

**APPLICATION FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS PROPOSING A 2000-01 START DATE
APPLICATION FACT SHEET**

The information furnished below must be an accurate representation of the application and must correspond to the information provided in the body of the application.

Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School
Proposed Charter School Name

Norristown, PA Montgomery County Montgomery IU #23
School Location (City/Town) County Intermediate Unit

Contact Person: Jane Delaney Proposed Start Date: September, 2001
First: Jane Middle: Last: Delaney
Organization: Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School Founding Coalition
Street Address: 546 Sussex Road
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Founding Coalition:	Staff: <u> </u>	Projected Enrollment: <u>1,500</u>
Parents <u>X</u>	Number of Teachers: <u> </u>	Years 1-5
Teachers <u>X</u>	Grade Level:	1st Year <u>1,500</u>
Business Partnership <u>X</u>	Elementary <u>X</u>	2nd Year <u>5,000</u>
Community-Based	Middle <u>X</u>	3rd Year <u>7,500</u>
Organization <u> </u>	Secondary <u>X</u>	4th Year <u>10,000</u>
Museum <u> </u>	Other Grade Level <u> </u>	5 th Year <u>16,000</u>
Higher Education <u> </u>		
Other Founding	Circle Appropriate Grade(s)	
Group <u> </u>	K 12 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	

Does the applicant group presently have access to a facility suitable for a school? Yes No X
In what type of community will the Charter School be located?
Urban X Suburban X Rural X Other

School Focus

In succinct terms, please describe the educational focus, school mission, and other essential characteristics of the proposed charter school in the space provided below.

Mission The mission of the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School (PVCS) is to provide Pennsylvania students with a world-class education, grounded in high academic standards, that will help them achieve their full intellectual and social potential.

Vision PVCS will leverage the power of the Internet to connect students, parents, and teachers to each other and to a world-class educational program. An Internet-based curriculum and sophisticated communication tools will help parents and teachers provide a rigorous, individualized, educational program. Students will also learn through the time-tested tools of education: books, workbooks, projects, and other activities. A parent or other responsible adult will conduct daily instruction with the support of a comprehensive curriculum, detailed instructional system, and an experienced teacher. The school will develop a new kind of educational community for students, teachers, and parents, where academic learning is available anytime and anywhere a student may be.

Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School Application

I. SCHOOL DESIGN

1. Mission Statement:

A. In succinct terms, describe the core philosophy or underlying purpose of the proposed school.

The mission of the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School (PVCS) is to provide Pennsylvania students with a world-class education, grounded in high academic standards, that will help them achieve their full intellectual and social potential.

The core philosophy of the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School is that all young people can achieve academic excellence if they are provided rigorous instruction, high standards, informed guidance, and individual attention. We use technology as a powerful tool that can support an effective education. Ultimately, however, we believe education is a human endeavor, and no machine can take the place of caring individuals, including involved parents, committed teachers, and fellow students engaged in the pursuit of learning. We believe our outstanding curriculum, innovative use of technology, and focus on individual attention can provide students with an education as good as that provided in America's best public and private schools.

Students will master the basics in all core subjects. We will build on basic skills and proficiencies to develop analytical and communications skills as well as a solid base of knowledge. An Internet-based curriculum and various communication tools will help teachers, parents, and other responsible adults provide a rigorous, individualized educational program. Students will also learn through the time-tested tools of education: books, workbooks, projects, and other activities. A parent or other responsible adult will conduct daily lessons with the support of a comprehensive curriculum, detailed instructional system, experienced teacher, and regular assessments. The program offers considerable flexibility for families and young learners, since the majority of the learning can take place virtually anytime and anywhere. The school will begin its first year with grades K-2, and will add grades to reach students in grades K-12 by the fourth year.

B. What is your overarching vision of the school?

We, the Founding Coalition, have both an internal and an external vision for the school.

Internally, Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School will serve students who are not currently receiving an education that meets their needs, challenges them sufficiently, or gives them the individual instruction they require. PVCS will leverage the power of the Internet to connect students, parents*, and teachers to each other and to a world-class educational program. The school will strive to develop a sense of community tied to the school's mission. Parents will be

* When discussing pedagogy, the terms parent and responsible adult are interchangeable in this document. Responsible adults might include grandparents or other relatives, for example. The setting for this instruction may include the home, a community center, or other small group setting.

strongly encouraged to sign a Student-Parent-School Compact that specifies their role in students' learning and in the daily operations of the school. This Compact will ensure that the parents and PVCS are in full agreement about the processes and responsibilities that will lead to high academic achievement and educational attainment for the students. A draft of the Student-Parent-School Compact is included in the Appendix.

Externally, we intend PVCS to serve as one example of how a school's teachers, parents, and students can reach their goal of achieving a quality education through the effective use of technology. In conception, design, and delivery, the school will be a model of innovation and educational excellence.

2. Goals and Objectives

A. What are the school's academic goals and objectives for student learning?

In building PVCS, we acknowledge that for a variety of reasons the traditional classroom setting may not be the best place for some children to learn. We hope to meet their needs by providing them with a rigorous curriculum that can be completed at home (or elsewhere, such as in small group settings). We intend to use the curriculum, technology, and service provided by PremierSchool because we believe its content-rich focus, educational expertise, and use of technology will provide a world-class educational opportunity for all of our students. Beginning in the primary grades, we will offer a comprehensive curriculum based on proven methods of instruction, rich and challenging content, and integrated assessments.

Primary Academic Goals:

- (1) Students will master a curriculum that meets or exceeds the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Content Standards.
- (2) Students will master language skills as a foundation for achievement.
- (3) Students will master mathematical skills as a foundation for achievement.
- (4) Students will develop a strong foundation of knowledge, facts, and skills across the core academic disciplines.
- (5) Students will develop critical reasoning and higher-order thinking skills.
- (6) Students will be prepared for the challenges and opportunities of higher education.
- (7) Students will acquire skills in both art and music as part of their aesthetic development.

Academic Goal 1

(1) Students will master a curriculum that meets or exceeds the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Content Standards.

Objectives

- Students will master a curriculum that pertains directly to Pennsylvania's Content Standards.
- Students in the program for at least two years will exceed the state average on the Stanford 9 Achievement Tests.
- Students will exceed the state average on all PSSA tests.
- Students will increase their PSSA scores over time at a faster rate than other students across the state, on average.

Academic Goal 2

(2) Students will master language skills as a foundation for achievement.

Objectives

- By second grade, students will demonstrate decoding skills when reading.
- By second grade, students will demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between phonemes and letter groups.
- By third grade, students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements of a narrative and be able to write a simple story.
- Students will grasp meaning, content, tone, and style from a variety of genres (i.e. fiction, poetry, essays, news articles).
- Students will practice and present dramatic readings.
- Students will gain an appreciation for great works of literature.
- For a variety of genres, students will master the skills of the writing process: researching, brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.
- Students will develop and use a variety of writing strategies appropriate for different audiences and purposes—persuasive, creative, descriptive, and research writing—by the end of 8th grade.
- Students will develop and use the conventions of successful composition: spelling, grammar, mechanics, and penmanship.
- Students will develop and use an advanced vocabulary.
- Students will develop and use advanced listening and speaking skills.
- On average, students will exceed the state average on verbal sections of the PSSA and SAT and the national average of the SAT-9.

Academic Goal 3

(3) Students will master mathematical skills and concepts as a foundation for achievement.

Objectives

- Students will understand and apply basic and advanced properties of numbers (ranging from the concept of whole numbers to the theorems of roots and exponents).
- Students will use basic and advanced procedures while performing computations (ranging from adding whole numbers to simplifying radical expressions).
- Students will understand and apply basic and advanced properties of the concept of measurement (ranging from determining length and width to the acceleration of the Space Shuttle).
- Students will understand and apply the basic and advanced properties of geometry, statistics, probability, and algebra.
- Students will apply mathematical skills to solve real-world problems.
- On average, students will exceed the state average on math sections of the PSSA and SAT and the national average of the SAT-9.

Academic Goal 4

(4) Students will develop a strong foundation of knowledge, facts, and skills across the core academic disciplines.

Objectives

- Students will develop a sophisticated understanding of History, Geography, Civics, Science, Art, Music, Economics, and other disciplines.
- Students will use this base of information to understand the important connections among these disciplines and their application in daily living.
- Students will draw on these interdisciplinary connections when faced with complex issues and problems, demonstrating an ability to approach them from multiple perspectives.

Academic Goal 5

(5) Students will develop critical reasoning and higher-order thinking skills.

Objectives

- Students will demonstrate the use of problem-solving and analytical techniques on open-ended questions by the 5th grade.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to recognize alternative positions and evaluate their validity by the 5th grade.
- Students will be able to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and apply their knowledge.

Academic Goal 6

(6) Students will prepare for a rigorous post-high school education.

Objectives

- At least 60 percent of graduating 12th graders will be eligible to enroll in a selective college.
- At least 90 percent of graduating 12th graders will be eligible to enroll in a two- or four-year college upon graduation.
- Students will know how to research and construct academic essays.

Academic Goal 7

(7) Students will acquire skills in both art and music as part of their aesthetic development.

Objectives

- Students will understand and implement artistic and musical techniques.
- Students will know and be able to speak intelligently about great works of art and music.
- Students will develop a sense of the history of art and music and how ideas, movements, and trends from one era inform another.

B. Describe any non-academic goals and objectives for student performance.

Our primary non-academic goal is to develop those qualities of mind and character that will help our students develop into active, thoughtful, and responsible citizens.

Our choice of materials and our approach are designed to communicate and build strong values that will serve our children well—solid and commonly shared values such as honesty, integrity, courage, discipline, compassion, respect for the experience and talents of others, and appreciation of the value of hard work. Through our curriculum and our approach, we will help

children learn to be organized, to set and meet personal goals, to write clearly and well, to distinguish right from wrong, to learn from others and for themselves, and to apply what they already know when solving new problems—all part of becoming a successful adult. While children are learning the basics of computation, decoding, and analysis, they will also be reading about epic struggles, wrestling with moral dilemmas, talking about virtues and vices, writing about character, courage, and justice, and learning about times when history was shaped by human frailty, moral surrender, and heroic sacrifices.

Non-Academic Goals:

- (1) Students will develop a sense of responsibility for the improvement of their school and local community—the basis of good citizenship.
- (2) Students will develop important personal traits such as honesty, courage, loyalty, personal responsibility, perseverance, respect, honesty, tolerance, and integrity.
- (3) Students will develop effective work habits and skills that will prepare them for challenges in school and the demands of society, business, government, and civic affairs.
- (4) Students will rise to meet high expectations of behavior and performance.
- (5) Students will learn habits of healthy living.

Non-Academic Goal 1

(1) Students will develop a sense of responsibility for the improvement of their school and local community—the basis of good citizenship.

Objectives

- Students will participate in school activities and events (whether electronically or physically in their communities), will exercise a voice in school affairs, and will work to improve the educational and social life of their school.
- Students will learn about the importance of community involvement as part of their educational experience.
- Students will learn about individuals who have contributed their talents and efforts to improve our country and our world.

