

GRANT REQUEST

CROSS-CURRICULAR SCHOOL PROJECT 2013-14

PROJECT BASICS

Name of School: Beurling Academy

Proposed sites to visit: Uncommon Charter High School, The Renaissance Charter High School for Innovation, KIPP NYC College Prep High School

Project Title: Investigating Different Approaches to Education through Charter Schools

TEAM MEMBERS

Name	Position	Signature
Isaac Gielen	English Teacher	_____
Kayla Matias	English Teacher	_____
Emilie Hamou	English Teacher	_____
Daniel Fitzpatrick	English Teacher	_____
Stephen McCarthy	Mathematics Teacher	_____

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

By visiting KIPP, Uncommon, and Innovation, we hope to return to our public high school with a greater understanding of the integral components of the mission New York charter schools share. In learning first hand which elements of each school's charter are most successful for them, we hope to work closely with the MELS and the resources available at Beurling Academy to develop a charter particular to our school's context.

The different ways the aforementioned three charter schools operate, on a day-to-day basis vary within their particular boroughs and community contexts in New York City, offer a well rounded, realistic glance into each school's environment that is easily transferrable to that of Beurling Academy.

Close inspection of these three charter schools, while reflecting on the values and learning environment of our own school, welcomes a revisioning of our school success plan. By having the opportunity to witness firsthand the effect of a school's respective charter amongst their communities, we can broaden our interpretation of our school success plan. Through implementing it within Beurling in a style similar to the charter schools we will be visiting, our staff can re-imagine a school success plan that students, staff, parents, and community leaders can buy into, and ultimately enjoy more social and academic success.

While there do indeed exist some roadblocks in implementing such a system, it is important to keep in mind that we are not looking to turn Beurling, or any other school, into a charter school. Canada lacks the legal framework to have the same charter school systems that countries like the United States enjoy, but because of our systemic differences, Beurling can use this opportunity to work with charter schools to truly take advantage of the systems that are in place for public schools. Our familiarity with the charter school system, coupled with the MELS, and the public sector can help us teachers employ the benefits of both school approaches.

LOGISTICS

TIMELINE

Submission of application to Principal:	September 15 th , 2013
Contact Host Schools:	October 2013
Gathering of Pre-Visit information:	November 2013
Pre-visit Planning:	November 2013 – February 2014
School visit:	First week of March 2014 (March break)

Day 1: Arrive in New York

Day 2: Split up into two groups; each group will visit a school

Day 3: We will rotate and each attend a new school

Day 4: Rotate again to attend the third school

After the trip, we may take (uncompensated) personal time in New York before returning to Montreal.

Reinvestment activities: March – July, 2014

BUDGET

We have prepared a budget that comes in well beneath the suggested \$7500 grant amount.

Item	Amount	Notes
Transportation	\$ 300	Gas for shared personal vehicle
Accommodation	\$ 1400	Shared rental apartment via airbnb.ca
Substitution	\$ 0	March break trip
Meals	\$ 1000	\$50 per diem x 5 teachers x 4 days
Misc. expenses	\$ 500	School gifts, parking, road tolls and unexpected expenses
Total	\$ 3200	

HOST SCHOOLS

All three schools are inner-city charter schools in different boroughs of New York City. All serve a diverse population and are majority minority. All three serve Grades 9 – 11, and KIPP and UCHS also have a Grade 12 class.

UNCOMMON CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

The Uncommon Charter High School (UCHS) is located in Brooklyn, New York and caters to a primarily African American and Hispanic student body. Approximately two thirds of the students are boys, and 58% of students are Anglophone, while the rest speak Spanish at home. UCHS places a strong emphasis on cyber citizenship by applying the same standards for classroom behaviour to internet use. There is a strong focus on academics as demonstrated by its students' high averages on New York State exams. There is a student to staff ratio of 10:1 which ensures that students benefit from more individualized attention. A particularly interesting feature of the school is its Family Accountability Contract which is a document that highlights the responsibilities of students, families, teachers and administration.

THE RENAISSANCE CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL FOR INNOVATION

At the Renaissance Charter High school for Innovation, there is a strong emphasis on differentiation. As a product of their philosophy, each student is provided with their own individual learning plan which takes into account their needs as learners and which is revisited regularly to take progress into account. The school also features an integrated team teaching model by which one Subject-matter instructor and one Special education instructor plan lessons together for each of the core subject area classes (Math, Science, History, and English) and are both present in the classroom.

KIPP NYC COLLEGE PREP HIGH SCHOOL

KIPP NYC College Prep School is located in the heart of New York City and has a primarily African American and Hispanic student body of 800. This school's principal aim is to impart students with the skills they need to move on to higher education. In terms of curriculum, the school offers a multitude of college prep classes (logic and reasoning, career readiness, speech and composition) over the course of four years, as well as a required foreign language class over the course of three years. As a result of the school's high academic expectations of the students, they are given quizzes and tests weekly and have about two hours of homework every night.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

BY OUR TEAM

Our team will be busy preparing for the visit in many ways:

- Contact the three schools that we would like to visit and organizing the logistics of the trip.
- Review the charters and literature on the three charter schools we are visiting to be well-briefed on their mission and values.
- Read relevant academic articles touting the benefits and negative aspects of the Charter school system.
- Review articles on Canadian educational law and school culture and contrast these with the New York State system.
- Peruse a “New York City Tour Guide” book, just to get to know the city a little better.

