

Date: Tuesday, December 22, 2009

To: VASD School Board

From: Patricia Codde , Teresa Kohler-Burke, Teresa Mueller, Janet Lalor & Carrie Sandstrom

Re: **Chinese Immersion Charter School Proposal Update**

The purpose of this document is to provide a revised proposal for a Chinese Immersion Charter School (Charter School) in the VASD. Over the last week we've spent considerable time discussing questions raised by the School Board (Board) and have come up with a creative alternative for the Board's consideration. We realize the Board has some very tough decisions ahead as well as limited time and we want to assure the Board that we are open to resourceful solutions. If anyone on the Board has any additional questions that have not been addressed, or arise from the following update, please don't hesitate to send us your questions.

Size/Scope & Budget

Size/Scope: The initial Charter School contract proposed a school of up to two K/1 classes of 22 students each. The Charter School contract is being revised to start with one K/1 class of 22 students. This will help reduce the Charter School's overhead costs such as facility (less space required) and other services. The reduced number of students would also minimize any potential impact on other district elementary schools. We've also given considerable thought to how we can make this idea attractive to attendance area schools. Because the smaller Charter School would only utilize a Chinese teacher for half of the day, the teacher could provide Chinese language classes to students at one or two other schools in the district the other half of the day. This would allow other VASD students to share in the unique opportunity of learning Chinese. Because no other public elementary schools in the area offer Chinese language classes this could draw more families to the VASD and give the district much greater flexibility with placement of interested students.

The Charter School could also offer a fee-based Chinese language summer school/camp at its location or potentially at one of the district elementary schools. Many of the schools we visited in Minnesota offer fee-based summer school/camps. This would also allow more VASD students to benefit from this opportunity.

Budget: As mentioned, by reducing our students from 44 to 22, we effectively reduce a number of expenses associated with the start up of a new school. Some additional steps we've taken to further reduce expenses include:

1. The elimination of a director for the first year. Given a class size of 22 we could operate with a lead teacher or a group of committed parents with support from district staff (similar to how New Century School started without a director in the first year).
2. Reduction of secretary support staff to 25%. We're confident we can cover much of this time and responsibility with parent volunteers. Three parents have already indicated they are willing to take on this responsibility several hours per week.

Diversity Outreach

Free & Reduced Lunch: We have established a target of 27% (or 7 students) with diverse backgrounds to attend the Charter School. This goal mirrors the district population. To meet this target we have built relationships with key leaders and members of the Boys and Girls Club, Head Start and the Hmong community. We've participated in various events including Thanksgiving Family Fun Night and open houses at Head Start. We have received a very enthusiastic response from these groups, as they see the opportunity it could provide to the families enrolled in their programs. We have also received a very enthusiastic response from some of the families, showing a definite interest in enrolling their children in the Charter School. We are continuing to grow these relationships and work with these organizations.

Special Needs Students: We have established a goal of 10% or 2 students with special needs for the Charter School. A plan for meeting this goal is being developed, which includes working with the Dane County Birth to Three program and visiting area pre-schools and day care centers that have students with special needs. We will work toward this goal with all the dedication and commitment we have for other goals.

Facility

The facility numbers in the current Charter School budget are based on a "dedicated" facility for two classrooms. We could reduce these numbers further if we enter into a lease to operate within a single classroom. A single classroom could still implement the East meets West classroom concept by dividing the class room in half and/or have reversible classroom materials that simply are flipped over or changed out based on whether instruction is in Chinese or English at that time (a Seattle school operates out of one classroom in this manner).

In addition to researching a number of "dedicated" facility spaces, we've met with the pastor of a local community church about the possibility of renting space at a price significantly below market rates. This facility has a full kitchen and gym. In addition, there is a significant green space in the back for an outdoor play area and this site is located on current bus routes. We will be presenting our request to rent this space during the church's board meeting, just prior to the VASD School Board meeting, on Jan. 4th. Therefore, we hope to have an update on this at the VASD School Board on Jan. 4th.

Because we're reducing the proposal to a single class of 22, we would also be open to creating a school within a school, utilizing a classroom in an existing VASD facility, in an effort to effectively and efficiently launch a new Charter School. However, we would need to have a more detailed discussion of this possibility with DPI charter school representatives on how this might affect our grant opportunities.

In closing, we believe this proposal for a Chinese Immersion Charter School would provide a very unique learning opportunity to students enrolled in the school as well as students in area attendance schools. It also encompasses some of the ideas discussed by the Board and administration team on December 21st (recruiting more students, offering unique opportunities in our schools to draw more families to the district and offering fee-based summer programs) that would place the VASD in a unique position to attract more students to our district.

Thank you for your time, we are grateful for your careful consideration of this proposal.