Non-Academic Goal 2

(2) Students will develop important personal traits such as honesty, courage, loyalty, personal responsibility, perseverance, respect, tolerance, and integrity.

Objectives

- Students will take responsibility for their actions (in both words and deeds) and will be encouraged to learn from their failures.
- Students will demonstrate an ability to work in teams in various capacities and will work toward personal, team, and school goals in their academic and extracurricular activities.
- Students will understand and be able to explain the value of our country's vibrant diversity and common civic heritage – *e pluribus unum*.
- Students will demonstrate tolerance in school, community, and extracurricular activities and an appreciation of differences among individuals and groups.

Non-Academic Goal 3

(3) Students will develop effective work habits and skills that will prepare them for challenges in school and the demands of society, business, government, and civic affairs.

Objectives

- Students will develop an understanding of the dynamics and importance of entrepreneurship.
- Students will learn to work effectively with technology and understand its role and importance in our society and economy.
- Students will meet external and personal deadlines and will be able to work independently and be self-motivated.
- Students will learn to collaborate effectively with other students.
- Students will regularly create polished, final projects.
- Students will understand the dynamics of local, national, and international economics.

Non-Academic Goal 4

(4) Students will rise to meet high expectations of behavior and performance.

Objectives

- Students will respect their parents, teachers, and fellow students and abide by the school's guidelines and rules.
- Students will learn to interact maturely with peers and adults.
- Students will conduct themselves with integrity at all times.

Non-Academic Goal 5

(5) Students will learn habits of healthy living.

Objectives

- Students will attend to their social, emotional, and physical well-being.
- Students will learn to balance school responsibilities (on- and off-line) with the other demands of their lives (personal, family, social, communal, athletic, artistic).
- Students will engage in interpersonal discussions, social activities, and school events to enrich their academic work with real-world experiences.

3. Educational Program

A. Describe the educational program of the school, providing an overview of curriculum goals, objectives and content in all subject areas.

Our school's curriculum reflects an engaged, thoughtful respect for student learning and potential. To that end, our initial academic objective is to begin in the primary grades by building a *complete education foundation* (beginning with K-2) based on *proven methods* of instruction and rich, challenging content. These principles are described below in overview form. A more detailed version of our *Curriculum in Progress* can be found in the Appendix.

True to our mission and stated objectives, the educational program we will offer is rooted in developing reading, writing, mathematical, and critical thinking skills through content-rich

materials. The goals, objectives, and content in each subject area are discussed in detail in this document.

We believe that a complete education is built on not only a solid academic foundation but also an approach that emphasizes parental involvement and character development. With high academic standards, committed and engaged adults, and an emphasis on each child's moral development, we believe that all children can be given the tools to succeed and the motivation to reach their potential.

PVCS will continue to meet the standards and goals set forth by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, as they are adopted and/or amended.

A Complete Education Foundation

PremierSchool is developing a complete K-12 curriculum program that meets or exceeds the Pennsylvania Academic Standards in math and the subject-area standards considered the most ambitious in other states and nations. We will begin with K-2. This program includes:

- **Internal Assessments and Individualized Placement:** Internal assessments are built into the on-line components of the school's academic program. These assessments are an integral part of instruction, including initial placement assessments in reading and math to find the child's current level of competence. Regular reviews of material in skill areas act as assessments to guide selection of the next lessons. With this powerful technology, teachers will work with parents to develop regular and measurable academic goals. Regular assessment (integrated into the lessons) allows us to monitor and foster each child's progress.
- **Mathematics:** Through daily practice, review, and application, we build a solid early foundation in both facts and concepts, based on improvements to existing math programs (e.g., Sadlier's *Progress in Mathematics*). Mathematics will come to be understood not only as a useful tool for application in other fields such as science and economics but also as a means for looking at and understanding the world. Students will develop a high degree of mathematical literacy.
- **Language Arts:** The reading, writing, and speaking program, developed and reviewed by nationally renowned experts, stresses early mastery of decoding skills through a systematic, phonics-based curriculum, complemented by a generous exposure to stories, myths, fables, and poems from many cultures, many of which communicate models of exemplary virtues. The program places a strong emphasis on the basic building blocks of good communication through writing, spelling, grammar, and composition. Recognizing the primacy of language skills in the early grades, the program places great emphasis on the skills, rewards, and joys of reading and writing and on the importance of great literature.
- **History, Geography, and Civics:** Beginning in the primary grades, PremierSchool offers a chronological study of History, complemented by integrated lessons in Geography and Civics. This approach is designed to provide students with a coherent and connected

sense of the past and our relation to it. A primary goal of this approach is the development of critical and analytical reading, writing, and thinking skills.

- **Science:** PremierSchool's science program (which is being reviewed by Roslyn Yalow, a Nobel laureate) balances hands-on investigation and experimentation with a systematic approach to key scientific concepts. Based upon the classroom-tested *Quest in Science* program, our science curriculum for grades K-2 integrates Physical Science, Life Sciences, Earth Sciences, and investigations and experimentation each year. Students in these grades are introduced to critical and creative thinking through the lens of the scientific method.
- **The Visual Arts:** The visual arts program offers enriching lessons that focus on doing, looking, and knowing. Doing: Students draw, paint, glue, build, mold with clay, and more to develop artistic technique (and fine motor skills) and, at times, for the sheer joy of it. Looking: Students spend time learning to look at and talk about works of art. Students learn to recognize artistic techniques and elements of design, express informed opinions about specific pieces, and develop an appreciation for great works of art. Knowing: Students are introduced to the biographies and styles of great artists as well as their place within the history of art.
- **Music:** The music program provides a comprehensive array of activities for musical enjoyment and enrichment, with an emphasis on singing traditional songs from various cultures, learning basic elements of music, and becoming familiar with great works and composers.
- **Health, Safety, and Physical Education:** A daily physical education program is designed to ensure that our students develop the coordination, motor skills, and overall fitness necessary to lead healthy and active lives. The school administration will develop a versatile physical education program that offers a variety of options. Instructions about this program will be posted on the school's website. Similarly, Health and Safety classes will be offered in the appropriate grades, with oversight by the teachers and school administration. These Physical Education and Health courses will have lesson plans that can be downloaded from the school website and tracked by parents and teachers. Physical fitness is a priority for us. We seek to ensure that children in our school develop physically, emotionally, and intellectually. We believe in the motto, "Sound body, sound mind."
- **Other Subjects:** Other subjects (such as the Environment and Ecology) will also be offered by the school, reflecting the guidelines of the Pennsylvania State Standards.

Each enrolled student will be loaned a computer system (including computer, printer, software, and ISP connection) and various instructional materials (including books, workbooks, science lab equipment, etc.) from the school to support the learning process. These computer systems and printed materials are school property and must be returned to the school when the student leaves the school. The school will provide or arrange for technical support and troubleshooting for these systems. Computer systems will be upgraded and replaced as needed.

Proven Methods

We use methods and curricula that are time-tested, coherent, and backed by research: phonics for reading, basic math facts early, plenty of “read aloud” and written work for younger children, and use of materials and stories that emphasize solid values. We also embrace promising new approaches (for example, collaborative learning projects where they make sense), and we emphasize using media in innovative ways. Our approach fuses tried-and-true lessons with a technologically innovative delivery system.

PremierSchool’s curriculum is being developed and reviewed by recognized leaders in their fields. For example, Louisa Moats, a noted author and researcher with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, is advising on our reading program; Nobel Prize Laureate Roslyn Yalow is providing her insights into our science curriculum; David Gelernter, professor of Computer Science at Yale University, is helping to develop our technology architecture; and, Susan Wise Bauer, noted author and teacher at the College of William and Mary, is creating original lessons in History, Civics, and Geography. Overseeing the development of all PremierSchool curricula is John Holdren, former Vice President and Director of Research and Publications at the Core Knowledge Foundation, and a co-editor of the Core Knowledge Series (*What Your First [Second, etc.] Grader Needs to Know*).

Parental involvement is another great proven method that informs our program. In *The Educated Child*, William J. Bennett, Chester E. Finn, Jr., and John T. Cribb, Jr. show that when parents become active and informed partners in their child’s education, test scores rise, drop-out rates and apathy fall, and the active pursuit of knowledge becomes a compelling focus for each family. These findings are at the core of our program.

The PremierSchool curriculum is standards-based. PVCS’s standards and assessment system adapts, where necessary, to meet Pennsylvania’s standards. We are committed to helping all of our students rise to meet the high expectations of both the PremierSchool program and the state standards.

B. What teaching methods will be used? How will this pedagogy enhance student learning?

Teaching in PVCS is, in some ways, a new model. Parents work directly with students on a daily basis following PremierSchool’s curriculum. Lessons and assessments occur both on-line and off-line. Experienced teachers oversee and evaluate progress, provide additional instruction, and assist in the accountability process.

Our students get in touch with each other, their teachers, and the school primarily through the Internet. We envision a powerful partnership between teachers and parents, combining forces to ensure that children receive individual attention and achieve academic excellence.

Our “team teaching” model places an experienced, knowledgeable teacher as team head with the parent as team member. Certified teachers are charged with overseeing content coverage and ensuring proper delivery of the instructional system. Teachers and curriculum experts assist both responsible adults and students with curriculum questions. Additional responsibilities of teachers

and curriculum experts include providing instructional assistance and answering specific questions about a variety of teaching strategies. Teachers are available by phone, e-mail, and for occasional site visits to ensure that each child is progressing towards his or her individual goals.

Parents conduct the daily lessons and help ensure that their children are learning. Parents also communicate regularly with teachers, help students maintain portfolios and manage their time, and keep daily attendance logs of student work.

Though our delivery of material is unique, our approach to pedagogy is not. To accommodate the diverse learning styles of children, we employ a variety of teaching strategies in our program, including direct instruction, hands-on exploration, use of manipulatives and games, and practice exercises. Additional instructional materials include workbooks, textbooks, science lab materials, and more.

The computer-based curriculum delivery system was designed for personalized instruction, so there will be limits on how many children an individual responsible adult can work with on a daily basis. The maximum student/teacher ratio is 50:1. The student to responsible adult ratio should not exceed 6:1, and in most cases will be 2:1 or 1:1.

The school's curriculum was designed with the needs of the student, teacher, and responsible adult/parent in mind. The program includes detailed instructional guides, multiple strategies to help students master the material, creative ideas about presentation, and access to trained experts who can answer questions. Instructions are designed to help the parent or responsible adult guide students through each lesson. Because students learn at their own pace, curricular individualization helps avoid the pacing problems many students face in a traditional classroom. Students who are excelling can progress ahead to the next lessons and units or drill deeper to explore topics in greater depth. Students who are struggling receive extra help from teachers and alternative lessons.

By setting goals, grading assignments, giving responsible adults support and advice, and drawing on their years of experience and training, teachers make sure that no child falls through the cracks. Our "team teaching" approach, built-in assessments and teaching tools, and comprehensive learning system will provide our parents and teachers with the support they need to deliver a world-class education. With PremierSchool's ongoing lesson and unit assessments, teachers will know more about each student's progress than they could in most regular classrooms.

A description of a "Day in the Life of a VCS Family," including a snapshot of a typical math lesson, is included in the Appendix, along with a description of a "Day in the Life of a VCS Teacher."

