

**EDUCATION FORUM**  
**Women Committed to an Informed Community**  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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April 4, 2012

City of Milwaukee Common Council  
c/o The Milwaukee Charter  
School Review Committee  
200 E. Wells Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Forwarded to Email Addresses  
of Committee Members

**Regarding: Charter School Application for Quest-Milwaukee, Inc.**  
as submitted by Edgar T. Russell, Executive Director for Quest  
Institute for the Transformation of Learning, Marquette University  
750 N. 18th Street, Milwaukee WI 53233 - (414) 288-3055 - v

Dear Chairman Ingram:

The undersigned individuals, on behalf of the Education Forum of the Women Committed to an Informed Community (Women Committed), ask that the Committee consider the following information in finalizing your review of the Charter School Application submitted on February 3, 2012 by Quest-Milwaukee, Inc. Individuals with Women Committed gave testimony during the public hearing (March 2012) for Charter School Applications. We have taken into consideration the defense of the School's representation at the Hearing and the actual Application Packet from which your written reviews will be made.

**The Education Forum of Women Committed to an Informed Community strongly encourages the Charter School Review Committee to defer approval of the Quest-Milwaukee Charter School Application at its April 4, 2012 session. The deferment would allow the entity to either invoke the Appeals process available in the City Ordinance Chapter 330 (typically 30-45 days) or to re-apply during the next application cycle.** Deferment would allow the applicant to appropriately respond to missing and incomplete information that is critical in making an informed approval of the proposed network of Quest-Milwaukee schools.

Please note that the following items are listed in no specific order.

## **1.0 Required Contracts and Collaborations**

- 1.1 It will be necessary for Quest-Milwaukee to secure thorough and ongoing contractual relationships with EdVision as outlined in the Application. This contractual agreement is not identified as either in process or completed. EdVision is the only true model that is similar in nature to the ‘variation’ of education delivery. An alternate plan is not identified should EdVision refuse to contract with Quest-Milwaukee or cancels its contract with the school.
- 1.2 It will be necessary for Quest-Milwaukee to secure thorough and ongoing contractual relationships with Microsoft / Google Chrome as outlined in the Application. This contractual agreement is not identified as either in process or completed. Is this contract predicated on the existing Microsoft Agreement with Wisconsin Department of Public Institutions? An alternate plan is not identified should Microsoft / Google Chrome refuse to contract with Quest-Milwaukee or cancel its contract with the school.

## **2.0 Staffing and Class Size**

- 2.1 Too few appropriately certified teachers:
  - 2.1.1 Entity lists only one teacher per location per discipline for as many as 475 Students with no back-up process when the ‘one teacher’ is not yet hired or resigns. These start-up schools are known for high levels of staff turnover.
  - 2.1.2 Unlicensed paraprofessionals will provide the daily interactions that are reserved for licensed teachers in the EdVision model.
  - 2.1.3 The EdVision model is designed for use in a small-school environment. Quest-Milwaukee’s use of this model will greatly exceed the desired staff/pupil ratios.
    - Grouping (class size) in the EdVision Model is 20 students to 1 licensed teacher;
    - Grouping in the Quest-Milwaukee Model is 22 students to 1 unlicensed paraprofessional with 475 students to 1 licensed teacher.
    - A similar model previously existed in Milwaukee (under the name of Phoenix Charter High School with Grades 9-12) under contract with EdVision but without the support and on-going direction of EdVision. This school had extreme challenges in implementing this education variation model in an urban environment.
    - Open-concept classroom or whole school model is in place at Bradley Tech High School (Milwaukee). Implementation and safety is an extreme challenge for the more mature students (grades 9-12). The Forum has extreme reservations with inclusion of grades 6 -7 into the model with very limited teacher/paraprofessional physical oversight.
      - Applicant does not provide data to demonstrate that this will be of benefit as it relates to the learning process.

- 2.1.3 Students will be chosen and grouped to include same-sex students of all grades—6th through 12th. Students will be provided online ‘communities for this grouping’ with no indication of on-going monitoring by the paraprofessional (teacher not included in the model). A typical makeup of the physical and online community can include students as young as 11 year olds and as mature as 21 year olds. Under normal circumstances, this grouping poses a threat of safety.
- 2.1.4 Computer technicians are under staffed with one individual slotted to float between multiple buildings for a 100% computer-based delivery system.
- 2.2 Many of the key school leadership will not be hired and prepared in advance of student enrollment. A pro-active hiring will allow staff to become acclimated to the teaching environment prior to inclusion of students in the areas of responsibilities.
- 2.3 Students will not have access to training information outside of the physical school plant—specifically because the material will be housed on an intranet. If this is a true intranet, it is not clearly explained how students/parents will approach homework and extracurricular work.
- 2.4 The Center for Support is a critical element of the organizational resources. The Center for Support will is not scheduled for staffing until School-Year #Three.

### **3.0 Curriculum**

- 3.1 Each student will develop and implement an individual learning plan. Application does not indicate at what point the teacher or paraprofessional (advisor) will be responsible to amend the individual learning plan to reflect realistic goals for either the learning disabled or the over-achiever.
  - 3.1.1 In the EdVision model, the development and amendments are reserved for the licensed teacher.
  - 3.1.2 Teacher-student evaluations are replaced with student-student evaluations.
- 3.2 Absent of an existing contract with EdVision (Carpe Diem or other similar models), no actual data is provided in school’s application to indicate success/fail/correction rates. The “extensive research and development” is only mentioned but not included in the Application Packet. EdVision has been implemented in the small-school environment for more than seven years. (Our Education Forum found EdVision implementation data that dates back to 1994 in a Minnesota school.)
  - 3.2.1 No indication that the small-school training model can be transferred successfully to the whole-school model as identified by Quest-Milwaukee.
- 3.3 It is not clear what an ‘average’ school day will look like for students. Some show only 2 hours of school-based subject-matter instruction while others show as much as 7 hours of actual main subject instruction. The school day is not clearly defined and only briefly discussed.

