

FRIENDS
OF
EDUCATION



CHARTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

JUNE 2010

Mission	3
History of Friends of Education	3
Learning Program Requirements – Why Content-Rich	4
Charter School Application Process.....	5
Start-Up Monitoring and Oversight.....	6
School-Opening Conditions/Significant Target Dates.....	7
Continuing Oversight - Accountability	8
Site Visits	9
Expansion Application.....	10-11
Communications	12
Renewal	13
Charter Termination or Non-renewal.....	14

Attachments:

Charter School Application - New Schools

Charter School Application Format Requirements

Charter School Application Due Dates

Charter School Application Evaluation Rubric

Start-Up Task List

Charter School Application - Existing Schools

Mission Statement:

To improve the education of children.

History:

Friends of Education started in 1999, under the name “Saving Children Through Education.” The initial focus of Saving Children Through Education was an under-performing grade school in North Minneapolis. Saving Children Through Education assisted this school, Ascension Grade School, in implementing the Core-Knowledge Sequence developed by E.D. Hirsch, Jr., and the Core Knowledge Foundation, as well as the math program developed by Saxon. In just one year, Ascension improved its proficiency rate from 21% on the Minnesota mathematics standardized achievement test, to 80% on both the Minnesota Standardized math and reading assessments tests. Saving Children Through Education’s involvement with Ascension grade school resulted in changing the organization’s name to “Friends of Ascension”.

After the undeniable success of Ascension grade school, Friends of Ascension decided to expand its reach, while maintaining its stated mission to improve the education of children, and authorize quality charter schools. Due to the tremendous success achieved at Ascension Grade School with the Core Knowledge Sequence and Saxon math, along with the extensive research supporting these methods, Friends of Education authorizes only those charter schools which implement a content-rich curriculum. Friends of Education also requires that its authorized schools implement a phonics-based reading program rich in literature and a sequential math curriculum typified by the Saxon and Singapore math programs.

In 2009, Friends of Ascension changed its name to “Friends of Education” to reflect Friends’ broad-based interest in improving the education of children. Friends of Education is not a religious organization, and it does not promote any religious activity or teaching.

Friends of Education is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Minnesota corporation, incorporated in 1999. Friends of Education is a member of the Minnesota Council of Non-profits and is registered with the Minnesota Office of the Attorney General.

Learning Program Requirements - Why Content Rich?

Friends of Education authorizes only those charter schools which provide students a content-rich curriculum such as the core knowledge sequence or the classical trivium. Why? Because foundational knowledge is critical to life success.

A primary academic difference between the advantaged and disadvantaged child is vocabulary size. Advantaged high school graduates generally know eighty-thousand words, whereas disadvantaged students know half that. Does it matter? Absolutely.

Knowledge builds on knowledge, and obtaining that knowledge requires more than phonemic skill: it requires having a wide vocabulary in order to understand what you're reading. How do you obtain a wide vocabulary? It necessarily results from exposure to a correspondingly wide knowledge.

Bill Gates frequently addresses school students, telling them that wide reading and general knowledge are critical to competence. Why does he believe that? Bill Gates, after all, is indisputably a critical thinker engaging in creative competencies which some say are more important than knowing facts. But Bill Gates, and others like him, know a lot of facts. If he didn't he couldn't be such a critical, creative thinker. In fact, psychologists tell us that knowing more makes one better able to learn new things and to think critically — that critical thinking comes only after factual knowledge.

Moreover, independent studies repeatedly demonstrate that, where schools emphasize broad factual knowledge, students become more curious and engaged. They're being set-up for success.

*Adapted from *Why Core Knowledge Promotes Social Justice, You Can Always Look It Up — Or Can You*, and *Why General Knowledge Should be a Goal of Education in a Democracy*, all by E.D. Hirsch, Jr.*

Charter School Application Process

Friends of Education is committed to supporting successful and sustainable schools. To that end, Friends of Education endeavors to evaluate whether the charter school applicant group will likely develop a quality charter schools.

Experience demonstrates and Friends of Education recommends that the composite board possess a broad range of skill sets in order to successfully launch and sustain a quality school.

Friends of Education contracts with external experts in education, governance, and administration in order to provide solid evaluation of the proposed charter school.

1. **Application.** Charter school developing groups must submit an application to Friends of Education in a specified format. The current application and format requirements are attached.
2. **Review.** Friends of Education and external experts review the application to determine whether the proposal clearly demonstrates an understanding of the requirements and fundamentals to establish a quality charter school.
3. **Interview.** Upon favorable application review, Friends of Education and external experts interview the developing group to determine whether the developing group has the capacity to implement the proposal contained in the application.
4. **Approval/Denial Decisions.** Friends of Education informs the charter school applicants of the decision, with feedback. For approved schools: note that Friends of Education requires, as part of its charter contract, that charter school board members have criminal background checks and submit the information to Friends of Education.

