical to the success of the Chancellor's Charter Initiative is its connection and coherence with the other components of the new school strategy. To meet this objective, the Center will work closely with the Office of New Schools and other new school intermediaries. This connection will also help to align the Center's work with the important reforms of *Children First* while at the same time informing policy development based on the success of the charter school work.

The Center will work closely with the Office of New Schools to coordinate appropriate supports for charter schools. The intent is that this coordination with the Office will evolve into more direct contact

between the Center and various DOE divisions as the Center and the Office organize their efforts for scale.

4. Administering Technical Assistance Grants

At times, the best planned schools will face educational and operational challenges that may prevent them from meeting their chartered goals. In such instances, industry-wide solutions and interventions are not enough, rather school-specific solutions are necessary.

To support these solutions the Center will administer technical assistance grants that are approved by its Board and paid directly to schools. These grants will allow schools to design, propose, and implement solutions to the challenges they face. By providing grants to schools, the Center uses a customer-driven model of technical assistance that helps to ensure the quality and cost-effectiveness of vendors, consultants, and other problem solvers.

Given the broad range of educational and operational challenges to new charter schools, and as school leaders may have access to only a limited network of problem solvers, the Center will maintain lists of preferred support organizations, vendors, consultants, and other problem solvers. These lists will allow schools to seek out different perspectives to decide which solution best fits their school design and philosophy. Vendor lists may fall into a variety of categories including back office support, programmatic support, special education expertise, charter school legal counsel, and marketing and public relations firms.

5. Building a Charter School Network

To create a healthy charter movement, it is necessary to stimulate the creation of a charter network in which schools have the opportunity to meet, share information, and develop a professional association. These interactions also serve as an important form of quality control, as school leaders can share information about what works and what does not, which vendors are helpful, and which ones are not. Simply put, this is an important way to develop the charter network as a self-sustaining and learning system. To support this voluntary association of charter school leaders, the Center will employ a network liaison charged to stimulate these critical connections.

This network need not be exclusive to charter schools. Rather, connections will be encouraged between charter schools and other new schools created through Children First Initiatives as well as existing public schools. For this network to be meaningful, it must grow organically overtime, and the Center will dedicate time and energy to stimulate meaningful and mutually-beneficial relationships between schools and district and regional leadership.

6. Studying and Advocating for Systemic Reform

Through this Initiative the Chancellor, with support and leadership from the philanthropic community, is establishing charter schools and the creation of a charter network as one of the DOE's principal research and development programs for public education. This Initiative will provide a different and effective model of autonomous and empowered public schools that are organized in an innovative network and that serve the overarching educational needs of New York City. This precedent setting work requires close scrutiny, research, and dissemination to inform local and national education policies. Consequently, the Center will support the development of this Initiative into a model for wider New York City and national application by:

- Analyzing and publishing the work of New York City's charter schools and the effectiveness of the charter open sector,
- Representing and advocating on behalf of New York City charter schools at the local, regional and national levels,

- Working closely with existing advocacy organizations such as the New York Charter Schools Association,
- Developing strategic partnerships and resources that serve the charter school movement both locally and nationally,
- Networking charter schools with traditional public schools in order to allow for the sharing of best practices.

In all of these activities, the goal of the Center will be to help establish the Chancellor's Charter Initiative as a replicable strategy for transforming public school systems from static entities into self-improving systems. This advocacy will address industry-wide trends, issues, and challenges so that it can support the movement while remaining impartial to the needs of particular schools.

MAKING NYC CHARTER FRIENDLY

To make NYC as charter friendly as possible, the Chancellor has already endorsed a number of substantive internal policy changes. In addition, he and the Mayor will lobby the state for important legislative changes to support the development of charter schools.