C. Attach the school calendar and identify hours of the school operation.

The 1994 paper, "Prisoners of Time" (prepared by the National Education Commission on Time and Learning), described the limitations of the traditional six-hour day and 180-day year. In one

of their more pointed passages, the authors note that "by relying on time as the metric for school organization and curriculum, we have built a learning enterprise on a foundation of sand."

By using Internet-based instruction, we believe we can create a 21st century school calendar. Students who master lessons ahead of schedule can progress seamlessly into the next grade level. Students who struggle with the curriculum can continue working on lessons at night or on weekends, if necessary, and receive extra help from certified teachers and alternate lessons.

The traditional school day (from morning to early afternoon) and school calendar (based on an agrarian model) are based upon assumptions about work schedules that do not apply to all families. Thus, we believe the flexible schedule made possible by on-line education will prove to be a great advantage to many students and families.

The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School will offer the equivalent of at least 900 hours of instruction time per year in the elementary grades and at least 990 hours of instructional time per year in the secondary grades or a minimum of 180 days, as required by the charter law. However, courses in the early grades will not be conducted synchronously. The parent will log onto the system and work with the child on assignments. Teachers will supply direction and support.

The school calendar is attached in the Appendix. The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School intends to open in the 2001-02 school year with grades K-2, followed by grades K-5 in 2002-03, K-8 in 2003-04, and K-12 in 2004-05 and beyond.

D. Describe how your school will accommodate students with special needs.

Students with disabilities will be served according to federal, state, and local laws regarding special education, including but not limited to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and other applicable legislation. The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School, as a public charter school, is open to *all* students. As such, it has a non-discriminatory policy regarding admissions (i.e., children with and without disabilities will be admitted to the school on the same basis). PVCS will provide a free, appropriate public education to all of its students.

Students with disabilities will be served in accordance with their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The school will create an IEP Team with all the necessary participants as required by IDEA, including the student's parent (or legal guardian), the regular education teacher, related service professionals and/or providers (speech language pathologist, physical therapist, social worker, psychologist), the special education teacher, and an administrator of the school. IEP meetings conducted by the IEP Team to review, modify, and implement a student's IEP will include the participation of the child's parent and child when appropriate. Parents will be expected to participate fully in all aspects of the IEP process including the identification, evaluation, eligibility and IEP planning for their child. Progress reporting for children with disabilities will be conducted on the same basis as for non-disabled students, and the school will develop a plan for participation of special education students in statewide assessments. Parents will be informed of their due process rights and responsibilities in writing and the school will

supply written notification of any special education meeting concerning their child. The school will secure the informed consent from parents before special education evaluations are conducted and all aspects of the IEP process will remain confidential as required by IDEA and FERPA.

While PVCS hopes to be able to serve all students well, in the event that a student has severe disabilities which cannot be addressed appropriately by the school, school staff will be responsible for contracting with the Intermediate Unit (IU), the district, a nonprofit organization, or a private provider to ensure that the physical, psychological, social, and educational needs are met for students with disabilities.

PVCS will establish a written pre-referral process to ensure that all children with disabilities who are enrolled in the charter school, and who may be in need of special education and related services, are identified, evaluated, and supported. This will include public awareness activities to educate parents about the school's special education programs and services, as well as the implementation of learning and behavior interventions and strategies to help our staff and teachers identify and serve the needs of all of our students.

While technology is not an appropriate vehicle for educating students with all kinds of disabilities, it can be a powerful tool in providing individualized, self-paced learning in a flexible and stress-free environment for many students with disabilities.

4. School Accountability

The School:

A. What methods of self-assessment or evaluation will be used to ensure that the school is meeting its stated mission and objectives?

Our school requires a particular accountability design, in order to ensure that all of the components are working, though they are distributed geographically throughout the state. For example, teachers must be hired based on their ability to work productively with minimal supervision, and they must be trained well on how to use the materials and to work with students from a distance in order to make the school function effectively. PVCS has been designed with all of the elements necessary to create an efficient and effective virtual school. PVCS will also build in a continuous improvement model, working to ensure a cohesive school culture by focusing every member of the school community on regular and open communication, and on continually providing feedback that can strengthen student learning and school administration.

Though success in this endeavor is predicated upon close cooperation among students, parents, teachers, administrators, support staff, community members, business partners, committee members, and others, ultimately, it is the Board of Trustees that is accountable for ensuring that the school is meeting its stated mission and objectives consistent with the terms of the school's charter. School policies and structure reflect this reality. To ensure success, the Board of Trustees:

- Analyzes PSSA results annually (for the appropriate grade levels) and includes a written analysis of its findings in the annual report. Additionally, the Board analyzes internal

testing reports on a grade-level basis at the end of each semester. (The Chief Administrative Officer [CAO] will be responsible for mid-course corrections between these Board reviews.)

- Analyzes SAT-9 results and includes a written analysis of its findings in the annual report.
- Creates a Community and Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) which will be responsible for developing the parent and student sections of the annual survey, compiling the results, and making a presentation of findings and suggestions to the Board of Trustees. Areas to be covered in this annual survey include but are not limited to:
 - PSSA and other standardized test results;
 - Parent and student reviews of teacher and administrative performance;
 - Parent and student reviews of the academic program;
 - Parent and student reviews of the state of technology in the school.
- After our first year, the Board of Trustees will invite an external evaluation team to evaluate the school's academic program as part of its accreditation process. The school will seek and maintain formal accreditation.
- The Board of Trustees will review all contracts and partnerships on an annual basis to ensure that the terms of the agreements are being upheld.
- The Board of Trustees meets at least quarterly to make decisions required to keep the school working effectively and efficiently. Decisions will be made on a host of issues by the Board and its committees, including personnel, testing, and grievances. For more details on the Board's responsibilities, see the draft By-Laws provided in the Appendix.

In addition to the Board responsibilities above, the school will employ additional mechanisms for the purposes of self-assessment and evaluation to ensure that it is meeting its objectives:

- Detailed accountability and assessment systems are designed into the program. On-line and off-line assessments are designed to evaluate student comprehension of each lesson and unit. Data from our regular testing program is available immediately to students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Results from external standardized testing will of course be an integral aspect of the school's accountability procedures.
- The school will employ an innovative student information system that empowers students, teachers, parents, and school officials with information to track student progress. This system provides real-time information on student progress through the school's lessons, units, and assessments. Combined with regular assessments, this student information system will ensure that there are no surprises about student work. The system will also give all members of our school community the opportunity to provide feedback on the lessons, curriculum, on-line system, school functions, and more.

B. How will teachers and administrators be evaluated? Describe your standards for teacher and staff performance.

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

The Board of Trustees directly evaluates the CAO of the school. The Board includes specific responsibilities and goals for the CAO in his/her contract. Benchmarks for measurement are agreed to by both parties. By the end of November, the Board presents the CAO with a short performance review that includes highlighted concerns. The Board will determine the employment status of the CAO for the upcoming school year by the end of March. The Board completes an end-of-year performance review before the end of June.

Faculty and Staff

The CAO of the school completes written performance reviews of every faculty and staff member. These evaluations are based primarily upon students' learning gains but also upon observations, parent and student feedback, a peer evaluation, a self-evaluation, and highlights of successes and professional development achievements. Any staff or faculty member who is not, in the eyes of the CAO, fulfilling or supporting the school's mission and objectives will be notified in writing, with remediation plans included. Faculty and staff will be notified of their employment status for the following year by April 15.

Formally, performance will be evaluated using standardized formats that will objectively measure compliance in areas that will include: student learning gains (first and foremost); policies and procedures; confidentiality; reliability regarding attendance and punctuality; initiative; work habits; working relationships with co-workers; use of supervision; time management; professional growth and development; communication skills; quality, quantity, and completeness of work; and performance of job duties as itemized in the employee's job description or work plan. A set of instruments covering these areas will be developed or selected by the Board prior to the beginning of the School Year.

In addition to evaluation of past performance, this process will identify goals for the following year that will provide guidance to the staff member and set continuing expectations for improved performance.

It is the school's belief that a good teacher:

- Loves the subject to be taught and is proficient in it.
- Accepts responsibility.
- Works with colleagues to help the school meet its stated mission and objectives.
- Maintains professional conduct at all times with students, colleagues, and parents.
- Supports the intellectual, physical, social, and moral development of each student.
- Demonstrates sensitivity to the individual needs of students.
- Responds to parents, students, administrators, and colleagues in a professional and punctual manner.
- Embraces different cultures and backgrounds and is sensitive to these differences.
- Enriches his/her intellectual and professional development through reading, courses, conferences, workshops, and seminars.
- Sets high standards and expectations and applies them fairly and appropriately.

- Utilizes new technologies to improve teaching skills.
- Proactively solves problems.
- Serves as a role model for students.
- Has excellent communication skills.
- Breaks geographic and technological barriers to get to know students and families well.
- Has a sense of humor.

C. How do you plan to hold your school accountable to the parents of the children attending your school?

As a charter school, PVCS is a school of choice. As such it must be responsive to its core constituency, its students and parents. We begin with the recognition that if we are not true to the desires and needs of our students and parents, we will not succeed. This school therefore aims to be both customer-oriented and community-oriented, listening to and anticipating the needs of our families and binding them together toward common ends.

A Community and Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) will consist of parents who will meet regularly with the CAO to discuss their recommendations for what could be changed in the school, and what might be done by the parents to improve it.

Parents will be active members of the Board of Trustees, CPAC, and other Board-appointed committees. Parents will also be asked to fill out an annual survey and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

Parents will have special chat and communication areas on the school's website that will be used to communicate regularly with the administration and teachers. The student information system is designed so that a parent can access (password-protected) reports on their child's progress. In addition, the system gives parents, students, teachers, and administrators the opportunity to provide continual feedback on-line about any and all aspects of the school. This feedback will be reviewed regularly and, when appropriate, integrated into the school's program.

Finally, because parents (and other responsible adults) are integrally involved in educating their children as part of our school model, the parents have a great deal of power over how their children's experiences are shaped by the school.

D. Discuss your plan for regular review of school budgets and financial records.

Financial accounts will be reviewed by the Treasurer of the Board of Trustees on a monthly basis and reported to the Trustees at their regular meetings. The Board's Treasurer will be responsible for overseeing the financial accounts.

PVCS will employ the services of a certified public accountant to review the design of the school's bookkeeping system. This system will track revenues, expenditures, receivables, and payables, and make comparisons to the projected budget in accordance with the provisions of Section 437 of the Public School Code. A certified accountant will audit the school financial records on a yearly basis and report to the Trustees, Pennsylvania Department of Education, and

Norristown Area School District, as required. The CAO will be responsible for maintaining the accuracy and reporting of all school budgets and financial records.

E. Describe your system for maintaining school records and disseminating information required under the law.

The CAO will have the primary responsibility for the compilation and maintenance of, designation of access to, and security of pupil records. The staff will compile records mandated by the Commonwealth or federal government. Under the direction of school policy, teachers will decide what information should be collected and maintained as part of students' school records. Any records kept or transmitted electronically will be subject to high standards of electronic security. The security system will be state-of-the-art (e.g., it will employ electronic firewalls and encryption systems) and will be monitored and tested regularly to ensure its stability and integrity.