Start-Up Monitoring & Oversight

Between application approval and school opening, Friends of Education monitors, on a monthly basis, the school's progress in completing start-up tasks, through a Start-Up Progress task list.

The Start-Up Progress task list consists of over 100 identified items in key areas, such as:

1. **Facilities**, such as conducting a needs assessments to determine the facility necessary to support the program
2. **Financial Management**, such as establishing appropriate policies and reporting systems
3. **Governance & Management**, such as adopting appropriate policies and job descriptions.
4. **Learning Program**, such as aligning the curriculum with state standards and identifying local assessments to drive instruction
5. **Project Management**, such as hiring a start-up coordinator responsible for clearly defined tasks
6. **Leadership**, such as hiring an effective school leader through a fair and open hiring process
7. **Personnel**, such as hiring licensed staff and ensuring sufficient professional development
8. **Enrollment**, such as creating and implementing a marketing plan to capture sufficient enrollment
9. **Accountability**, such as participating in goal setting

The current start-up task list is attached.

School-Opening Conditions/Significant Target Dates

Friends of Education has identified six key start-up dates with related tasks (e.g. facility, school leader identification, enrollment, staff) which, if not met, create a rebuttable presumption that the school will not open that year. Friends provides multiple reminders to the school of these key target dates. In addition, Friends requires and monitors monthly financial statements as soon as the groups receive funds (which, in some cases, predates the federal grant). As an additional precaution, Friends requires a pre-opening evaluation to ensure each school is ready to open.

The Significant Target Dates/Tasks are:

March 1	School Leader Hired Facility secured
May 1	Data base of interested students/families that is 125% of projected Enrollment
May 10	Significant renovations/build-out to facility have begun
May 31	75% of projected students officially enrolled
June 1	75% of teaching staff identified
July 1	125% of projected students officially enrolled

Where significant target dates are not met, the school board will submit a written plan to Friends of Education detailing how the condition will be remedied within thirty days and how the delay will impact the opening of the school. Where Friends does not believe the school is ready to open, Friends counsels the school to delay opening and, if necessary, intervenes to prevent the school from opening.

Continuing Oversight - Accountability

Friends of Education evaluates its charter schools in four primary areas:

1. Academic Performance
2. Fiscal Management
3. Legal Compliance
4. Operations

1. Academic Performance

Absolute Proficiency: Expecting proficiency for each student, Friends of Education evaluates the percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards on the state tests (MCA-II). Students are tested in grades 3-8 & 10 for Reading and 3-8 & 11 for Math.

Comparative Proficiency: Expecting each charter school to fulfill its statutory obligation to improve student performance, Friends of Education evaluates how well the charter school performs compared to a nearby district school that the charter school students would otherwise likely attend.

Growth: Expecting growth for each student, Friends of Education evaluates the growth each student achieved on the state and other assessments.

2. Fiscal Management

Friends of Education evaluates a charter school's financial management based primarily on three indicators:

Financial & Budget Reports: Friends of Education reviews monthly and annual reports and requires explanations for out-of-budget spending and expects schools to build and maintain adequate reserves.

External Audits: Friends of Education evaluates external audits and expects its schools to work towards elimination of deficiencies.

Finance Award: Friends of Education considers whether a charter school has received the Minnesota Department of Education Finance Award, which recognizes sound fiscal health and management policies and procedures.

3. Legal Compliance

Charter schools must comply with a myriad of laws, such as admissions, teacher licensing and special education requirements. Friends of Education's oversight process is designed to ascertain compliance with these requirements.

4. Operations

Effective operations and governance are fundamental to a quality charter school. Consequently, Friends of Education's oversight process evaluates effective operations through attendance at board meetings, review of board meeting minutes, and discussions with staff and other stakeholders.

Friends of Education engages in site visits as one tool in its oversight program. Site visits may be announced or unannounced. In addition, Friends of Education hires educational experts to pose as parents interested in enrolling children in the school to also engage in site visits.

Due Date to Friends of Education: January 15th

Expansions – for additional sites or grades – require an application to Friend of Education. The application must contain:

- I. **Evaluation of Planned Growth:** Provide an explanation of how the expansion will affect the school facilities, faculty and enrollment.
 - a. **Facility:** Describe how the expansion will affect the school’s overall facilities plan and comply with health and safety regulations. Identify the potential location and the impact of the expansion on the school’s transportation plan.
 - b. **Faculty:** Describe how the expansion will affect staffing needs, including the need to hire additional teachers, managers and support staff. Include brief job descriptions for each staffing change. Attach a copy of the current faculty organizational chart and proposed faculty organizational chart for the new site. The current faculty organizational chart should include current teacher names and assignments. The proposed faculty organizational chart should include 1) current teacher names and assignments for existing faculty and 2) position titles and assignments for proposed new faculty (ex. teacher – social studies).
 - c. **Need:** Provide evidence of need. Indicate the school’s current student enrollment and projected enrollment (by site, if applicable). Provide evidence for the projected enrollment with the expansion. Demonstrate community support for the expansion. Identify existing public schools that serve the same grades in the targeted area.
- II. **Evaluation of Current School Academic and School Performance:**
 - a. **Academic Performance:** Provide evidence of student academic achievement, including: (1) meeting Adequate Yearly Progress, (2) significant student growth on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, and (3) a summary of the three most recent years of the school’s performance data.
 - b. **Faculty:** Provide evidence that current teachers are appropriately licensed or have received appropriate waivers from the Minnesota Board of Teaching.
 - c. **Governance & Management:** Provide a copy of the current school board roster which includes member names and positions on the board. Describe the extent to which the school has a successfully functioning board including, but not limited to, adequacy of membership (by skill sets), fulfillment of training requirements and extent of member involvement in board and committee meetings. Provide evidence that the school has the management capacity to implement the expansion.
- III. **Evaluation of Legal and Fiscal Performance:** A charter school requesting an expansion must provide evidence of being fiscally sound and has the financial capacity to implement the expansion.
 - a. **Reporting:** Identify the extent to which the school met all compliance reporting deadlines.
 - b. **External Audit:** Provide evidence that any findings in past audits have had approved corrective action plans.

- c. **Budget:** Three budgets (revenue and expenditure budgets) must be submitted, displayed side-by-side for ease of comparison. Budget one is the current year. Budget Two is the subsequent year without expansion. Budget Three is the subsequent year WITH the expansion proposal. Each budget must contain the anticipated end-of-year fund balance. Budgets are complete year budgets and are line-item reports, subtotaled by program. A narrative must be attached that contains a detailed description of the budgetary changes that result in the expansion budget. Detailed budget development assumptions are also contained in the narrative.

Friends of Education believes that communication, from and to the school, is critical to the relationship between school and authorizer and to prevent “surprise”.

Communications may be:

School Initiated. If the School fails to achieve academic goals, financial targets, or comply with applicable law or other requirements, the school may at any time prepare and implement an improvement plan to overcome such deficiencies. The school may at any time submit the plan to Friends of Education for review and comment prior to adoption and implementation.

Friends of Education Initiated. If the School fails to achieve academic goals, financial performance, comply with applicable law, or other requirements, Friends shall provide the following notices, as applicable.

- a. **Notice to School Leader or Board Chair.** Friends shall notify the school leader or board chair of area(s) of concern for correction. Friends may specify a target date for correction.
- b. **Formal Notice to School Board.** If the situation remains uncorrected without reasonable explanation, or if the situation involves an urgent concern, Friends of Education will formally notify the school board of the area(s) of concern for correction and may ask the school board to adopt a specific performance improvement plan. If Friends of Education requires the School Board to retain a third-party investigation, the third party investigator must be acceptable to Friends of Education and the School Board shall authorize such investigator to provide status reports to and communicate with Friends of Education. Friends of Education specifies a target date for correction which may, if circumstances warrant, be amended.
- c. **Notice to School Board of Charter Revocation/Termination.** Friends initiates notice whereby charter authorization will be withdrawn pursuant to the charter contract.

By September 1st of the school year in which the charter contract terminates, the School shall submit a renewal application to Friends of Education which shall contain three parts: (1) School Performance. An analysis and evaluation of the School's performance under the charter contract, which shall include a comprehensive evaluation of each charter contract goal for each year of the charter contract, as well as an evaluation of governance performance, compliance with reporting obligations, and fiscal management, (2) Proposed Goals. A proposal for goals for the following charter contract period, and (3) Other Information. Any other information the School desires Friends to consider. The School agrees to provide to Friends documentation supporting the School's evaluation if requested by Friends.

Friends will notify the School within four weeks of receipt of the School's external audit (final, not draft) for the most recently completed fiscal year as to whether Friends intends to offer the School a renewal charter contract. If Friends offers a renewal contract, Friends will base the renewal term on the following conditions. A five-year term will be awarded only if warranted by school performance: the school has met or substantially met its academic pupil performance outcomes/goals, the school has no fiscal deficiencies, and the school has no operational compliance or governance deficiencies. A minimum of one year will be subtracted from the 5-year renewal period for each of the following:

- a. Failure to substantially meet all academic Pupil performance outcomes/goals.
- b. Fiscal deficiencies.
- c. Operational compliance or governance deficiencies.

Significant deficiencies in any area, multiple minor deficiencies in any area, or deficiencies in multiple areas, will result in a one-year probationary renewal contract; the School must demonstrate significant improvement in order to be granted a subsequent renewal.

Charter Termination or Non-renewal

Friends of Education terminates and does not renew charters for failure to achieve academic goals, failure to meet fiscal management standards, failure to comply with applicable law, and other violations of the charter contract.

If the charter is terminated, the charter school must be dissolved. Similarly, if a charter is not renewed due to the charter school's failure to achieve academic goals, failure to meet fiscal management standards, failure to comply with applicable law, and other violations of the charter contract.

Friends of Education complies with all laws relating to charter termination and non-renewal.