Internal Policies Generating Support for Charters

- ***Capital commitment:*** The DOE is currently developing its next five-year capital plan. This plan will include resources to support charter school facilities projects. This funding will allow the Department to contribute to a variety of projects to house charter schools and in doing so address the single greatest barrier to new charter school development. Projects may include renovation of public space for charter school use, joint public-private financing of new construction, lease-hold improvements, the creation of a revolving loan pool, and other alternative financing projects that use public funds to leverage private and not-for-profit capital resources.
- ***Use of public school facilities:*** As facilities identification, financing, and use is the single greatest barrier to charter school development, the Chancellor has made a firm commitment to house all new charter schools created through this Initiative. Although some school developers and their supporters will prefer to use privately owned and financed facilities, all Chancellor-authorized schools will have access to Department facilities support. This support may take a variety of forms depending on the condition of the Department's facilities infrastructure, demographic trends, capital priorities, and the educational needs of a particular community. Regardless of the form, no Chancellor-authorized charter school will need to independently find a solution to the facilities challenge.
- ***\$400,000 public start-up grants:*** The Department has a long-standing policy to provide start-up funds for new schools. In a continued effort to erase the distinction between new traditional public schools and new charter schools, the Chancellor has extended this policy to all new charter schools created in New York City. As a result, schools receive approximately \$200,000 in public start-up funds in their first year and on going per capita funding until the school reaches full enrollment. As a result, a school of 500 students will receive over \$400,000 in public start-up funding. As this does not cover all start-up and planning activities, it is anticipated that this funding will be matched by private philanthropic support.
- ***Increased operating funding:*** Through detailed analysis of the charter school funding formula, the Department identified specific causes of a funding disparity which results in fewer operating dollars for charter schools. To correct a component of this disparity, the Chancellor doubled charter schools'

special education funding. This policy, which establishes a state-wide precedent for the funding of charter school special education, brings each school's resources to parity with the larger school system and in fiscal year 2003 allocated an additional \$600,000 to New York City charter schools.

- **Technology infrastructure:** A better technological connection between New York City charter schools and the Department results in better services to the school, easier reporting of data, and a seamless transfer of students into and out of charter schools. Consequently, the Chancellor has provided charter schools with full access to and functionality within the Department's student information system, procurement system, and intranet. Over \$25,000 in hardware is provided to each charter school along with training and tech support. As current IT systems are limited in their current capabilities, this technological connection will provide a basis to create new and more effective systems that will better respond to the accountability demands that are central to charter schools and that are reinforced by No Child Left Behind.

Lobbying for Policy Change

There is no doubt that the current charter school law provides tremendous freedom and opportunity to begin implementing much of this Initiative—now. But to meet the full potential of this effort, administrative and legislative change is necessary. And fortunately, the stage is set to make these changes as the New York State Department of Education recently released a draft report recognizing the early success of New York charter schools. Also, the expectations of No Child Left Behind and the Campaign for Fiscal Equity give two more important reasons to expand and enhance the charter opportunity. Consequently the Chancellor, supported by the Center and other charter school proponents, will vigorously engage the New York State Governor, the Legislature, the State Board of Regents, and the State Education Department to enact the following changes:

- **Eliminate the New School "Cap":** The Charter Schools Act currently limits the number of new schools that may be chartered at 100 statewide. To date, 51 new charters have been granted, and the New York Charter School Resource Center reports that at least 24 charter applications are in development for schools proposed throughout the State. Although not all of these applications will be approved, it is a clear indication that to fully meet the goal of creating 50 schools, this cap must be increased or eliminated.
- **Encourage Intermediaries through New Governance Structures:** Currently, the Charter Schools Act only permits a not-for-profit charter school board of trustees to operate a single school at a single site. This requirement prevents not-for-profit intermediaries from operating numerous schools under a single board. To encourage a not-for-profit intermediary strategy of school creation, the Chancellor will seek to remove the "one board, one school, one site" limitation on new charter schools.
- **Increase the Chancellor's Authority:** Currently, the Chancellor may approve and grant provisional charters but must submit these applications to the Board of Regents for final approval. Fortunately, due to the strength of Chancellor-authorized schools, no proposal has been rejected by the Regents. To further bolster this authority, the Chancellor will seek to acquire authority similar to that which is entrusted to the State University of New York which may resubmit applications to the Board of Regents that will be approved by act of law.
- **Streamline Charter School Oversight:** The New York City DOE has established an effective oversight arrangement with the State Education Department. In this arrangement, the New York City Department conducts oversight of Chancellor-authorized schools and provides assurances to State authorities on compliance issues. This arrangement has effectively streamlined charter school oversight so that two different government agencies are not duplicating efforts. To institutionalize

