

**Ember Charter School
SUNY Charter Schools Institute
Letter of Intent 2015**

TO: SUNY Charter Schools Institute
C/O School Applications
41 State St., Suite 700
Albany, NY 12207

RE: Ember Charter School Letter of Intent

DATE: December 7, 2015

Lead Applicant Information:	
First Lead Applicant Name:	Rafiq R. Kalam Id-Din II, Esq.
Applicant is a:	Teacher, School Administrator, District Resident
Applicant Mailing Address:	616 Quincy Street, 3rd Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11221
Phone Number:	917-536-2493
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Second Lead Applicant Name:	Alexandria Lee, Esq.
Applicant is a:	Teacher, School Administrator, District Resident
Applicant Mailing Address:	616 Quincy Street, 3rd Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11221
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Email:	Alex@tfoaprofessionalprep.org

Partner Information:	
Not Applicable	

Proposed School Information:	
Charter School Name:	Ember Charter School
Education Corp Name:	Ember Initiative for Mindful Education, Innovation & Transformation Charter School
School Location:	NYC CSD 16
Opening Date:	August, 2016
Planned Grades and Enrollment in the 1st year of Operation:	Grades K-6; 564 students (480?)
Planned Grades and Enrollment in the 5th year of Operation:	Grades K-10; 768 students

School Description:	
<p><i>Glossary of Terms: below find a description of unique terms used in the following section of this letter:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Anew School ("Anew"): an existing 501(c)(3) non-profit education organization proposing to open public, domestic and international, single-sex boarding schools for Grades 7-12. • #BlackLedSchools: a grassroots initiative to increase the number of charter schools founded and led by progressive Black leaders (at both the Board and school management levels), to leverage their unique and invaluable perspectives and vision to evolve education reform efforts to be far more holistic, responsive and effective in meeting the needs and spurring the authentic achievement of 	

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Black children, the largest and persistently lowest achieving demographic served by public charter schools.

- **College-Successful:** *Is a term of art created by Ember, as a play on the term “college ready.” Rather than solely preparing our students to merely get into college, we are focused on providing with them with the authentic skills they’ll need to successfully matriculate therefrom.*
- **Schoolhouse:** *Is a term synonymous with classroom, referencing the autonomy of the historical one-room schoolhouse teacher.*
- **Teaching Firms of America-Preparatory Charter School (“TFOA”):** *an existing K-5 charter elementary school in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn (CSD 16).*

Ember Charter Schools Initiative for Mindful Education, Innovation and Transformation (“Ember Charter Schools”, or “Ember”), seeks to achieve the realignment and evolution of the existing Teaching Firms of America-Professional Preparatory Charter School (“TFOA”), in its merger with the existing nonprofit The Anew School. As a result, Ember Charter Schools will be an innovative, holistic and comprehensive primary and secondary community of learning, practice and thought leadership located in Bedford Stuyvesant-Central Brooklyn.

Our Mission: Ember’s mission is to transform, empower, and ignite students who have traditionally been labeled “at-risk” from historically underserved, under-resourced, low income communities with our innovative holistic elementary school, international experiences within middle school, and single-sex boarding high school, all of which nurture students into social entrepreneurs, engineers, and global leaders using our Teaching Firm model, a unique teacher-led approach, while we concurrently affect net positive economic, socio-emotional and cultural outcomes within the communities we serve.

Our Students: Ember will offer an admission preference to students who qualify for free and reduced-priced lunch (to the extent permitted by law). Bedford Stuyvesant-Central Brooklyn remains an overwhelmingly Black and Latino community, and this area continues to be beset with high poverty, unemployment, violence, obesity, untreated trauma and other negative physical and mental health indicators. TFOA, our currently operating charter school in CSD 16, will be the predecessor charter school entity to Ember Charter School. As a result, TFOA’s current student population will feed directly into Ember. Our current demographic is 99% Black and Latino; 93% Free & Reduced Price Lunch; 15% students with disabilities (IEPs); 11% English Language Learners, with 35% of parents are born outside the USA. This demographic represents some of the poorest children in the nation, which in large measure, remain disconnected from high quality, holistic and comprehensive education options such as those Ember will offer.

