

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: February 15, 2017

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
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Second Lead Applicant Name:	Alexandria Lee, Esq.
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Current Board Co-Chair:	James Bartlett
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Current Board Co-Chair:	Shahidah Kalam Id-Din
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Partner Information:	
Request is Not Applicable	

Proposed School Information:	
Charter School Name:	Ember Charter School 2
Education Corp Name:	Ember Charter School for Mindful Education, Innovation & Transformation 2
School Location:	NYC CSD 16
Opening Date:	August 2019

Planned Enrollment:

Planned Grades and Enrollment in the 1st year of Operation: Grades K, 5, 9; 276 students

Planned Grades and Enrollment in the 5th year of Operation: Grades K-12; 1194 students

CHARTER ENROLLMENT BY GRADE

GRADES	LEVEL	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Kindergarten	Elementary School	88	88	88	88	88
1st Grade	Elementary School		88	88	88	88
2nd Grade	Elementary School			88	88	88
3rd Grade	Elementary School				88	88
4th Grade	Elementary School					88
5th Grade	<i>Middle School</i>	88	88	88	88	88
6th Grade	Middle School		88	88	88	88
7th Grade	Middle School			88	88	88
8th Grade	Middle School				88	88
9th Grade	High School	100	100	100	100	100
10th Grade	High School		100	100	100	100
11th Grade	High School			100	100	100
12th Grade	High School				100	100
TOTAL		276	552	828	1104	1194

School Description:

Glossary of Terms: description of unique terms used in the following section of this letter:

- **The Anew School (“Anew”):** an existing 501(c)(3) education organization proposing to open public, domestic and international, single-sex boarding schools for Grades 7-12.
- **Teaching Firms of America-Preparatory Charter School (“TFOA”):** an existing charter school in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn (CSD 16).

Ember Charter School for Mindful Education, Innovation and Transformation 2 (“Ember Charter School 2”, or “Ember 2”), seeks to achieve the growth and expansion of the highly innovative and successful model of the existing Teaching Firms of America-Professional Preparatory Charter School (“TFOA”), which was recently approved for a full five-year renewal (no conditions), and a name change to Ember Charter School for Mindful Education, Innovation and Transformation (“Ember Charter School” or “Ember”), by its authorizer (NYC DOE). As a result, Ember Charter School 2 will be an innovative, holistic and comprehensive primary, middle and secondary community of learning, practice and thought leadership located in Bedford Stuyvesant-Central Brooklyn.

Our Mission: Ember 2’s mission is to transform, empower, and ignite students who have traditionally been labeled “at-risk” from historically underserved, under-resourced, low-income communities. Through our innovative holistic elementary school, international experiences within middle school, and single-sex boarding high school, we will 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.

School Description:

Our Students: Ember 2 seeks to continue TFOA/Ember's mission to serve low-income students in the Bedford Stuyvesant-Central Brooklyn community who have been the most historically underserved and under-resourced. TFOA/Ember's current demographic is approximately 99% Black and Latino; 90% Free & Reduced Price Lunch; 15% students with disabilities (IEPs); and 10% English Language Learners, though more than 35% of parents of current students were 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. Ember 2 will continue TFOA/Ember's focus on this demographic and thus will offer admission preferences to students who qualify for free and reduced-priced lunch, to the extent permitted by law, along with returning students, siblings of enrolled and admitted students and children of staff members. 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.

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.**

The key design elements of Ember 2's proposed educational plan represent the evolution of innovation and development of TFOA/Ember as it expands to further incorporate community input and the programmatic blueprint of The Anew School's vision. The result is a proposed educational program for Ember 2 that forges a true K-12 'university' model, one that continues to draw on the successful, innovative and award-winning elements of TFOA/Ember and Anew, and includes the following three core educational enterprises that will serve students across the developmental continuum of their pre-collegiate lives:

- 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.