this arrangement, the Chancellor will seek formal recognition of the New York City Department of Education as the primary oversight body for Chancellor-authorized charter schools.

- **Release State Categorical Funds:** Charter schools are currently ineligible to receive state categorical funds. These funds, which represent 12% of the New York City DOE's budget, support programs for English Language Learners and students with compensatory educational need. Charter schools' inability to access these state funds creates a clear funding disparity between charter schools and the school districts in which they reside. More damaging, state funds do not follow English Language Learners from a traditional public school into a charter school. The Chancellor will seek to correct this failure in how state funds are distributed by either petitioning the State Education Department to amend their funding guidelines or through an amendment to the Charter Schools Act.

THE ROLE OF THE OFFICE OF NEW SCHOOLS

In order to support the overall charter initiative, the Office of New Schools' charter-related work must continue to prioritize high quality charter authorization and quality assurance. Good authorizing is a critical component of a healthy charter school movement. Authorizers are the administrators and protectors of the public trust and should be judged by the sustained performance of the schools they create. Regrettably, authorizers are a traditionally under-resourced area of the charter industry and as a result, schools may be hastily approved or created under political pressure. Once schools are approved, many authorizers do not have the capacity to verify that they are meeting their performance commitments and are operating in a responsible manner. All of these shortcomings set a stage for failure.

Recognizing the importance of good authorizing, the Chancellor will bolster resources within the Department's Office of New Schools that are dedicated to these duties to ensure an effective review of applications, approval of only the best schools, and the protection of the public trust through meaningful and rigorous quality assurance.

The New York State Charter School Act establishes the Chancellor as a charter authorizer with three primary functions. First, the Chancellor has the authority to receive and review charter applications and to recommend approved provisional charters to the Board of Regents. Second, for approved charters, the Chancellor must oversee the school to ensure that it meets the provisions of applicable law, regulations, and charter provisions. Third, the Chancellor must review the five-year performance of each school, evaluate a school's application for charter renewal, and grant or deny a five-year contract extension. To administer these duties, the Office of New Schools' key responsibilities will include the following:

1. Rigorous Review and Recommendation of Applications

The Office of New Schools will conduct a thorough evaluation of all proposed new charter schools. This evaluation will determine whether or not the application meets the standards established in the New York Charter Schools Act and the Chancellor's Effective School Design Criteria. These criteria respect charter school autonomy, allow for differentiation, and provide quality control and assurance to new school development. The Chancellor's Design Criteria specifications require that a school proposal include or plan for:

- ***A clear mission*** that teachers, administrators and students know and support;
- ***Strong leadership*** that supports effective instruction;
- ***High expectations*** for all students with a clear definition of the knowledge, skills and personal attributes students should gain;
- ***Caring and respectful relationships*** between teachers and students with every student known well by an adult and engaged in meaningful work;
- ***Qualified teachers*** who have opportunities to work together and form a professional community;

- *A rigorous curriculum* that prepares students for secondary and postsecondary education;
- *A well-defined approach to instruction* with engaging instructional strategies such as in-depth projects and learning that takes place in the community as well as the classroom;
- *Meaningful assessment* of student work and a culture of continuous improvement;
- *Active roles for students* in all aspects of school life;
- *Clear connections* and pathways to secondary and post-secondary education, careers and community participation;
- *Financial autonomy* to direct resources toward teaching and learning; and,
- *Accountability*, both internally and externally, for individual student success.