Parents and legal guardians have the right to view all of their child's records unless the school has been provided with evidence that there is a state law or court order, or other legally binding instrument that states otherwise.

Teachers, parents, and eligible students will be notified of the policies and procedures of the school regarding student records, the conditions for disclosure of information, access to the records, and notice of where they may be obtained. School policy pertaining to records will be included on the school's website and in its School Handbook.

Teachers, parents, and eligible students who wish to file complaints regarding compliance with student records policies may do so by contacting the CAO. If further appeal is necessary, they may contact the Board of Trustees.

Information that has been collected will only be used for the normal operation of the school. If data are collected for non-school purposes, it will be done on a voluntary basis with the consent of the student and parents. Prior consent of the student and parents/legal guardians must be obtained before collecting information. Special Education documents are filed in a separate storage area of the office.

The records will be classified into three groups:

Category A: The minimum personal data necessary for operation of the educational system. Category A information will be maintained for 100 years.

1. Legal name, birth date, address, telephone number, sex, name of parent or guardian, attendance data such as year attended, days attended, days absent, school attended, and placement within the school in terms of the student's year in school.
2. Grades and credits earned in subject areas, or other report cards.
3. Scores earned on standardized achievement tests.
4. Listing of awards, honors, and extracurricular activities.
5. Date of graduation.

Category B: Verified information of clear importance, but not absolutely necessary to the school in helping the child or in protecting others such as: scores on standardized tests, aptitude tests and interest inventories, and systematic teacher rating. Parents should be periodically informed of the contents of these records and of their right of access to the contents. Category B data will be destroyed, or maintained only under conditions of anonymity, when the students leave the school.

Included in this category are:

1. Scores of group or individual standardized tests.
2. Aptitude test scores.
3. Interest inventory scores.
4. Reports from specialists such as speech therapists and school psychologists.
5. Systematically gathered teacher or counselor ratings and observations.
6. Health and dental records.

Category C: Potentially useful information but not yet verified or clearly needed beyond the immediate present such as legal or clinical findings including personality test results, and unevaluated reports of teachers, counselors, and others that may be needed in ongoing investigations and disciplinary or counseling actions. This category will contain material, which cannot be classified as either Category A or Category B, such as case referrals and related confidential correspondence. Unsolicited or solicited reports from other agencies or individuals are sometimes received, and should be maintained here. School personnel who can use this information to improve educational planning and programs should be informed of it as it applies to the current situation. This data will be destroyed as soon as its usefulness is ended, unless it is reasonable to transfer it to Category B.

In addition, professionals working in the school may maintain personal confidential files containing notes, transcripts of interviews, clinical diagnosis, and other memory aids for their own use in working with pupils.

Attendance records, such as excuses for absence and letters of notification on disciplinary actions, are not classified as any of the foregoing categories. These are maintained separately.

All student records will be kept in one locked, fire-proof location, a key to which will remain in the possession of the CAO.

Dissemination:

The parents of the student may have a copy of records upon request. Authorized school personnel may disclose personally identifiable information from the education records of a student without the written consent of the parent of the student or eligible student if the disclosure is to other school officials, to another school, to state and local officials, or to comply with a judicial order or subpoena.

Authorized school personnel may disclose information to other agencies and institutions upon the parents' written request. School personnel may not divulge, in any form, to any persons other than those above, any information contained in the school records without the expressed consent of the CAO.

A parent or guardian may have access to the pupil's Category A, B, and C records. The school may also disseminate information to comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena, provided that the school makes a reasonable effort to notify the parent of the student or the student of the order or subpoena in advance of compliance.

The school may disclose personally identifiable information from the education records of a student to appropriate parties in connection with an emergency if the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals. Upon request, an attempt will be made to comply with an advance notice of one (1) day. However, when the process requires additional time or the request cannot be fulfilled in that time span, the parent will be notified of what is administratively feasible.

Substitutes, student teachers, and professional interns should be familiar with the records policy and need for confidentiality and may read only records of students with whom they are working.

Staff should be familiar with and periodically review the Department of Education Records Policy and the policies of the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School.

The school or any school personnel may not divulge, in any form, to any persons other than those listed above, any information contained in school records. The school will maintain a record of requests and disclosures of information from the student's education records to all parties who have obtained access to the student's records with the exception of parents, students, and other school officials who have legitimate education interests. This record, which indicates the legitimate interest the parties have in obtaining information from the student's record, may be inspected by the parent of the student or eligible student.

Request to Amend Education Records:

The parent of a student or an eligible student who believes that information contained in the education records of the student is inaccurate or misleading or violates the privacy or other rights of the student may request that the information be amended. Authorized school personnel shall decide whether to amend the education records of the student in accordance with the request within four weeks of time of receiving the request.

If the school personnel decide not to amend the education records in accordance with the request, the school shall inform the parents or the student of their right to a hearing.

Student Evaluation:

A. Describe plans to evaluate student performance.

The Board of Trustees will develop student performance guidelines for each grade level—in conjunction with the performance guidelines already built into the student learning system—that ensure that the school's high goals for student performance meet or exceed the Pennsylvania

State Standards. In our school, students will not progress to more challenging material until they have achieved a level of mastery of current material. If a student does not pass a unit, he/she is directed back to ensure the gaps are addressed. We provide extra help and teacher support to ensure that every child can succeed. PremierSchool's student learning system allows for varying growth rates in each subject area. Measuring student performance will have both quantitative and qualitative dimensions.

Quantitative Evaluation

Student achievement is the ultimate measure of a school's success, and we plan to assess the success of our program quantitatively in two ways. First, a unique component of our on-line curriculum model is its ability to generate detailed and ongoing data on academic achievement. Work completed off-line will be entered into the system with easy-to-use forms.

PremierSchool's secure database (built with "firewall" systems) can provide parents, teachers, and students with information on individual performance, and the CAO with a steady stream of data about school-, grade-, and student-level performance. This powerful database enables us to customize each student's academic program, a capability that will be most fully exploited in the key areas of math and reading. In all subject areas, however, student achievement will be assessed through curriculum-embedded lesson assessments, unit tests, and semester tests. Data from all assessments will be collected in the database and regularly analyzed and reported to students, parents, teachers, and school staff. Our system is designed so that a student who is not mastering Math or Language Arts lessons will be redirected back to alternate lessons on the same topic. Only after demonstrating mastery of a unit will a student be able to proceed to more advanced units.

Second, participation in the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) will yield data on individual strengths and weaknesses relative to the state standards. These data, collected longitudinally, will enable us to examine patterns of improvement or decline across two or more years.

Students in grades two through eight will take the verbal ability and math sections of the Stanford 9 exam, except in years when they will take the PSSA. (There will be age-appropriate assessments for students in grades K-1.) Students in secondary school will take either the PSAT or SAT annually. Results from these tests will be used as an external measure of student progress and will be studied longitudinally to ensure progress.

Qualitative Evaluation

Each student will keep a portfolio of work that will be evaluated according to scoring rubrics by both responsible adults and teachers. A formal letter-grade system (A to F) will be used beginning in the fifth grade. Each semester, students will be assigned a report card, reflecting their completed work, their progress towards stated goals, and results from all quantitative assessments. Both quantitative and qualitative information will be considered in assigning grades and recommending promotion for individual students. (Note: The grading policies must first be approved by the Board.)

The Board will consider hiring an outside evaluator to provide feedback on the school's progress toward fully implementing our mission and goals. Candidates for conducting the evaluation may be drawn from education or technology departments at universities or independent evaluation companies.

B. How will student development towards the school's overall learning goals and objectives be measured?

Standards form the basis for almost every facet of the instructional design and assessment of the program. The school has its own standards and assessments, which meet or exceed those of Pennsylvania. Our school intends to be true to both sets of standards and assessments—and to integrate them in a coherent array of content, lessons, units, tests, and performance-based accountability.

Measurement of student development towards the school's goals will occur through several linked approaches:

- Our curriculum and technology allow us to measure regularly each student's development towards the school's overall learning goals and objectives. These data will be used to help refine individual achievement goals among parents, teachers, and students.
- Test data from the PSSA will be used to help us understand how well each of our students is progressing individually, and how he/she compares with peers across the state. Data from the PSSA will be considered in the process of setting each student's individual academic goals.
- Teachers and parents will evaluate each student's portfolio on a regular basis and will produce reports on particular strengths and weaknesses. Placing this information in context with quantitative data is the basis of both goal setting and semester report cards. Inclusion of qualitative information will enrich our understanding of and ability to report on student progress. The school administration will develop and oversee a school grading policy that uses descriptive remarks in grades K-4 and letter grades (A-F) in grades 5-12.

C. Describe how student evaluation will be used to improve student achievement and attain the stated learning objectives.

The types of evaluation tools we will use are described in the two sections above. Student evaluation will be used to improve student achievement in three distinct ways. First, the results of daily assessments will be stored in the student information system. Teachers will study these in detail and report to parents (or responsible adults) strategies for helping students meet the stated learning goals. The constant flow of data helps our teachers identify and address any areas of weakness. Next, portfolio work will be assessed regularly by teachers (often using rubrics) and the results of these evaluations will be built into setting clear, student goals. Finally, standardized test results are used as an annual benchmark whereby we look to identify increasing, decreasing, or stable testing trends. We use standardized tests as a measure of both

student growth and an evaluation tool of how effective the teachers and staff have been in helping each student learn.

5. School Community

A. Describe the relationship of your school to the surrounding community, and vice versa.

PVCS will have its home base in Norristown. It was founded by a coalition of local, regional, and national educators, parents, community members, and business leaders committed to improving the educational opportunities available to all students. Our school has the local support of members of community organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce. The community surrounding our school includes a physical and virtual network of teachers, parents, and students, and expands from there effortlessly through the World Wide Web.

B. Describe the nature and extent of parent involvement in the school's mission.

Many schools speak of their policy of viewing parents as partners. In our school, this is far more than a motto. Parental involvement is at the core of the school. Though officially we enroll only students, ours is in many cases a family commitment. Having agreed that our mission and objectives meet the needs of their family, and that they understand and are ready to accept the commitment articulated in the application process, we begin integrating parents and students into our school immediately. Parents serve on our Board of Trustees and every school committee. So they will be able to help their child meet our mission, parents are offered training in the use of our technology as well as in the pedagogy of the program. Our on-line curriculum provides parents with clear directions for teaching their children and suggests various strategies for success. Parents also will help assess students. They monitor and keep records of progress and attendance. They will help us to evaluate the school's program each year and serve as mentors to new families. Direct parental involvement helps the school fulfill its mission.

Our school—particularly its teachers, administration, and curriculum—is designed to support parents in achieving their academic and social goals for their children. As parents gain knowledge and confidence, they add their own personality, creativity, and experience to the education of their own children and to the community at large. The school grows and is enriched by parent contributions.

Because parents will have a wide range of skills and talents to offer the school, we are building a robust communication component in our system. Artistic parents can help build a virtual museum of children's work. Musical parents can help create and store concerts of children's performances. By providing the tools and empowering parents, we hope to allow our school to develop its own identity and culture.

