

### **Mission Statement**

Our mission is to create a collaborative learning community; one in which all students are inspired to learn, flourish, and excel. In order to ensure that students reach their full potential, all stakeholders will collaboratively focus on using data to drive instruction thereby individualizing the instructional path of each learner.

### **Key Design Elements and Unique Characteristics**

L.I.F.E. Charter School will feature an uninterrupted core educational program that will be designed in part by extending the school day. This will enable us to incorporate a 60-minute block dedicated to specialized programs that traditionally require students to be removed from classroom instructional time. These specialized programs may include, but are not limited to: Academic Intervention Services (AIS), Gifted and Talented Programs, Speech, Physical / Occupational Therapy and Resource Room.

The school day will be structured around 60-90 minute uninterrupted blocks of time for literacy and mathematics instruction, as well as science, social studies, and technology education. The core curriculum program will be infused with multiculturalism. Diverse experiences in traditional United States art, music, and literature will also be emphasized to help students more easily assimilate into American culture.

All L.I.F.E. Charter School classroom teachers will be required to be ESL certified. This will ensure full integration of ESL instructional strategies into all core curricula and will avoid interruption of core classroom instruction for ESL pull-out programs. Priority hiring will be given to those teachers who are also certified in bilingual education, special education or literacy.

Parent collaboration will be fostered through ongoing and sustained parent development programs. These programs will be designed to equip parents with the skills necessary to become full partners in the educational process.

### **About the Founding Group**

L.I.F.E Charter School's founding members each have more than 15 years of diverse educational experiences as teachers and administrators, at both the building and district levels. All founding members have an extensive background in curriculum planning and development at all levels. Each founding member has a unique area of specialization focused on one of the key core curriculum components. Those specializations include: literacy education, mathematics education, and social studies education.

Our literacy expert trained extensively at Teachers College at Columbia University in helping low performing students become successful readers. She was a participant for three years in Lucy Caulkin's "Think Tank" entitled "Helping Low Performing Urban Students Become Successful Readers and Writers." She is a trained AIS reading teacher as well as an NYU certified reading recovery teacher. Our literacy expert has worked with NYSED on formulating new ELA assessments as well as on the new ELA standards. She holds two Master of Science degrees; one in elementary special education and the other in reading, as well as a post-master's degree in administration and supervision. She is currently at work on a doctoral degree from Columbia University in Literacy Teaching and Learning.

L.I.F.E. Charter School's mathematics expert holds a doctorate in mathematics education from Teachers College at Columbia University. Her dissertation research was in the implementation of

reform mathematics programs at the elementary level. She also has published many peer reviewed articles summarizing the research surrounding the development of mathematics concepts taught in grades K-6. She has worked as: a mathematics teacher, a mathematics instructional coach, and as a public school district mathematics program director.

In addition to a bachelor's degree in history with a minor in fine arts, our social studies expert holds master's degrees in social studies education, in liberal studies with a major in American Studies, and in Educational Administration. She is currently a doctoral candidate at Hofstra University, with a dissertation focus on youth leadership development. She won Congress' 1997 James Madison Fellowship, which awards a masters in American History to one teacher social studies per state for excellence in her teaching of Regents, advanced placement , special education and ESL students. Because of her outstanding work in this program, she has repeatedly been recruited to serve on review panels for major national grants supporting professional development for social studies teachers, including the USDOE's Teaching American History and the NEH's Landmarks of American History Grant panels. She brings insights from these experiences to her current work as a Grants Administrator, writing and administering compensatory and competitive grants.

The expertise of L.I.F.E's founding members ensures innovative and sound learning opportunities for diverse learners. The founding members bring combined, comprehensive educational methods, informed by best practices in early education, tested and rooted in experience. The mix of skill sets these educational leaders possess, particularly in curriculum and professional development, on both the school building level and district-wide, will provide for dynamic school leadership. Our combined administrative know-how also includes all areas of school supervision and governance. Each member of the team has held district-wide supervisory positions, in which we have recruited, hired, trained, mentored, and evaluated both teachers and other administrators. Our supervisory positions have entailed comprehensive responsibilities essential for school operations, including assembling budgets and ordering materials, orchestrating system-wide assessment, and developing and/or managing communication systems with school community members, other stakeholders and governmental agencies.

As educational leaders, the founders believe that L.I.F.E. should be above all else a learning community, which reflects the coalesced aspirations of all school community members. Each of the founders intends to model continuous learning and improvement, as they participate with and provide leadership for staff members. The founders' have directly developed curricula and supported the development of curricula, which span all spectrum of academic offerings to be included in L.I.F.E.'s programming. Integral to this expertise is our experience in aligning curricula with state standards, local priorities, best practices inquiry -based methods and problem-based learning. Essential to our approach is an emphasis on collaborative and reflective practice, in which teachers work together with administrators to design, test, and continuously improve methods. The founders are versed in staff development approaches which stoke the commitment, ownership and innovation of all educators involved, such as *Looking Together at Student Work*, *Whole Faculty Study Groups*, and *Japanese Lesson Study*. We have also supervised and guided the professional development of staff members across the gamut of elementary positions, ranging from ESL teachers to librarians, custodians, nurses, guidance counselors, science, math and ELA teachers. The founders have spear-headed cutting-edge programming, customizing to the unique learning needs of students, whether in designing inclusion classes, enhancing gifted and talents programs, or building character education-based after school mentor ship partnerships.