Design Elements: The key design elements of Ember’s educational plan are designed to achieve the implementation of the following five important objectives highlighted in the New York Charter Act (Education Law §2850(2)):

- A. Improves student learning and achievement;**
- B. Expands learning experiences for students who are at risk of academic failure;**
- C. Encourages use of different and innovative teaching methods;**
- D. Creates new professional opportunities for teachers; and**
- E. Provides parents/students with expanded choices in educational opportunities that are available within the public school system.**

Additionally, the key design elements of Ember’s proposed educational plan represent the evolution of innovation and development of TFOA as it realigns, expands and incorporates the programmatic blueprint of The Anew School. The result is a proposed educational program that draws on the successful and award-winning elements of both organizations, and now includes the following three core educational enterprises:

- Elementary school experience serving students in Grades K-4;
- Middle school experience serving students in Grades 5-8, where upper school (Grades 7 & 8) will include both **single-sex cohorts** and guided, **intensive international travel learning experiences**; and
- High school experience serving students in both **single-sex cohorts** for Grades 9-12, which will include a residential, **community-based boarding option**.

Instructional Methods: Ember will wholly adopt and utilize the same innovative instructional methodology currently employed at TFOA, which includes the follow researched-based practices:

- **Integrated Instruction:** an approach to teaching that connects different areas of study by cutting across subject-matter lines and emphasizing unifying concepts (*see* researchers John Bransford and Howard Gardner);
- **Differentiation:** the process of tailoring instruction to meet individual needs (*see* researcher Carol Tomlinson);
- **Looping:** practice of keeping groups of students together for two or more years with the same teacher (*see* Rudolph Steiner, Waldorf schools; Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University);
- **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:** an approach to teaching that endeavors to develop student self efficacy by empowering them intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically through using their cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (*see* researcher Gloria Ladson-Billings);
- **Economically Relevant Pedagogy:** coined and created by teacher-leaders at TFOA, this is an approach to teaching that endeavors to empower students to notice, explore and understand the interconnectivity of all knowledge, people, systems and the environment, and their collective relationship to how human beings have and will proceed to satisfy their needs and wants now and in the future;
- **Inquiry-based instruction and Socratic Questioning:** an approach to instruction that involves teaching through asking students an ongoing series of substantive questions as the primary instructional tool for developing the mastery of critical thinking, analysis and other higher order thinking skills (*see* researcher David Perkins; the Galileo Educational Network; CriticalThinking.org);
- **Design Thinking:** an instructional practice that involves using and teaching the mastery of problem solving process through a “backwards” thinking framework that demands an exploration of purpose (goals or needs to satisfy), perspective (impact on various stakeholders) and people (end users) (*see* thought leaders Tim Brown (IDEO), and Paulo Friere (Pedagogy of the Oppressed));
- **Neuropedagogy:** an approach to teaching that involves applying neuroscience research on the brain and learning as we attend to students’ development and mastery of executive functioning and critical thinking skills (*see* researchers Richard Guare and Christopher Kaufman; National Center for Learning Disabilities); and
- **Mindfulness and meditation:** an instructional practice that involves teaching students to develop and use breathing and focused attention techniques to help cultivate and improve executive functioning skills, particularly response inhibition/emotion control, working memory and flexibility (*see* Association for Mindfulness in Education).

The Professional Partnership Hybrid: Ember’s Teaching Firm model is a unique professional-partnership hybrid, a design that combines the governance models of the nonprofit corporation and the professional-partnership structure. Typical nonprofit corporations are governed by a Board, which delegates the day-to-day management of the enterprise to an individual (e.g. an Executive Director, President or CEO). As discussed earlier, the professional-partnership is an organization governed by two or more producer-owners (the “Partners”), individuals who are full-time practitioners and share equally in the ownership,

management and responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the enterprise. In the Teaching Firm, the Board of Trustees (“Trustees”), will delegate the day-to-day responsibility for the charter school to a group of master-teachers (the “Partners”) who will be full-time teachers who also share equally in the management and operation of the school within a professional-partnership structure formed via contract (as opposed to a formal for-profit legal entity).

Demand: Ember can demonstrate a sufficient demand within the community for our school. For the 2014-2015 school year, TFOA received 533 applications, accepted 80 students and had a wait-list of 453 students. There continues to be a high need for high quality middle and high schools in CSD 16. Recent school reviews and report cards, and other reports of middle-grade performances within CSD 16 reveal a continual dearth in high quality schools serving pre-adolescents. In fact, only 13% of seventh and eighth grade students attending public schools within CSD 16 scored at or above proficiency in math and English language arts (ELA) respectively. Several middle schools reported 0% of students scoring proficient in ELA and/or math at one or more grade levels.

Initial Facility Plans:

To fully realize our expansion plans, we will seek to work with the NYC Department of Education and City of New York to either secure additional space in existing public school buildings or obtain reimbursement for leased space to accommodate these expansion elements (each in a manner consistent with the recent amendments to the charter law). While we have not as of yet secured appropriate and adequate facilities for our proposed expansion into the upper middle school grades, we feel confident that we will be able to do so. Additional space request (or reimbursement to lease such space) will contemplate school facilities needed to accommodate up to 340 middle school students and 400 high school students. We are concurrently working with local community leaders to realize the attached “Community Innovation Campus” project proposal to house Ember and our attendant community vitalization plans for Bedford Stuyvesant-Central Brooklyn.