Upon receipt of a charter school application, the Office of New Schools will facilitate a rigorous review process. The review will include an assessment of the proposal, interviews with school founders, and where applicable, site visits to existing schools. The review of applications will include a thorough evaluation by an independent panel of charter school, education, business, and not-for-profit experts.

Based on the findings of the independent reviewers, site visits, and board interviews, the Office of New Schools will recommend to the Chancellor those applications to be approved and those to be returned to the applicant. As defined by the Charter Schools Act, the Chancellor will make the final decision as to whether or not an application should be approved or rejected.

2. Meaningful Accountability and Quality Assurance

Public accountability is central to the charter school contract. Without it, the public trust can be undermined which will only damage the charter movement, charter schools, and most sadly the trust of parents and children. On the other hand, charter schools must remain a performance and output-driven initiative, and in the face of potential risk, authorizers and public entities have often over-compensated, turning performance-based accountability into compliance oversight. And while the Chancellor recognizes the value and importance of charter school autonomy, public accountability remains a guiding principle of this Initiative. What is required is a firm but fair evaluator of charter school performance.

The Office of New Schools believes that inspired quality assurance is the best form of proactive problem solving. Oversight should be based on a trusting dialogue between a school and the monitor rather than a compliance-driven framework that ignores the challenges that face schools, the importance of joint solutions, and the paramount measure of student outcomes. Also, the Office of New Schools believes that quality assurance can be performance-driven: for example, successful schools should “earn” the right to have fewer monitoring visits while failing schools will face more intense scrutiny. This arrangement gives schools yet another incentive to be excellent.

The Office of New Schools will monitor a charter school’s performance and the processes that will allow a school to meet its goals, including the school’s program, resource allocation, governance, and professional development. The Office will also evaluate each charter school’s compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

3. Rigorous Charter Renewal

The moment of truth for many charter schools will come at the time of their charter renewal. Each school must demonstrate that it has met the goals and objectives committed to in the school’s charter and must also demonstrate that it operates a fiscally and operationally sound organization.

To serve the Chancellor in this process, the Office of New Schools will administer the renewal application process. This will include development of application guidelines and the evaluation of completed applications. After this evaluation, the Office will recommend to the Chancellor those charters

which should be renewed, conditionally renewed or revoked. As with the original authorization, the Chancellor retains final decision making authority on renewal decisions.

LOOKING AHEAD

Will it Work?

All signs indicate that the New York City charter school community, small schools advocates, philanthropists, parents, and students will rally around the Chancellor's Charter School Initiative. Early discussions with numerous local and national education experts and supporters have been very positive and these discussions are generating important momentum for this project.

Timeline

New York City urgently needs new and high quality schools. To meet this need, the Chancellor, working closely with the philanthropic community will seek to gain the necessary private financial support during October 2003. By November 2003, the Chancellor will make a high-profile announcement to introduce the Charter School Initiative, the New York City Center for Charter School Excellence, its founding board of trustees, and important friends and partners of this project. By January 2004, the Center will be operational. This is a rigorous timeline, but it appropriately seizes the opportunity created by the Chancellor's support of charter schools and responds to the dramatic need for high quality educational options in New York City.

On the Horizon

This plan lays out the first phase of the Chancellor's Charter School Initiative and the necessary infrastructure that must be built to accomplish the ambitious goals of creating 50 new and excellent charter schools and a charter school network. But it need not stop there. As we look beyond the initial three-to-five year timeline of this first phase, this Initiative is designed to support the creation of another 50 charter schools in the next eight to ten years. Similarly, the charter network will be an important "existence-proof" of how school districts can support organic and meaningful relationships between schools. Time will tell how the Chancellor's Charter Initiative must grow and change. In the meantime, this proposal represents an endorsement of the charter model, a belief in the value of a strong New York City charter movement, and a strategic response to accomplish the Chancellor's ambitious goals.