## II. STUDENT POPULATION

### Student Enrollment

**Applicant Instructions:** In the table provided, enter enrollment projections for the school, by year, for the first five years of operation.

Grades	Projected Enrollment Table				
	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2017-2018
<b>K</b>	70	70	70	70	70
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	70	70	70	70	70
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	70	70	70	70	70
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	-	70	70	70	<b>70</b>
<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	-	-	70	70	<b>70</b>
<b>5<sup>th</sup></b>	-	-	-	70	70
<b>6<sup>th</sup></b>	-	-	-	-	70
<b>7<sup>th</sup></b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>8<sup>th</sup></b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>9<sup>th</sup></b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>10<sup>th</sup></b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>11<sup>th</sup></b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>12<sup>th</sup></b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Ungraded</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>490</b>

## **Target Populations**

The targeted school community has an ESL population of 15.8%. 14% of the school population receives related special education services and 60% of the school community is eligible for free and reduced price lunch.

Students in the targeted community come from very culturally diverse backgrounds. Many come from homes where English is not even spoken. In order to publicize the L.I.F.E. Charter School, advertisements for public meetings will be placed, in both English and Spanish, in the local newspapers, in the public library, mailed home to the community at large, and placed in local businesses. Public meetings will be held in a central location both during the day and in the evenings to allow both working and non-working parents to attend. Translators will be present and babysitting will be provided. All materials will be provided in both English and Spanish.

The L.I.F.E. Charter School's plan is to focus on core curriculum, extend the school day and eliminate pull-outs, will attract this mostly blue-collar immigrant community, all of whom are interested in having their children in an environment geared around becoming a successful student and a productive member of society. Many of these parents are disillusioned by the local school district's inability to provide the support necessary to make their high-needs learners successful. They are looking for an alternate means to provide their children with a high-quality, public school, education. In this current economy, private school and parochial school education, is just not a viable option for most parents in this community, as evidenced by the closing of most of the local private schools.

L.I.F.E. Charter School will have on staff bilingual secretaries and teachers to help parents who do not speak English. Our founding members have an extensive background in both Special Education and ESL and are familiar with dealing with the varied needs of those populations along with the NYSED requirements and regulations.

This plan of individualized study designed around a core curriculum will attract and retain families interested in having the varied needs of their children addressed. We are not a one size fits all school.

ESL students will be identified through an initial screening process that will include a home language questionnaire. Once identified, students will be assessed by a certified ESL teacher using the Lab-R battery to determine their current ESL level. Since all of our teachers will be certified in ESL, students will be receiving targeted ESL instruction in all core curriculum areas throughout the day without any pull-outs. This will appeal to many parents who resent the pull-out model and the implied stigma it gives their child.

Teachers will work collaboratively with administrators and parents, using the results of the Lab-R, along with the results of other high-quality assessments, to determine an individualized program of study for each student. These plans for be flexible, allowing for adaptations and modifications as students progress and more data becomes available.

Student progress will be tracked and monitored using a student management system such as AIMSWEB, integrating both high-quality assessments and locally with those developed locally. Students determined to be at-risk for not meeting the benchmarks set forth by NYSED will receive AIS and other extra targeted instruction during our 60 minute block set aside for this. Students who are meeting or exceeding the benchmarks will receive enrichment services during this time to ensure their needs are being met.

Special education students will be identified through our tiered RtI plan, that allows teachers to be the first level of intervention. Once students are identified they will be assessed by a team of special education teachers, administrators and a school psychologist. Then a plan of action will be put in place for each student. Classes at the L.I.F.E. Charter School would follow the inclusion model, allowing for a special education co-teacher in place. This teacher would then be available during the 60 minute block to provide resource room services as mandated.

All of our students, including those not identified as requiring either ESL or special education services will be closely monitored via AIMSWEB and our RtI plan and provided with an individualized course of study. Each child at L.I.F.E. Charter School will be provided with access to any and all services during the 60 minute block.

### **III. SCHOOL DESIGN**

#### **a. Curricular and Instructional Initiatives to Decrease Student Achievement Gaps**

Specific features of L.I.F.E. Charter School, which are guided by the research of Ferguson (2000) and informed by the writings of Ruby Payne (2005), which will work toward helping us to specifically narrow the achievement gap are: holding high expectations for all students, focusing on multiculturalism to tap into our minority students' stores of knowledge, employing teaching strategies that promote meaningful student participation, maintaining small class sizes in grades K-3, and maintaining the highest teacher quality through selective hiring practices and sustained ongoing teacher professional development.