Parental involvement at PVCS is enhanced by the fact that the school will be educating its parents as well, by training them on our instructional system and teaching them how to be effective instructional coaches and partners, under the guidance of qualified teachers:

In building our community, PVCS offers an extensive network of communication tools that connect parents and children to the school and to each other. The school will communicate daily with parents and children, knitting the community together with bulletins, shared experiences, school events (live or on-line), and personal stories. Teachers initiate conversations with parents about their child's progress and the parents' needs and concerns.

We expect parents to be proactive: to contact teachers, specialists, and other parents to solve problems, give feedback, or pass on ideas and insights to the community. We will also have bulletin boards, special interest discussion groups, and on-line publishing features to facilitate this process.

Suggested field trips, social events, and groups that parents initiate are all part of the experience. The power of the network allows us to organize and publicize these events effectively. Parents tell us about their interests and, in response, we can tailor our special events to their preferences.

In cases where tutors or other responsible adults are guiding students through the instructional system, learning can take place in small group settings or community centers where students have the benefit not only of the learning system, a teacher, and their responsible adult or tutor, but also of interaction with fellow students. In these cases, parents can also contribute to the school's mission by actively supporting their child's learning, maintaining open lines of communication with the tutors, and involving themselves in the affairs of the school through committees, volunteer work, or special events.

C. Describe procedures established to review complaints of parents regarding operation of the charter school.

We distinguish between personnel-related and non-personnel-related complaints as follows:

Parent complaints and concerns regarding personnel:

In minor cases, we ask parents to find a way to speak constructively with the person involved and try to resolve the matter. If this proves ineffectual, or if the parent is truly not comfortable speaking with the staff member, he or she should speak with the CAO. If this proves ineffectual, the concern or complaint should be made known to either the President of the Board of Trustees or to the designated parent representative on the Board. A standing item on the agenda of regular Board meetings is reserved for fielding and responding to parent complaints. Soon after the meeting, either in writing or by telephone, the parent is notified of any Board actions. The President of the Board is permitted in the By-Laws to convene an ad-hoc Board meeting to address a question that warrants immediate attention.

Parent complaints and concerns regarding non-personnel issues:

The parent speaks with or writes to the person most likely to be able to provide a solution and expresses the complaint or concern. If the matter is not resolved to the parent's satisfaction, it should be referred first to the CAO, and then to either the President of the Board of Trustees or the designated parent representative on the Board. As above, complaints will be fielded during regular Board meetings. Soon after the meeting, either in writing or by telephone, the parent is

notified of any Board actions. The Community/Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) will also convey parents' general concerns to the Board and to the CAO in an efficient manner.

Information on ways to register complaints will be included in the School Handbook.

6. Extra-curricular Activities

A. Describe the program of extra-curricular activities planned for the charter school.

Because we are not a physical school, we will not offer a full array of extra-curricular offerings. We will, however, create message boards on our website where we will post recommended, age-appropriate activities, identify interesting places for field trips, facilitate events and gatherings, and list suggestions from other parents about what is enriching their children's lives. We believe that children have a lot to learn and gain from involvement in theatrical and musical productions, athletics, clubs, and other events and activities. Thus, the school administration will work to negotiate agreements with school districts and community organizations statewide to allow our students to participate in extracurricular programs where they reside.

Parents will be encouraged to take advantage of the partnerships we are developing with museums, cultural institutions, universities, and parks across the Commonwealth by gathering their children together to go on field trips related to what they are learning in school. The school's website will have several opportunities listed for full- or half-day trips to sites all across the state. Students and parents will be encouraged to take advantage of them frequently. In addition, the school will offer on-line messages from high-profile speakers and on-line lectures and discussion groups hosted by experts (e.g., a paleontology professor or business leader).

B. Describe whether any agreements have been entered into or plans developed with the local school district regarding participation of the charter school students in extracurricular activities within the school district.

No agreements have currently been reached with regard to the enrollment of PVCS students in extracurricular activities within their sending school district. Because we intend to enroll students from all over the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, it was seen as premature to begin making arrangements with districts which may or may not be contributing students to the school. Upon announcement of lottery winners for the 2001-02 school year, PVCS staff will begin to notify the sending districts about the student's new school, and to notify families about whom to contact in their local district for extracurricular options. PVCS staff will work hard to help families make connections that allow their children to participate in local athletic, artistic, and other programs.

II: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

1. Statement of Need:

A. Why is there a need for this type of school?

There is a need for an academically oriented virtual charter school among students for whom a regular school setting is not optimal. Thus, for many children who are not getting as much out of school as they could or should be—whether they be struggling, in the middle, or excelling—Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School will provide them with a content-rich, technologically innovative, individualized school program that can help them achieve their full academic and social potential. There are numerous reasons why such a nontraditional school model might be desirable for some children:

- Some children are struggling academically and, for whatever reason(s), have trouble thriving in traditional school settings.
- Some children have special needs or physical limitations (e.g., homebound children) that prevent them from being able to attend a traditional school without considerable difficulty.
- Some children attend schools in which they feel unsafe or are exposed to drugs, or are in over-crowded classes, that make it difficult for them to concentrate on their studies, enjoy the learning process, and fulfill their potential.
- Some children get lost in the shuffle of large class sizes and would benefit from a learning system that tracks their progress more closely and provides them with individualized attention.
- Some children are academically gifted and have the ability to progress through the curriculum quickly and/or explore some topics in great depth, as long as there is compelling and interesting material at their fingertips.
- Some children need more time to move through lessons and would benefit from a flexible learning schedule and an adaptive learning system.
- Some children have left the school system or are considering home schooling but might remain in or return to the public school system (in this virtual charter school) if offered the support of a content-rich curriculum, adaptive lessons, and certified teachers.
- Some older students are engaged in other productive endeavors (the arts, full-time athletics, community service, or employment while they seek their GED) that make it difficult for them to attend class during regular school hours.
- Some children are self-directed learners and would thrive in a setting that allows them to work on learning activities in partnership with a parent (or responsible adult) and teachers.
- Some children are stimulated by the educational richness of multimedia applications and are able to assimilate more information when engaged in this type of learning.
- Some children move frequently due to changing family circumstances, which disrupts the continuity of their learning.

We believe parents will be interested by a school that offers a rich curriculum, flexibility, direct involvement with their child's learning, public accountability, the excitement of engaging their

children's minds with innovative technologies, and the stamp of approval that accompanies a public charter school in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

B. Explain why the charter school model is an appropriate vehicle to address this need.

The Pennsylvania charter law intends to empower people to “establish and maintain schools that operate independently from the existing school district structure, as a method to accomplish all of the following:

- (1) improve pupil learning;
- (2) increase learning opportunities;
- (3) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- (4) create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site;
- (5) provide parents and pupils with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system; and
- (6) hold the schools established under [the] act accountable for meeting measurable academic standards and provide the school with a method to establish accountability systems.”

Our school directly addresses all six of these worthy goals. PVCS will give parents and school staff four important tools with which to build a strong educational program for children under their care: *freedom* to do things differently when existing programs are not working optimally, the opportunity and space to develop and promote *innovation*, the *power to choose* the program that suits them best, and *accountability* for results built into the charter agreement and the school systems. These tools are described in more detail below.

Freedom: Public charter schools are meant to gain the independence, autonomy, and operating room to do things differently: to design new learning programs, to offer an innovative curriculum, to implement new teaching strategies, to lead the way with new technologies, and more. The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School offers a focus on results, the flexibility of learning practically any time and anywhere, a one-on-one teaching approach, and computer-enhanced pedagogical tools. Such an innovative on-line learning environment seems custom-built for the publicly accountable world of charter schools.

Innovation: The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School is based on a 21st century school design that makes effective use of technology, without letting technology become the focus. The school presents a truly innovative approach to instruction, the school day, the school year, and the school community, while incorporating the very best of the traditional model of education. We aim to fuse tried-and-true educational practices (including lots of off-line work) with promising technologies and new approaches.

Choice: PVCS will be attractive to some—perhaps even many—families, but certainly not to all. This is the power of a school of choice: parents and children can find an option that interests them, meets their unique needs, and helps them obtain the best possible education.

Accountability: Placement assessments, unit and lesson assessments, and end-of-semester tests (in the appropriate grade levels) will help us track with regularity and precision how students are doing. This is also important for delivering an instructional program that addresses a child where he/she is right now, on a given subtraction exercise or a particular History lesson. Our customized learning system will provide parents, students, teachers, and administrators with a constant flow of information about achievement—allowing us to identify areas of difficulty before they become gaping holes in a child’s education. Day-to-day accountability for lessons learned and units mastered is difficult in a classroom of 25 active children. However, given personalized instruction by a caring adult, automated assessments, and easy-to-use progress-tracking tools, such day-to-day accountability becomes an integral part of the child’s learning program. The accountability system rests on a foundation of high expectations for each child. Teachers and responsible adults help students set and meet these goals.

2. School Demographics:

A. *What are the school’s enrollment projections for the first five years? What is the school’s ultimate enrollment goal? What grades will be served? How many students are expected to be in each grade or grouping?*

The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School projects enrollment of 1500 students in year one of its operation (grades K-2), 5000 students in year two (K-5), 7500 students in year three (K-8), 10,000 students in year four (K-12), and 16,000 students in year five (K-12). While it is impossible to project with accuracy the number of students and families who will be interested in such a unique educational program, we believe that the transformative impact of Internet technology on the delivery of instruction and a content-rich curriculum matched with committed, caring adults will have a wide appeal.

It has been said that the Internet dissolves the traditional trade-off between “richness and reach.” That is to say, a vast amount of content-*rich* material can be made to *reach* an extremely wide audience with incredible speed and efficiency, as opposed to the traditional model, where the richness of a great curriculum or particularly gifted teacher is confined to the geographic constraints of a neighborhood school district or particular classroom.

As described above, we expect to enroll students in grades K-2 in the first year, K-5 in the second year, K-8 in the third year, and then K-12 in years four and beyond. We expect there to be an even distribution of students in each grade level but we will have the flexibility and resources to adjust if the distribution is irregular.

The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School is not limited by traditional facility constraints, transportation logistics, or class-size limitations. We see no good educational reason to turn away students and families who choose this model of instruction.

B. *Describe the community or region where the school will be located.*

The administrative office of the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School will be located within the Norristown Area School District (NASD) in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. The NASD

serves Greater Norristown, which includes the towns of Norristown, East Norriton, and West Norriton, with a total population of approximately 59,000. Norristown is a suburban community in close proximity to Philadelphia. Many families with great needs move from Philadelphia to Norristown in search of better services and a better life. The result is a population with a broad diversity of economic status, ethnicities, and educational backgrounds.

C. Why was this location selected? Are there other locations suitable to the needs and focus of the school?

Though the Internet lessens the importance of place in some arenas, the community where the school is located is critically important to the school's success due, not surprisingly, to human factors. Norristown was selected, in part, because of its commitment to and understanding of educational technology. Its proactive leadership and aggressive investments in wiring its buildings and classrooms with Local Area Networks, Wide Area Networks, and fiber-optics serves as a model to schools and districts statewide of the importance of harnessing the power of technology for educational purposes—and of bridging the digital divide. The district shares our sense of urgency about helping children, improving pupil academic performance, making effective use of technological innovations, increasing parental involvement in education, and bringing the community together in common purpose.