- 3.3.1 The Quest-Milwaukee school year will not lend well to older students who desire/need to work and/or complete community service hours outside of the school. The proposed year extends for 8 weeks beyond the traditional parochial high school. Many, if not all, of the reasonable positions that are available to the age group will be taken.

## **4.0 Employment Arrangements**

- 4.1 It is not clear in the Application Packet why this Wisconsin employer seeks hiring practices that exceed Wisconsin law. Statutes that are in place at the time of this application submission do not allow for barring of all types of felony convictions. This greatly exceeds existing law and should be explained. This should be addressed for compliance.
- 4.2 Health benefits are slotted for only 70% employer share during the first year. Any percentages less than 80% qualifies the employee to be identified as uninsured and eligible to apply for Wisconsin Medicaid for lack of insurance. The Education Forum does not believe that it is the intent of Quest-Milwaukee to place its instructors and staff onto the Medicaid roles. This should be addressed for compliance.
- 4.3 The proposed school intends to implement a \$250 penalty for unexcused absences. There is no clear financial template to indicate that the employee arrangement will not violate federal/state minimum wage hours. Ultimately, the deduction of \$250 from a 3-day pay week may not leave enough compensation equivalent to \$7.25 for actual hours worked. This should be addressed for compliance.

## **5.0 Financials**

- 5.1 Non-profit [501(c)3] approval not in place by original application time. Conversation during Public Hearing referenced a recent approval. Documentation, however, was not provided for inclusion into the Application Packet—which is a matter of public record.
- 5.2 Conversation during Public Hearing referenced a recent approval by the Executive Board to increase the per-student tuition rate from \$7,777 to \$11,000. No additional explanation was offered verbally. Documentation, however, was not provided for inclusion into the Application Packet—which is a matter of public record.
  - The Application Packet, along with any modification should be made available as a matter of public record. The process of amending an Application Packet may by a CSRC process that does not currently lend well to public inspection.

- The Education Forum’s recommendation is to amend the responsibilities of the Committee Clerk to include tracking with update notification to all parties requesting release of the public documents, namely submitted Charter School Application Packets. A reasonable timeframe to provide the update notification is within 3 calendar days of receipt from applicant entity.
- 5.3 Three-year projections included in the Application Packet itemize the expenses of a preparation year with a fiscal start date of July 1. Missing from the Packet is an itemization of the expenses for the prior years of preparation. The standard itemization is addressed with a voluntary statement: “Note: This is a new school and does not have prior school year financial information.” To the contrary, the actual operation of Quest-Milwaukee (with Edgar T. Russell identified as Executive Director for Quest) is referenced in petitions to elected officials as far back as January 2011. This would account for two prior school years if the July-June fiscal year is applied as identified by the applicant.
- 5.4 Use of the Wisconsin Planning Grant (\$200,000) is not identified as being a part of the 2012-13 planning year but was briefly mentioned in the Public Hearing.

## **6.0 Senior Management and Executive Board Structure**

- 6.1 The discussion of the Executive Board structure for Quest-Milwaukee indicated a composite of eight members. The Application Packet submitted for review, however, only list three members—only two of which were available for the public hearing.
- Questions regarding the Executive Board members not yet identified were addressed by the Board Treasurer as ‘not enough time to identify prior to the public hearing.’ Deferment would allow for additional time to secure and evaluate individuals who will the significant makeup of this decision-making body.
  - It is a serious question of the Education Forum whether a true 2/3 majority can be obtained with the current Executive Board structure given that two of the Members are a husband/wife team.
  - Current Executive Board Chair is also the Chair of another entity that is applying for Charter School approval during this March 2012 approval cycle.
    - The Education Forum finds is extremely odd that the Application Packet of the second entity was significantly deficient and is encouraged by the CSRC to re-submit for approval in September 2012.
  - The Application references two different Executive Board Chairs in different areas of the Packet. It is not clear if this is an oversight and when the structural changes were made because two of the documents where authored/signed within days of each other.

## 7.0 Miscellaneous

- 7.1 The Education Forum would ask the applicant to review and adjust the document to exclude overly repetitive documentation. Entire sections are repeated throughout the document—with no added value—as much as three times.
- 7.2 The Education Forum believes that it is a challenging feat—possibly a conflict of interest—for CSRC Members who are also long-term and life members of the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) organization to also take responsibility for approval of an entity that is the product of the organizations founding members. The Education Forum’s opposition here, however, will take a back seat if the remaining items are addressed to the public’s satisfaction.

The Education Forum and the Women Committed feel that it is necessary to express that these requests are from Milwaukee residents who are working to see the achievable school options are available to our children. Those who join us in the Education Forum have worked and volunteered in the Milwaukee Public School system, as well as, private/choice schools at varying grade levels. We do not require our members to express opposition to choice schools. To the contrary, individuals who have recently made application for review as a Charter School through the City of Milwaukee have previously met with the Education Forum.

If you have additional questions during your serious review of this material and its application to your decision-making process, contact information for Education Forum Leaders is provided below.

Respectfully,



Harriet Callier, Associate Chair  
Education Forum  
608-313-5101

Gail Hicks, Chair  
Education Forum  
414-358-1042

Marva Herndon, Chair  
Women Committed to an Informed Community  
414-350-3027

**Women.Informed@gmail.com**  
**www.WomenInformed.org**