

Proposed Charter School Information

School Overview, Mission and Students To Be Served Description:

Ember Charter Schools Initiative for Mindful Education, Innovation and Transformation (“Ember Charter Schools”, or “Ember”), is our proposed charter school that seeks to achieve the evolution and merger of the existing Teaching Firms of America-Professional Preparatory Charter School (“TFOA”), into a new NYSED charter, combining the programs of TFOA and 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 seeks to continue to serve the low-income students in the Bedford Stuyvesant-Central Brooklyn community who have been the most historically underserved and under-resourced. 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
- Two parallel high school experiences serving students in two 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 (Bransford and Gardner);
- Differentiation: tailoring instruction to meet individual needs (Tomlinson);
- Looping: practice of keeping groups of students together for two or more years with the same teacher (Waldorf schools; Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown);
- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: 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 (Ladson-Billings);
- Economically Relevant Pedagogy: created by teacher-leaders at TFOA, 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 proceed to satisfy their needs/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 (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) (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 (Guare and Kaufman; National Center for Learning Disabilities);
- 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.

Planned Enrollment*:

***To the extent allowed and permitted under this RFP, we intend to merge the existing K-5 Teaching Firms of America Professional Preparatory Charter School (authorized by the NYC DOE) into this K-12 charter upon its issuance from NYSED Board of Regents. In that context, the planned grades and enrollment will be as follows:**

CHARTER ENROLLMENT BY GRADE						
GRADES	LEVEL	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Kindergarten	Elementary School	88	88	88	88	88
1st Grade	Elementary School	88	88	88	88	88
2nd Grade	Elementary School	84	88	88	88	88
3rd Grade	Elementary School	84	84	88	88	88
4th Grade	Elementary School	84	84	84	88	88
5th Grade	Middle School	88	88	88	88	88
6th Grade	Middle School	88	88	88	88	88
7th Grade	Middle School	84	84	84	84	84
8th Grade	Middle School	-	80	80	80	80
9th Grade	High School	-	-	125	125	125
10th Grade	High School	-	-	-	125	125
11th Grade	High School	-	-	-	-	125
12th Grade	High School	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL		688	772	901	1030	1,155

Proposed School Location/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 our middle and high school students. We are concurrently working with local community leaders to realize our “Community Innovation Campus” project proposal to house Ember and our attendant community vitalization plans for Bedford Stuyvesant-Central Brooklyn.

Replication of High Quality Charter School Model:

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. By fully embracing our current instructional approach that rejects the standard focus on content coverage and test prep, and instead embraces the authentic approach to nurturing mastery of self efficacy, executive functioning and critical thinking skills has yielded very strong and promising results. In 2015 our students achieved over 100% growth in overall ELA scores on the New York State standardized test, which was the highest growth in the State. We increased the ELA proficiency rate for 4th Grade students by over 240% from 2014, and ELL students’ ELA proficiency performance eclipsed the New York City rate significantly with 50% proficiency as compared to 4%. On the Science Assessment we achieved nearly 90% proficiency, with over 40% of students earning the highest proficiency score of 4. While Math proficiency rates were not as robust, we outperformed our CSD, as well as proficiency rates for Black students, our largest demographic.

2015 New York State Assessment Proficiency Results (% at or above proficiency)								
Content Area	TFOA Third Grade	TFOA Fourth Grade	TFOA (Overall)	CSD 16	NYC	NY State	Black Students (NYC)	Latino Students (NYC)
ELA	33.8%	46.9%	39.2%	17%	30.4%	31.3%	19%	19.8%
Math	22.5%	22.4%	22.5%	16.5%	35.3%	38.1%	19.7%	23.7%
Science	N/A	87.5%	87.5%	??	??	??	??	??

Our national norm test results continued to be strong (based on the ERB’s Common Core-aligned Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP) 4th Edition). Students showed strong performance indicators when compared to peers nationally across the board.

2015 ERB’s CTP Results (% at or above National Proficiency Average)			
ASSESSMENT CONTENT AREA	THIRD GRADE	FOURTH GRADE	SCHOOL
Verbal Reasoning	79%	89%	84%
Auditory Comprehension	73%	74%	74%
Reading Comprehension	68%	74%	71%
Writing Mechanics	50%	85%	68%
Writing Concepts & Skills	77%	57%	67%
Quantitative Reasoning	64%	79%	72%
Mathematics 1 & 2	55%	79%	67%

Community Outreach, Enrollment and Retention Information:

Community Outreach and Engagement: 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 why and how 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. 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 answers drove the evolution of the proposed charter design for Ember Charter Schools. After this initial meeting, we continued to meet with families and community members around the responses we received from core stakeholders, honing in on the most important education program elements that emerged again and again. All of this feedback sculpted the design outlined in Ember’s design. Community support for Ember is very strong, with vocal support of our local community leaders and TFOA’s parents (*see attached “Evidence of Community Outreach”*). Over 90% of parents expressed strong support for Ember’s proposal.

As the Ember design was finalized, we conducted a telephone survey of several hundred families about support for the core components and demand for the growth and expansion of TFOA’s programs. Over 90% of families responded, and over 90% of those responses were positive.

Recruitment and Retention of Students, esp. Students with Disabilities, ELLs, and FRPL: Ember intends to continue TFOA’s successful outreach, enrollment and retention of students, especially special population students. Ember will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that our school continues to attract students from special populations in comparable proportion to schools in our district. Ember will engage in extensive outreach, with particular emphasis on staff and service providers at early childcare centers, shelters and CBOs that cater to students with disabilities, ELLs and low-income households. Ember will circulate tens of thousands of application-and-info sheets via direct mail, tabling and drop-offs across zip codes most connected to Bedford Stuyvesant-Central Brooklyn. Ember’s outreach teams will be bilingual, particularly Spanish-speakers as they represent the largest ESL population in the community.

In all of our outreach Ember will tout our unique school model and approach to serve some at-risk students, particularly students from low-income households, English Language Learners and children with disabilities (e.g. looping, two-highly qualified teachers in every classroom, ongoing professional development for serving the wide spectrum of students, a team of special education specialists and social workers to support students and teaching staff, integrated instruction, leadership development, inclusion, differentiation and technology). Ember’s unique school model and approach is also designed to produce high retention rates with all of its students, especially students with disabilities, ELLs and those who qualify for free or reduced priced lunch. Ember will take a multifaceted, holistic and differentiated approach to serving the needs of all learners.