D. Describe any unique demographic characteristics of the student population to be served, including racial and ethnic composition or primary languages spoken.

Since the school will be enrolling students both inside and outside of the district, we expect the student population to reflect the great diversity of children across the district and state. Our students will have at least one parent or responsible adult at home (or in a small group setting) with them during the day who will guide them through the school's instructional program, with the help and oversight of a teacher.

3. District Relations/Evidence of Support:

A. What efforts have you made to notify the district(s) from which your charter school would draw students?

In October 2000, members of the Founding Coalition and representatives from the Drexel University/Charter Schools Technical Assistance Center (TAC) met with Superintendent Mike Woodall of the Norristown Area School District (NASD) to discuss opportunities in the district and to determine district needs that could be fulfilled by this charter school. In November 2000, members of the Founding Coalition and TAC met with Superintendent Woodall and members of the Board of Education and NASD Staff to continue the dialogue on this proposed school and its potential relationship with the District. The outcome of the meetings was quite positive, ultimately leading to the submission of this application. Because PVCS intends to draw students from districts across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, it was determined that the Founders should wait for approval of the charter before attempting to contact representatives from all of the state's districts.

B. Convey the scope of community backing for the proposed charter school and its Founding Coalition. Document community support among teachers, parents, students, community members, and institutional leaders and others, through the use of letters of support, surveys, or other tangible means.

PVCS has been well received by the community, which stands to benefit a great deal from the creation of this school. The school has been discussed with Norristown Area School District officials, and various ideas about partnerships between the school and the District (educationally, technologically, etc.) are actively being discussed. Members of the Norristown Chamber of Commerce have met with representatives of the school and have voiced their support for the school's development. The Chamber of Commerce will suggest additional candidates for the school's Founding Coalition and (possibly) Board of Trustees. In addition, members of several local religious organizations have indicated their support for the school to the founders.

In all, 81 letters of support have been received thus far from parents and interested community members who would like to see this school become a reality for Pennsylvanians. Forty-five of these letters have been received from Norristown School District residents. The support for the school has been strong statewide, with many citizens offering to volunteer to help get the school opened for the 2001-02 school year.

III: DESCRIPTION OF FOUNDING/MANAGEMENT TEAM

1. Profile of Founding Coalition:

- A. Describe the make-up of the group or partnership that is working together to apply for a charter, including the names of the founders, their background and experiences, and references for each.*

The Founding Coalition of the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School represents a diverse group of interested parents, educators, business leaders, and community members who are dedicated to creating an innovative and effective educational model. Because of the ambitious nature of this school, there is a need to involve a wide variety of citizens in order to ensure development of a successful school model. The search for and inclusion of founders is ongoing, and will continue through to the selection of the Board of Trustees. At present, the school's Founding Coalition consists of the individuals below.

Jane Delaney
546 Sussex Road
Winwood, PA 19096

Ms. Delaney has been in the early childhood field for 20 years. She currently serves as Senior Vice President of Operations for Knowledge Learning Corporation, where she has been for 12 years. Knowledge Learning Corporation is a family of child development centers dedicated to meeting the growing needs of our nation's families. They provide quality early childhood education in numerous centers nationwide, along with innovative services that help families achieve balance between work and home life. Ms. Delaney earned her undergraduate degree in Family Services from Eastern Illinois University.

E. Diane Parks
1022 Keystone Drive
Sellersville, PA 18960

Ms. Parks is a resident of Sellersville, PA. She is a skilled businesswoman and public official, interested in the exploration and promotion of new ideas and innovative technologies. She has worked in marketing and sales, and computer technology organizations in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, as well as internationally. Currently, Ms. Parks is Chief Marketing Officer for Clearlogic, Inc. in Haddonfield, NJ, and serves her community as Hilltown Township Supervisor.

Morris & Carolyn Wright
554 Hamilton Street
Norristown, PA 19401

Mr. Wright, a resident of Norristown, has been in restaurant management since 1979, holding numerous managerial positions for various restaurants in Philadelphia, Willow Grove, and St. Davids. He studied at Temple University and West Chester State College. Ms. Wright currently serves as Sales Administrator for ADP in Ft. Washington, PA. She has also worked for

consulting firms and law firms in Wayne, Philadelphia, and King of Prussia. She received a certificate from the School for Executive/Medical Secretaries in Philadelphia.

Scott Miltenberger
551 Sproul Road
Villanova, PA 19085

Mr. Miltenberger worked in Norristown for three years as Director of Corporate Finance for NovaCare Employee Services. He is a current resident of Villanova, where he is pursuing an MBA at Villanova University while also working in Devon for Supply One, Inc. as their Corporate Controller. Prior to moving to Villanova, Mr. Miltenberger served as Vice President of Finance, Operations, and Administration at MedSprout.com, an Internet-based health care consulting firm. He is a graduate of Lafayette College, where he studied Economics and Business, and a Certified Public Accountant in Pennsylvania.

Bubinea Owens
28 Tanglewood Drive
Schwenksville, PA 19473

Ms. Owens, a resident of Schwenksville, currently serves as an Administrative Assistant in the Patents Department of Wyeth Ayerst Research in St. David's, PA. She has also worked for Nycomed Pharmaceutical, Unisys Corporation, and the Lawyers Title Insurance Company in Norristown, PA.

Peter Stewart

Mr. Stewart is a School Developer at PremierSchool, an innovative educational organization located in McLean, VA. Mr. Stewart has ten years' experience in education, both as a teacher and as an administrator. He has served as the Head of a private elementary school, as a public school district curriculum director, and as an English teacher, both in the United States and in Switzerland. Mr. Stewart holds an M.A. in Education from Teachers College, Columbia University.

Gregg Vanourek

Mr. Vanourek currently serves as Vice President for Charter School Development at PremierSchool, a private education provider in McLean, VA. His experience in both business and in education research for the Fordham Foundation and the Hudson Institute provides valuable insights to the development of PVCS. Mr. Vanourek has co-authored a book, *Charter Schools in Action: Renewing Public Education*, and written numerous articles and reports on education issues. He holds an MBA from the Yale School of Management and an M.Sc from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

B. Discuss how the group came together, as well as any partnership arrangements with existing schools, educational programs, businesses, nonprofits, or any other entities or groups.

The Founding Coalition came together around the common goals of helping children improve the prospects of their lives, helping students achieve to high standards, creating an innovative new school of choice based on new technologies and tried-and-true practices, and providing

alternatives for children who are not currently receiving an education that meets their specific needs.

The school's curriculum and technological infrastructure is being provided by PremierSchool, a private education corporation based in McLean, Virginia. The PremierSchool curriculum, which contains a mix of on-line and off-line components, is at the heart of the educational program that we will offer. PremierSchool will provide not only the educational backbone of our program, but also on-line and off-line education materials, computer systems (including peripheral devices) for our students, and school management and student information services, many of which are built into the on-line system they provide. PremierSchool's system is completely integrated, with curriculum, supplies, hardware, software, and tracking systems all combined in one package that:

- facilitates learning;
- promotes high standards;
- makes regular use of academic performance measurement;
- facilitates communication among students, parents, teachers, and administrators;
- makes reporting and documentation simple and user-friendly; and
- maximizes accountability.

The Founding Coalition has benefited from the assistance of the Technical Assistance Center for Public Charter Schools (TAC), a joint project of Drexel University and FOUNDATIONS. Drexel and FOUNDATIONS have formed a unique partnership to assist and support individuals, organizations, communities, schools, and school systems as they strive to improve teaching and learning environments for children. TAC works intensively with charter school applicants and founders in and across the country to develop high-performance charter schools.

Beyond these two partnerships, the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School intends to form alliances, relationships, and partnerships with schools, school districts, Intermediate Units, museums, community centers, universities, tutoring programs, social service agencies, clubs, and more throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. These relationships will serve the interests of our students, through field trips, socialization opportunities, learning adventures, social services, and/or proctored examination sites.

C. Include any plans for further recruitment of founders or organizers of the school.

Members of the local Norristown Chamber of Commerce are being actively sought to participate as founders and members of the Board. In addition, several members of local religious and community organizations have indicated a desire to participate as founders or potential Board members.

D. Provide information on the manner in which community groups are involved in the charter school planning process.

Preliminary contacts with community leaders have been made in the educational, business, and religious realms to get their input on the planning of this charter school and to seek their support.

Numerous letters of support can be found in the Appendix. Finally, plans are underway for involvement of the Community/Parent Advisory Council in the planning of the charter school.

2. Governance:

A. Describe the proposed management organization of the school.

The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School will be operated by Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School, Inc., a Pennsylvania nonprofit corporation, which will apply for Section 501(C)3 status with the United States Internal Revenue Service upon receiving notice that the charter will be awarded.

The governing body of Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School, Inc. will be the Board of Trustees, with five-year terms. The Board of Trustees will consist of five individuals drawn from the following categories: parents, educators, community leaders, institutional partners, business leaders, and/or government. The Board of Trustees will meet regularly to oversee the management, operation, activities, and affairs of the charter school. The Board of Trustees will define, compose, and revise (as needed) the policies of PVCS and ensure compliance with its charter agreement and applicable laws and regulations.

PVCS Trustees shall not receive compensation for their services as Board members, and may resign at any time by giving appropriate written notice. Board members may be removed at any time with or without cause by an affirmative vote of the majority of the remaining members of the Board whenever, in the judgment of the Trustees, the best interests of the students and/or the school will be enhanced by their removal. The Board Chairperson will use *Robert's Rules of Order* as deemed necessary. The Board will set its own threshold for minimum Board attendance policies.

The composition of the Board of Trustees of Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School will reflect the school's mission and vision. Consideration in the election to the Board of Trustees to Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School will include:

- Commitment to the school's mission and vision.
- Integrity and credibility in the community.
- A desire to help the children of Pennsylvania improve their educational prospects and character development.
- Professional educational and/or practical experience, including legal and financial expertise.
- A diversity of backgrounds, interests, and expertise.

The Board of Trustees will elect the officers of the corporation and determine the duration of their term(s). The Board of Trustees will govern in accordance with the Articles of Incorporation and the By-Laws of Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School, Inc.

The CAO will act as the administrator of Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School, Inc. and will be responsible for the daily operation, personnel, expenditures, and any other area that affects school operations. The CAO is also responsible for making all recommendations regarding policies and procedures. All day-to-day management of PVCS will be the responsibility of the CAO in conjunction with the school management organization. It is the intention of PVCS to contract with PremierSchool for curricular and educational materials and for additional school management services, such as budgeting and financial planning.

The Board, at its discretion, may vote to expand its membership and/or create subcommittees. Specific responsibilities of the Board are defined in the By-Laws.

The Board of Trustees should contract with PremierSchool, Inc. to manage student records, the implementation and oversight of the curriculum, professional development, and back-office business responsibilities, including budgeting and financial report preparation.