Ember 2 seeks to provide our target population with expanded progressive, holistic and global education opportunities that have been unavailable to them. Ember 2 strives to accomplish this objective by engaging in three primary efforts:

1. Nurturing and enabling students to become holistic social entrepreneurs, engineers and global leaders through the development of: agency and self-efficacy; critical thinking skills; social, emotional, and physical well-being; mindful leadership; global citizenship; and substantive international exposure and experiences;
2. Developing and providing thought leadership within the education space, training and developing staff and other organizations committed to the same values and principles Ember employs; and
3. Contributing to the positive and healthy economic, social and cultural development of the

School Description:

communities we serve.

As we move forward and grow into the full scope of our K-12 vision, we will look for evidence of success in achieving these objectives in a myriad of ways, yet perhaps most notably through:

- Elementary School students successful development of service-learning projects that contribute positively to their community (e.g. launching a successful initiative that seeks to reduce gun violence and create more safe community spaces for play);
- Middle School students successful launch of a social enterprises that connects their local community to at least one foreign country (e.g. developing and launching a peer-to-peer social investment, micro-lending network and app/portal for youth in Brooklyn to fund youth-led social enterprises that help solve community problems in Greater Accra, Ghana);
- High School students successfully organize other teens, adults and/or organizations to advocate for important social change (e.g. develop and launch a youth-led ballot initiative to create an official City Council seat (one from each borough) for a youth age 16-21, who has full voting rights and responsibilities)
- Ember 2 successfully develops an Ember Teaching Firm Fellowship program where groups of experienced teacher-leaders can work at Ember 2 in residence and learn how to open and operate their own Teaching Firm;
- Ember 2 successfully works with local community partners and leaders (Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, Bridge Street Development Corp, Councilman Cornegy, Assemblyman Mosley, former Assemblywoman Robinson, Congressman Jeffries, etc.), to build a community campus facility that will provide much needed development for the Bedford Stuyvesant-Central Brooklyn community: economic (thousands of jobs), social (aquatic and green indoor-activities space), and cultural (various open, modular performance art spaces).

Instructional Methods: Ember 2 will adopt and utilize the same innovative instructional methodology currently employed at TFOA/Ember, 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 (John Bransford and Howard Gardner);
- Differentiation: the process of tailoring instruction to meet individual needs (Carol Tomlinson);
- Looping: practice of keeping groups of students together for two or more years with the same teacher (Rudolph Steiner, Waldorf schools; Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown);
- 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 (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 (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));

School Description:

- 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 (Richard Guare and Christopher 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 2's Teaching Firm model (currently employed at TFOA/Ember) 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 2 can demonstrate a sufficient demand within the community for our school. For the 2016-2017 school year, TFOA/Ember received over 500 applications, accepted 80 students and had a wait-list of over 400 students. There continues to be a high need for high quality schools in CSD 16: in 2016 only 46% of students in CSD 16 graduated high school, with only 39% of achieving a Regents Diploma and merely 3% an Advanced Regents Diploma.

Initial Facility Plans:

We intend to seek facilities space from the NYC Department of Education. In the event we are denied we will appeal our request to the NY State Education Commissioner in accordance with the Charter Act.

In anticipation of such a denial of our request from the NYC DOE we have been working with local community leaders to explore public-private developments of a community-based campus to meet our facility needs. Please see the attached "Community Innovation Campus Project" documents for additional design details.

Existing Education Corporation's Description of Academic Performance:

A. *TFOA/Ember Board Co-Chairs:*

James Bartlett: 646-667-7114; James.E.Bartlett@gmail.com;

Shahidah Kalam Id-Din: 267-975-4041; skiddin@gmail.com

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

TFOA/Ember has demonstrated success in achieving strong results for our students even as we fully implement an instructional approach that rejects the standard focus on test prep and content 'coverage'. We have instead embraced an authentic approach to nurturing mastery of self-efficacy, executive functioning and critical thinking skills, the integration of which has helped us achieve outstanding results as evidenced in the recent recommendation for our full 5-year renewal (with no conditions) by our current authorizer

Existing Education Corporation's Description of Academic Performance:

(NYC DOE).