#### **b/c. High Achieving Elementary Students are Equipped for Academic Success in Middle and High School**

L.I.F.E Charter School will produce inspired, students who have flourished to excel by all academic standards. Students possessing the strong literacy and mathematics skills that will become the hallmark of L.I.F.E. Charter School students are more likely to realize academic success in secondary and post-secondary school settings. These students will be well prepared for high levels of academic achievement in Middle School. It follows that students who perform well in Middle School will be more likely to satisfy all requirements necessary to graduate from High School; which will serve to increase high school graduation rates of these students.

L.I.F.E Charter School's focus on closing the achievement gap at the elementary level will break the cycle of low achievement that traditionally places many of our English Language Learners and students from the low socio-economic community we will serve into an at-risk high school population. Early intervention and academic success in the elementary grades will ensure that these students will not function below grade level in high school thereby decreasing the likelihood that they would dropout of high school in the future.

#### **d. Using Data to Increase Student Achievement**

L.I.F.E. charter school will be focused on using data to individualize daily classroom instruction for each child in order to increase student achievement. Research suggests that routine analysis of such data within a professional learning community may inform instructional changes aimed at improving student achievement, such as: prioritizing instructional time (Brunner et al, 2005), targeting additional individual instruction for students who are struggling with particular topics (Brunner et al., 2005; Supovitz and Klein, 2003; Wayman and Stringfield, 2006), more easily identifying individual students' strengths and instructional interventions that can help students continue to progress (Brunner et al, 2005; Forman, 2007; Wayman and Stringfield, 2006), gauging the instructional effectiveness of classroom lessons (Halverson, Prichett, and Watson, 2007; Supovitz and Klein, 2003), refining instructional methods (Halverson, Prichett, and Watson, 2007; Fiarman, 2007), and examining school-wide data to consider whether and how to adapt the curriculum based on information about students' strengths and weaknesses (Marsh, Pane, and Hamilton, 2006; Kerr et al, 2006).

#### **High Quality Assessments will be Utilized to Measure Student Understanding**

Utilizing the psychometrically valid and reliable AIMSweb assessment probes to monitor student progress in both literacy and in mathematics will allow all stake-holders to work collaboratively to design classroom interventions for any student who is not meeting or exceeding progress targets. Other assessments which will be utilized to ensure that students acquire critical applications of concepts include the: Boehm Test of Basic Concepts, Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment System, as well as other locally developed criterion referenced assessments.

#### **e. Increased Implementation of Local Instructional Improvement Systems**

While public school systems have access to much of the same assessment data that the L.I.F.E. Charter School will, L.I.F.E. Charter School will implement all five of the recommendations made by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance for educational practices surrounding the use of data in schools (Hamilton et al, 2009). They are: establishing a clear vision for school-wide data use, developing and maintaining a school-wide data system, providing the supports that will foster a data-driven culture within the school, making data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement, and teaching students to examine their own data and to set learning goals. Implementation of these recommendations will serve to ensure that assessment is routinely used to inform instructional practice, decision-making, and to evaluate curricular and instructional effectiveness.

Our plan to employ an extended school day schedule will allow us to avoid any student being removed from core classroom instruction. That coupled with L.I.F.E Charter School's plan to provide all English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction for each academic subject by ESL certified classroom teachers, as suggested in the work of Dr. Margarita Calderone, will enable our students to receive the full benefit of the curricular and instructional structures designed to decrease student achievement gaps for all students.

#### **f. Partner with Low Performing Local Public Schools**

We will work/partner with the local school district for professional development and for sharing of best practices among our teachers and administrators. We will encourage and foster open communication between the L.I.F.E. Charter School and the local public school district. We will share resources, such as special area teachers and service providers, whenever feasible. We will work to

establish an environment conducive to ensuring we are all doing what is best for the students in our charge.

**g. Demonstrated Ability to Overcome Challenges and Obstacles**

All three founding members have demonstrated their management and leadership abilities through the varied positions they have held. All have overseen and run large departments and been instrumental in the implementation of new programs from piloting on up. All three have demonstrated a capacity for thinking out of the box to tackle challenges as they arise. As collaborative leaders, they will work alongside their faculty to determine the solution and overcome the myriad of obstacles presented during the start up of any new program. All three of the founders have experience working directly with early learners as teachers and administrators. Most importantly, all three instructional leaders are master teachers who have provided students with challenging and engaging learning experiences. We have spent our careers supporting young people with safe, highly organized learning environments and providing them tools and inspiration to develop to their fullest potential. Our goal in establishing the L.I.F.E. Charter School is to build on the practices we have found to best support early learners and provide them a springboard from which they may develop the knowledge and skill sets that will ready them for their middle school years and LIFE.

**h. Ongoing Relationship with Local School District**

All three founding members have a solid relationship with the local school district that is built upon mutual respect and trust. We would want to work closely with the the school district to provide best practice, high-quality teacher training, as well as to share resources as necessary. The local school district currently enjoys a positive partnership with the local agencies they deal with now and we anticipate the same.

**i. not applicable**

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