B. How will the Board of Trustees be selected?

The first Board of Trustees will be established by the Founding Coalition. Board vacancies will be filled through a nominating and voting process. Qualified candidates will be sought, and they will be required to submit a letter explaining their reasons for seeking to join the PVCS Board, their qualifications for doing so, and recommendations from colleagues or other members of the community speaking to their qualifications, professionalism, commitment, and integrity. Applications will be vetted and reviewed until Board members are satisfied that Board candidates are right for the job, committed to the school's mission, and willing and able to make the sacrifices necessary to be effective and productive Board members.

C. What steps will be taken to maintain continuity between the Founding Coalition's vision and the Board of Trustees?

Some of the founding members will serve on the Board of Trustees, thus ensuring that the Founding Coalition's vision is present in the work handled by the Board. The Founding Coalition has drafted clear mission and vision statements that will guide the school throughout the life of its charter. The Founding Coalition will seek Board members who are committed to honoring the school's mission. The Board will delegate appropriate responsibilities to the CPAC, which will help the organization achieve its mission and vision. The CAO will regularly report to the Board of Trustees on the school's accomplishments.

D. Describe the roles and responsibilities of the board.

The Board assumes ultimate responsibility for all of the operations and the budget of the school. The roles and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees include:

- Financial development and management
- Fiduciary
- Academic program
- Coordination of long-term planning

- Overseeing and evaluating the work of the CAO
- Setting a framework for the budget process and authorizing the annual budget
- Approving large resource expenditures, significant program changes, expansion into new program areas, and building and facility issues.

The Board of Trustees shall have the power and responsibility to engage in the following acts, by an affirmative vote of the majority of the members:

- Sign a written charter with the Board of Education of Norristown Area School District;
- Establish and maintain all policies governing the operation of the school;
- Approve the appointment of a CAO and to approve the appointment or dismissal of staff members as recommended by the CAO;
- Adopt the school calendar;
- Adopt textbooks;
- Adopt the school policy on evaluation and reporting of assessments, upon recommendations made by the CAO;
- Appoint or dismiss school administrators;
- Adopt the annual budget and conduct an annual independent audit of the school's finances;
- Buy or sell land;
- Locate new buildings or change the location of old buildings;
- Create or increase indebtedness;
- Adopt courses of study;
- Designate depositories for school funds;
- Determine salaries or compensation of administrators, teachers, or other employees of the school;
- Enter into contracts with and make appropriations to an Intermediate Unit, school district, or area vocational/technical school for the school's proportionate share of the cost of services provided or to be provided by the foregoing entities;
- Enter into contracts with and make appropriations to organizations (both for-profit and non-profit) and appoint nonvoting members of the Board of Trustees;
- Authorize the school's maintenance workers to perform any necessary repairs, construction, or other maintenance work in the school;
- Authorize a committee of the Board or appoint a qualified hearing examiner to hold hearings regarding recommendations of suspension or expulsion of students.
- Authorize a committee of the Board or appoint a qualified hearing examiner to hold hearings regarding recommendations of suspension or dismissal of employees with or without cause. Specifically, the Board shall, via the approved policies of the school, convene to hear the recommendations of the CAO regarding any employee issue. Following the CAO, or the CAO's designee should the CAO be the employee at issue, the Board shall 1) make a determination based on the information obtained at that meeting; or 2) authorize a committee to gather additional evidence, as needed and appropriate, for the Board's review of the issue. Thereafter the Board may render its final decision based on all evidence obtained and in conformity to the employee's Employment Agreement.
- Monitor the performance of the school based on a variety of information, including student performance and parent and staff satisfaction;

- Serve as a Board of Appeals with respect to complaints arising out of the school's operation that cannot be resolved by the staff, the CAO, or other school administrators;
- The Board may exercise whatever other powers may be necessary to further the mission and operation of the school.

E. What steps will be taken to facilitate a productive relationship between administrators and teachers?

The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School will employ a "Lead Teacher" to facilitate a productive relationship between administrators and teachers. The Lead Teacher will serve not only as a guide, mentor, and supervisor for the teachers but also as a liaison between the school's administrators and its professional educators.

The school will be based on a team approach, utilizing the skills and expertise of its various members. Commitment to the team approach is one of the essential qualities for which the Trustees will look when hiring and evaluating the CAO. The CAO, in turn, will require this same team commitment when hiring and evaluating staff members.

The CAO will be responsible for developing the staff into a cohesive unit. Teachers will be hired who share the educational vision of the school. During the hiring process, the goals and objectives of the school, the curriculum, school policies, and performance requirements expected of teachers will be explained to all applicants.

Teachers and administrators will participate in all training and professional development. They will be partners in creative problem-solving, as they refine and implement the educational program.

The Internet will also be used regularly to maintain high levels of communication among staff members. The school will create ways by which staff members can communicate regularly and effectively. The on-line learning system and student information system will also provide areas for teacher feedback.

Annual evaluations of teachers, along with a continual performance review by the CAO, will be major contributors to developing a positive relationship between teachers and administrators. The evaluations will serve primarily as a tool for identifying what can be done by all parties to strengthen the education that the school is offering its students. Administrators and teachers will use evaluations to generate plans not only for teacher improvement, but for administrator and whole school improvement as well.

When teachers and administrators are hired to join the school, they will be required to sign an agreement that ensures that they will participate in an on-going school improvement plan. The plan will describe in detail, based on the ideas presented in this application, what will be done to implement the school's mission, and how that implementation will be monitored and improved upon by the school's staff members.

F. Discuss the nature of parental and student involvement in decision-making matters where appropriate.

Day to day, parents and students will be in charge of their educational program to an extent difficult to imagine in traditional school systems. Parents and students will have an important role in school decision-making by having representation on the Board. In matters of school governance, parents will have direct representation on the Board of Trustees and students will have a voice in drafting and amending appropriate school policies. Whenever appropriate, the Board, administration, and/or faculty will seek student participation on ad hoc committees.

Please see the Appendix for a draft of the Student-Parent-School Compact, which discusses, among other matters, the nature of parental and student involvement in decision-making matters for the school.

Parents and guardians of students at the school will form a Community and Parent Advisory Council. The Council will schedule regular meetings (whether in-person or virtual) to discuss issues, strategies, and programs that will benefit and advance the school. The Council will:

- Set policy on issues delegated to it by the Board of Trustees;
- Serve as the primary organizational vehicle through which parents can provide input or voice concerns to the Board, administration, and faculty; and
- Create its own agenda and priorities for school improvement.

Parents and students will have regular opportunities to provide on-line feedback about the operations of the school and the quality of the curriculum. Students will also be encouraged to develop their own ways to organize and exercise leadership and provide input into school policies, in some cases using technological tools and virtual networks that they have helped create.

G. Submit copies of the school's by-laws, contracts, and other documents required by pending charter school legislation or applicable law.

The proposed By-Laws of the school are located in the Appendix. In terms of other documents, preliminary discussions with the Norristown School District and Board of Education have already begun regarding a proposed charter agreement between NASD and the PVCS Board and a Draft Partnership Agreement between NASD and PremierSchool. These discussions are ongoing but it is our hope that they will lead to mutually beneficial agreements between relevant parties.

H. Submit board members' names, addresses, phone numbers, and resumes.

Members of the Founding Coalition are listed above. Other Founding Coalition members are being recruited. From this Founding Coalition (and from a pool of other individuals who are well qualified to make significant contributions to the implementation and oversight of this

school), a Board of Trustees will be created as we transition from charter application phase to charter implementation and start-up phase.

IV: FINANCE AND FACILITY

1. Financing:

A. Develop a preliminary start-up and operating budget. Develop a purchasing procedure that addresses a competitive way to purchase goods and services. (For additional financing procedures see Section 1725-A of the Charter School Legislation.)

A preliminary start-up budget for PVCS (Charter School Start-Up Grant, form PDE-362) is provided in the Appendix as is a preliminary operating budget.

Purchasing procedures will be modeled after the requirements of the Public School Code but will provide as much flexibility as possible, consistent with the need for adequate control and oversight and the need to create and maintain competition for school purchases.

The CAO, upon Board authorization, will establish a revolving checking account from which he/she will be authorized to spend up to \$10,000 on any single transaction for the purchase of supplies, materials, instructional aids, educational software, books, transportation, and/or tickets for special events. Such a checking account will be established with the signatures of the CAO and the Business Manager. The CAO's signature indicates that the expenditure is consistent with the instructional needs of the school and consistent with the guidelines established by the Board of Trustees. The Business Manager is authorized to reimburse the account at appropriate times to reestablish the \$10,000 limit out of the general account of the charter school with receipts documenting expenditures. The CAO will submit a list of monthly expenditures to the Treasurer of the Board.

Expenditures in excess of \$10,000 for construction and renovation purposes will only be permitted when pre-authorized by the Board of Trustees, and only when the Board has received three competitive bids. This process requires that a summary of the proposed expenditure(s), the name of the vendor, the amounts of the three bids, and the purpose of the purchase be submitted to the Board of Trustees at each meeting for ratification. The Board of Trustees will develop additional expenditure procedures as the need arises. The CAO will submit expenditures and budgets to the Board on a regular basis with the assistance of PremierSchool, Inc.

B. What fundraising efforts have occurred and/or are planned to generate capital or to supplement the per-pupil allocations?

The school will apply for state and federal start-up grants in order to get the school running on a sound financial platform. Once the administrative staff is in place, we will explore grant and other fundraising opportunities. PVCS will employ a staff member who will apply to all relevant government entities and foundations that are supporting educational initiatives of this type. Examples of the types of funding sources that PVCS hopes to access are:

- Federal charter school start-up monies
- State charter school start-up monies

- Technology Challenge Grants
- Fund for the Improvement of Education
- Technology Opportunity Grant
- Title I monies
- E-rate funds
- Various philanthropies and foundations

C. Using the attached Pennsylvania Department of Education budget template, draft a preliminary operating budget covering all projected sources of revenue, both public and private, and planned expenditures.

The preliminary operating budget for the first year, employee benefits worksheets, and cash flow statements are provided in the Appendix. The budget shows revenues from the per-pupil allocation, start-up funds, and state subsidies. Additional sheets show the detail of revenues and obligations, labeled according to the state's chart of accounts.

Assumptions underlying the budget are attached to the budget pages in the Appendix. The budget for the first year assumes a full complement of students at all times. Any vacancies created by student mobility will be filled from the waiting list or by renewed recruitment. Receipt of start-up funds is assumed to occur in October (70%) and November (30%).

In the event that revenues do not meet expected levels, the Board of Trustees will take one or more of the following actions: reducing the surplus, increasing fundraising, and/or reducing costs.

The following required financial procedures will be followed:

The treasurer of the charter shall deposit the funds belonging to the charter school in a depository approved by the board and shall at the end of each month make a report to the charter board of the amount of funds received and disbursed by him or her during the month. All deposits of charter school funds by the charter treasurer shall be made in the name of the charter school.