Though still early in our development, our holistic pedagogical approach has yielded impressive results. In 2015 TFOA/Ember had over 100% growth in overall ELA scores on the New York State standardized test (from 19.1% in 2014 to 39.2% in 2015), which at the time was the highest growth in the State. We also increased the ELA proficiency rate for 4th Grade students by over 240% from 2014 (19.1% in 2014 to 46.9% in 2015), and achieved nearly 90% proficiency on the Science Assessment, with over 40% of students earning the highest proficiency score of 4. In 2016 we continued our strong performance in ELA, with our 4th grade (44%) and 5th grade (51%) students significantly outperforming their peers in our community school district (31% and 26%, respectively), New York City (41% and 34%, respectively) and New York State (41% and 33%, respectively) achievement rates. Again, over 90% of 4th grade students scored proficiency or higher in Science, with over 35% achieving the highest proficiency score of 4.

Overall, the longer students are immersed in our model, the better they perform and the more they close the achievement gap in critical reading and analysis. By 5th grade, when many of our peer schools in CSD 16 are reporting consistent declines in ELA performance, our students have nearly eliminated the achievement gap, closing it by 80% for our Black students, and 90% for our Latino students. While the progress has been slower on the Math side, we've nonetheless experienced meaningful growth in this domain as we've continued to evolve our holistic approach to math instruction, exemplified by the performance of our 4th grade cohort, where our Black students have closed the gap in math proficiency by 32%, and our Latino students have closed the gap by 29%.

The impact of TFOA/Ember's approach is particularly positive and notable given the extremely high needs of the students whom we serve. Over 15% of our population enroll as students with disabilities (SWD), and over 90% of all students enter our school reading well below grade-level, with the vast majority entering Kindergarten with very low vocabulary and phoneme recognition. Additionally, nearly 90% of students live in very low income and severely under-resourced households, with over 35% of all student families headed by a parent born in foreign country (most often from the Caribbean, Central America, West and Central Africa regions). These latter students often come to school with even more significant socio-emotional needs as the result of added dislocation of their language and/or cognitive struggles. Long term, TFOA/Ember's approach has had a particularly positive impact on the learning outcomes of these high need students whom often come to school with even more significant socio-emotional needs as the result of added dislocation of their language and/or cognitive struggles. Ember 2 will continue to build on TFOA/Ember's current results with respect to these populations, evidenced by the strong and improving achievement metrics with respect to this cohort, as our ELL and SWD cohorts outperformed the New York City ELL and SWD 2016 proficiency rate in ELA and continue to close the gap in Math.

Community Outreach Analysis:

For more than two years we have been engaged in an ongoing and public dialogue with Bedford Stuyvesant community members and leaders about how and why to expand the innovative and highly effective programs we offer. This proposal for Ember Charter School 2 represents the result of this ongoing consultation and design work. Many of the instructional design elements for Ember 2 came directly from the design thinking community conversations the TFOA/Ember teacher-leaders have had with parents, students and community leaders over the course of more than 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 in the 2014-15 school year. Initially we convened a public community meeting to solicit responses to the central question: "what kind of educational opportunities would you like for your children?" The answers and feedback we received drove the evolution of both our current model and our

Community Outreach Analysis:

proposed charter design for Ember 2.

Subsequent to the 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 our model to middle and high school;
- Expand development of socio-emotional health, including high self-esteem and independence;
- Expand our focus on students' future career and economic success opportunities beyond college;
- 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 international travel and exposure to the global community and economy.

All of the feedback from our community outreach sculpted the Ember Charter School 2 proposal to be outlined in our full charter application. Community support for Ember is very strong. We have the vocal support of our local community leaders and TFOA/Ember's parents (*see* attached exhibit "Evidence of Community Outreach and Input"). Indeed over 90% of TFOA/Ember's parents expressed strong support for Ember Charter School 2's proposal.

We also conducted a telephone survey of several hundred families about their support for the core Ember 2 proposal, the result of which revealed an overwhelming appetite and demand for the growth and expansion of our current 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 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 Outreach and Input," 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 social media and web postings with ongoing feedback from the public; and letters of support from parents and local community leaders.