The use of DOE Facilities is a favorable option for the location of Ember. Currently TFOA’s Grades K-5 are co-located at PS 308, but the space is very limited. We have asked for additional space outside of the PS 308 campus to accommodate grades 5 and up.

Existing Education Corporation:

A. Board Information:

While we are not seeking to operate an additional school (and are instead proposing to merge into a new charter for a single, but multi-site school), we are nonetheless providing information about TFOA’s Board as the predecessor entity and currently existing charter school:

Name of the Board Chair: Shahidah Kalam Id-Din

Contact information for the board co-chairs: 267-975-4041; skiddin@gmail.com

B. Analysis of provision of high quality academic program to students for replication proposals:

The Ember Charter School is not a replication as defined by charter law, but rather a merger of an existing charter organization and a 501(c)(3) innovative educational organization. Nonetheless, the predecessor NYCDOE charter school, TFOA, has demonstrated success in achieving strong results for our students. In

2014-15, TFOA had over 100% growth in overall ELA scores on the New York State standardized test, which was the highest growth in the State. It also increased the ELA proficiency rate for 4th Grade students by over 240% from 2014, and achieved nearly 90% proficiency on the Science Assessment, with over 40% of students earning the highest proficiency score of 4.

Community Outreach Information:

Our current charter school TFOA has been engaged in an ongoing and public dialogue with Bedford Stuyvesant community members and leaders over the last two years about how and why to expand the innovative and highly effective program we offer. This proposal to seek a new charter and become Ember Charter Schools represents the result of this ongoing consultation and design work. Many of the instructional design elements for the proposed new charter came directly from the design thinking community conversations the TFOA teacher-leaders had with parents, students and community leaders over the course of the last two years. While there was a particular focus on our current school community, we also solicited and received input from the broader Bedford Stuyvesant-Central Brooklyn community, and began the process of community engagement regarding our growth and evolution nearly 24-months ago. Initially we convened a public community meeting to solicit responses to the central question: “what kind of educational opportunities would you like for us to provide for your children?” The answer drove the evolution of our proposed charter design.

Subsequent to this initial meeting, we continued to meet with families and community members, engaging in an ongoing series of meetings centered around the responses we received from our core stakeholders on this topic, honing in on the most important education program elements that emerged again and again. These program elements included the following design elements:

- Expand the our model to middle and high school;
- Increase development of socio-emotional health;
- Expand our focus on development of high self-esteem and independence;
- Expand our focus on students’ future career and economic success opportunities beyond college;
- Provide access to improved facilities, 21st century ready building to support and spur the development of 21st century skills (particularly entrepreneurship);
- Create opportunities to explore and experience the arts, culture and history of the Black diaspora;
- Provide opportunities to connect learning to real world applications;
- Facilitate integration of student culture and history into everyday instruction;
- Expand development of leadership and service opportunities; and
- Provide opportunities for travel and exposure to the global community and economy (especially international travel).

All of the feedback from our community outreach sculpted the Ember Charter School proposal outlined in this charter application. Community support for Ember is very strong. We have the vocal support of our local community leaders and TFOA’s parents (*see attached exhibit “Evidence of Community Support”*). Indeed over 90% of TFOA’s parents expressed strong support for Ember Charter School’s proposal.

Following our community conversations and subsequent design meetings, we conducted a telephone survey of several hundred families about their support for the core Ember proposal, the result of which revealed an overwhelming appetite and demand for the growth and expansion of TFOA’s school programs. Over 90% of families responded, and over 90% of those responses were positive. Concurrent with this outreach, we also engaged local leaders in our Central Brooklyn community to garner their input and feedback to help craft our proposed charter design. The responses from our local elected and nonprofit

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leaders has been similarly enthusiastic, resulting in widespread support and excitement for our plan to use our educational programs to drive economic, civic, social and cultural development in our Bedford Stuyvesant-Central Brooklyn community. Our proposed charter design is materially responsive to the most requested design elements from our community engagement. As evidence of this, and our ongoing outreach to the community, we have attached in an exhibit as “Evidence of Community Support,” which includes among other items:

- Sample advertising materials announcing the various community meetings;
- List of regular parent participants of the committee formed out of these meetings;
- Screenshots of website announcements soliciting ongoing feedback from the public; and
- Letters of support from parents and local community leaders.