WITH THE SUCCESS PLAN COMMITTEE AND GOVERNING BOARD

One very important step we will take before leaving is discussing this project at the Success Plan committee meetings. As leading committee members, we are asking the rest of the committee and the school to entrust us with a large task of spearheading the renewal of the Success Plan. This will need to be done with much consultation at the committee level.

Our school suffers from a high dropout rate, low literacy rates and low grades on standardized tests. We also have many students with special needs that we are trying to accommodate. Before leaving, we will work with the Success Plan committee to determine specific goals for each school visit. For example:

- at UCHS we will inquire about the strategies teachers and administrators have used to raise students’ test scores so high above average;
- at Innovation we will be investigating how teachers assess the needs of each student while implementing the team teaching techniques used to engage the various learners;
- at KIPP we hope to discover how they manage stockpiling students with such a heavy workload and what teachers at the school are doing to keep students motivated and invested in their education.

WHOLE SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

We will also conduct some activities with the full staff in preparation for our visit:

- Hold a screening of the movie “Waiting for Superman” to become acquainted with the public school system in New York.
- Conduct a staff survey of attitudes on Charter schools to better inform us of the internal opportunities or barriers to implementation we may encounter.
- Invite any staff members to join informal discussions on the project or success plan.

SCHOOL VISITS

OBSERVATION AND INTERPRETATION STRATEGIES

We will split into two groups which will explore a different school each day, meeting at the end of the day to compare notes. This is so we can extend our observation of each school over more than one day, and to not be too intrusive to the everyday life of the school.

While at our host schools, we will tour the building and note the school's culture (structure, artwork, student accomplishments, technological resources etc.) as well as the social atmosphere; we will sit in on selected classrooms and observe various in-school programs. We will meet with the vice principal as well as staff members such as the director of special projects, director of special education and various faculty representatives to address important questions. We will document our findings on paper and take pictures if permitted.

At the end of our rounds, the five of us will come together as a group and discuss what we have observed; what elements of the Charter system can we bring to our Canadian public school system? What worked and did not work?

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- What initiatives does your school take to better socialise students?
- How do you evaluate this socialisation?
- What sorts of students do you look to attract to your school and why?
- How do you evaluate your success in terms of the goals of the school?
- What steps do you take to ensure a diverse student demographic?
- Is your school involved in any community programs/projects?
- What resources are available to your students?
- What are the fundamental differences between a charter school and a public school?
- How do these differences benefit the student body?
- What is your relationship like with parents? Do they have a role in the school's community?
- How do you approach declining literacy rates?
- What are your perspectives on team-teaching and co-planning?
- Does your school work to foster citizenship? If so, how?
- What are your Graduation and post-secondary statistics?

REINVESTMENT

ACTIVITIES

Our main activity to reinvest in our professional development will be a renewal of our school's Success Plan, achieved in conjunction with a committee involving the administration and other stakeholders. This will be a several-month process culminating in a summer Governing Board meeting, and will likely continue as we help develop future success plans.

Our second reinvestment goal is to share teaching techniques we have learned with the school community. Of course, before the trip we cannot say which methods we will be sharing. However, whatever we do learn will be disseminated to colleagues through a presentation we plan on making about what we learned at these three charter schools. The objective is to identify the strategies that these schools are using to become so successful. Our aim is to present our findings to the school and demonstrate to the administration that our recommendations should be implemented in an attempt to improve the learning environment at Beurling Academy. We would also eventually like to share our ambitions with other schools, though this is not a primary objective of this trip.

EVALUATION

The success of our trip will be measured in the short term in two ways:

- Did we successfully recommend changes to the School Success Plan which work for Beurling?
- Did we generate a positive attitude among the staff team toward renewing the Success Plan?

Of course, we will measure our success in the long term by the success of the new Success Plan in improving the educational outcomes of the school. Assuming major changes are adopted as a result of our trip, the strategies meant to improve academics will take more than one year to show results. In order to evaluate this, we will ensure that the Success Plan includes appropriate progress benchmarks over at least five years and specific measurement tools against these benchmarks.

CONCLUSION

In visiting three different New York City charter schools, we hope to pick and choose from the charters of the participating schools the most relevant, and beneficial components to Beurling Academy. In identifying these, we can work closely with the administration and Governing Board within our existing school system to improve academic and social success while enjoying more involvement from parents and community members. All of this will stem from a re-imagined school success plan that takes off from the founding philosophies of KIPP, Uncommon, and Innovation.