The board of trustees of a charter school shall invest charter school funds consistent with sound business practice. Authorized types of investments for charter schools shall be:

- United States Treasury bills
- Short-term obligations of the United States Government or its agencies or instrumentalities
- Deposits in savings accounts or time deposits or share account of institutions insured by the FDIC or the Federal Savings & Loan Insurance Corporation or the National Credit Union Share Insurance Fund to the extent that such accounts are so insured, and for any amounts above the insured maximum, provided that approved collateral as provided by law therefore shall be pledged by the depository.
- Obligations of the United States of America or any grant of its agencies or instrumentalities backed by the full faith and credit of the United States of America, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or any of its agencies or instrumentalities backed by the

full faith of Pennsylvania or any of its agencies or instrumentalities backed by the full faith and credit of the political subdivision.

- Shares of an investment company registered under the Investment Company of America Act of 1940 (54 Stat. 789, 15 U.S.C. * 80a-1 et seq.) as defined in PA 24 PS 4-440.1 of the Pennsylvania School Code.

Note: All investments shall be subject to the standards set forth in PA 24 PS 4-440.1 of the Pennsylvania School Code.

The school treasurer shall settle his/her accounts annually with the board of school CAO for each school year.

An annual school audit shall be conducted according to the requirements of Article 24 of the School Code of 1949. Charter school boards of trustees shall follow requirements set forth for school boards in this section.

2. Facility:

A. Descriptions of and addresses for the physical facilities under consideration.

As noted earlier, a traditional school facility is not needed due to the "virtual" nature of this public charter school. One advantage of the Internet is that learning can take place virtually any time, anywhere, and can be tracked automatically. Thus, a community of learners can be created without consideration of transportation logistics and coordination of schedules. Several local facilities are being considered for administrative office space to house the PVCS administration in Norristown, and to provide a home base for the Board. These facilities include a currently unoccupied building owned by the Norristown Area School District (Burnside Elementary School), a building in the local empowerment zone/waterfront area, and a building in a new high-tech business complex. All of these buildings are currently available and may be well-suited to our purposes.

B. Explain how this site(s) would be a suitable facility for the proposed school. Consider the necessity of renovation to the facility and compliance with applicable building codes. Describe the services of the facility including heating, ventilating, lighting, sanitary conditions, and water supply.

Although there will not be a building that will house the school's students, the administration building will be properly licensed and up to code with regard to the Americans with Disabilities Act and all OSHA regulations. The buildings are easily accessible to major roads, with ample parking for parents and staff. They also provide sufficient wiring and communication capabilities to support the high-tech nature and infrastructure of the school or could be retrofitted to support these functions. All of the buildings provide adequate heating, ventilation, lighting, sanitary conditions, and water supply to support the school's staff.

C. Discuss the plan for maintaining the facility on a day-to-day basis (custodial) and extended basis (facility maintenance).

No facility will be acquired to house the school's students. The facility for the administrative offices will be maintained by a contracted property maintenance company. Funds for office maintenance are included in the budget.

D. Discuss any progress, partnership developments of other future steps towards acquisition of a facility/land.

Administrative facilities will be rented in Norristown. Presently we are working with a local real estate broker to identify available commercial space. We are also working with DREXEL/FOUNDATIONS, INC. Technical Assistance Center for Public Charter Schools of Mount Laurel, New Jersey in order to locate a suitable facility. The Superintendent of the Norristown Area School District suggested that an unoccupied school building could be leased for our administrative offices. We are considering the possibility of using the District's school building, Burnside Elementary School.

E. Describe facility financial plans.

The facility will be leased annually, with payments made to the owners of the facility. The attached budget includes provisions for those lease payments starting July 1, 2001.

3. Liability and Insurance:

A. Describe your school's insurance coverage plans, including health, general liability (including school operation, extracurricular activities and parent volunteer activities), property, and Director's and Officer's liability coverage (see Section 1727-A of the charter school legislation).

The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School will maintain insurance coverage as required by state legislation, including policies providing for:

- General Liability: one million dollars in Combined Single Limit.
- Professional Liability: one million dollars.
- Worker's Compensation.
- Director's and Officers' Liability.
- Unemployment Compensation Insurance.

In addition, the school will provide health, dental, disability, and life insurance to employees who work more than 30 hours per week. The PVCS will have a flexible benefits program with available insurance coverage equal to that of the District's health coverage for staff members, to the extent possible.

4. Child Accounting:

A. Describe your school enrollment and attendance procedures. Note: State child accounting procedures must be followed. (24 PS 13-1332)

Enrollment

Students will be enrolled after they have applied and been accepted as having met the requirements for admission, or having been chosen by lottery if qualified applicants outnumber openings for enrollment. Enrollment will be provided to the District in a timely manner and in accordance with all requirements of the charter school legislation and any applicable state regulations. As a public school, PVCS will comply with all laws establishing minimum age for public school attendance. PVCS will admit all eligible students who choose to attend, space permitting. No student will be denied admission based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, family income, national origin, or disability.

Attendance

Our attendance system will have two tracks. First, on-line student attendance will be automatically captured by the system. At the end of each day, the responsible adult will fill out an attendance log that includes all work completed and time spent on task. Additionally, each child's teacher will contact the parent or responsible adult on a regular basis in order to discuss successes and problems, and will verify the parent's log of student work. Records will be maintained at the school office. Teachers and school administrators will review attendance and logs of on-line work on a regular basis to determine that students are on track to complete the 900 hours (for elementary grades) and 990 hours (for secondary grades) and/or at least 180 days of instruction. Should students be falling behind these requirements, teachers and administrators will derive a plan that will help students complete the required time within the given school year.

V. IMPLEMENTATION AND ADMINISTRATION

1. Recruiting and Marketing Plan

A. Demonstrate how you will publicize the school to attract a sufficient pool of eligible applicants.

Upon receiving our charter, PVCS will begin a five-part marketing plan:

- **Pupil Recruitment Team** - The CAO will assemble a Pupil Recruitment Team consisting of teachers, parents, and community members to oversee the creation and implementation of the marketing plan.
- **Website** - The school's website will contain background information about the school, its leadership, mission, charter, calendar, faculty, and admissions procedures. Equally important from a marketing perspective, the school website will include a prototype of lessons for grades K-2.
- **Local media** – Members of the Recruitment Team will prepare a written press release for local media and will make themselves available for print, radio, and television interviews. Advertisements will be placed in newspapers throughout the state. Spanish language newspapers will be provided advertisements to post in Spanish. Press releases will also be sent to educational message boards and appropriate "list serves," and will encourage interested parties to visit the school's website.
- **Recruiting materials** – The Recruitment Team will produce materials about the school's mission, curriculum, leadership, details of its charter, and the application process. For the sake of continuity, in look, feel, and information, print materials will resemble the information on the school's website. Direct mail will also be used to get the word out about the school.
- **Community meetings** – Once the recruiting materials are prepared, the school's leadership team will host a series of Open Houses for interested parents, students, and community members to discuss plans for the opening of PVCS. We will encourage members of the local media to attend. Because PVCS will appeal to many students outside of Norristown, the school leadership team will host similar meetings across several regions. We are committed to recruiting a student body that reflects the diversity of Pennsylvania. Invitations to all public events will be widely publicized.

B. What type of outreach will be made to potential students and families?

Public outreach will occur in several different ways:

Educating about the program and its mission - The Open House and community meetings mentioned above will be the first steps in this outreach. It will be important to inform parents of our mission, our ability to train them in the use of technology, and our ability to

accommodate special education needs. These meetings will also include information about the application process and Q&A sessions from parents.

Admissions - Our admissions process is designed to ensure that students and families truly understand our mission, our program, and the commitment necessary to make it a success.

Orientation - We will offer an orientation day in the summer to integrate new families into our school. This day will have three key components:

- **Technical assessment and training** – We will assess the technical needs and skills of our families. We use this information to ensure that they are up to speed by the opening of school.
- **Mission Discussions** – We will review key aspects of the School Handbook to highlight the many ways our mission is woven into our program. Understanding school operations, policies, and programs in the context of our mission is a way to both communicate effectively and to foster a greater understanding of our identity as a community.
- **Community Building** – It is important that our families have opportunities to meet with each other and become integral members of our school’s innovative community. Through this and other local area meetings, students, parents, and teachers will meet each other and begin to create the relationships and friendships that are an important part of any school. Adults and students will share experiences, ask questions, and plan peer-to-peer activities.

Orientation materials will also be available on-line, and we will explore the use and efficacy of having a “Virtual Orientation” for interested families.

2. Admissions Policy

A. Describe the admissions methods you will use to select students.

Our admissions process seeks to ensure that all potential families understand our mission and the responsibilities, challenges, and rewards of joining our school. The Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School will be inclusive and open to all. In the likely event that more students apply than there will be available space for, a lottery will be held by grade, with preference given first to residents of the Norristown School District, and then to students from outside of the District. Once all slots are filled, the remaining students will be placed on a waiting list in the order that they are drawn. Applications received following the fulfillment of all open positions will continue to be accepted throughout the year, with those students being placed on a waiting list. The families of students selected in the lotteries will be given two weeks to sign a commitment for the students to enroll in the school. If the families do not return a signed commitment letter by that time, additional families on the waiting list will be contacted and given a chance to enroll their children. Provided there are spaces available, this process will continue until school enrollment is complete. Siblings of students accepted into the school through the lottery will automatically be enrolled in the school as well.

B. Describe the timetable to be used for admitting students, including a plan for the admission lottery for students from both within and outside the district.

Recruitment will begin in February for enrollment for the following fall through advertisements and articles placed in newspapers and radio public service announcements (we are also considering the use of radio and television ads). Applications for in-district students will be available on March 1st or the Monday following the 1st if the 1st falls on a Saturday or Sunday. Applications for in-district students will be accepted from that time until the 1st of April, or the Monday following the 1st if the 1st falls on a weekend.

If there are more in-district applicants than spaces available, then a lottery will be held to determine the selected candidates no later than April 7. Applications selected in the lottery will be reviewed and processed in the order in which they are drawn. Notification of lottery results will be made by the end of April, with students accepting or rejecting admission by the 1st of June. After receiving responses from the first round of qualified students selected in the lottery, if there are additional openings, applications already selected as alternates in the lottery will be reviewed and candidates notified.

Out-of-district applications will be considered until May 1. A separate lottery will be held for out-of-district applications by May 7 if there are more applicants than spaces. Out-of-district students will be contacted in order of their number drawn in the lottery. Notification of lottery results will be made by the end of May, with students accepting or rejecting admission by the 1st of July. After receiving responses from the first round of qualified students selected in the lottery, if there are additional openings, applications already selected as alternates in the lottery will be reviewed and candidates will be notified.

The Norristown School District and other affected school districts will be notified of the names of students who have been admitted and enrolled into the school no later than August 31st, or the Friday before the 31st if the 31st falls on a weekend and on a rolling basis after that.

C. Explain how these policies further the mission of the school in a non-discriminatory fashion.

We view every aspect of our admissions process as an opportunity to educate our potential applicants about the mission of our school. Joining PVCS is a decision that entails not only the prospect of a rigorous and innovative educational program, but also a detailed commitment of time, effort, and attention. We want to be sure every family knows who we are, how we operate, and why we exist. By inextricably linking our marketing, recruiting, and admissions efforts to the mission of our school, we believe parents will be able to determine if we are the right fit for them and their child. Once this process is completed, it seems only fair that we conduct the lottery as described above. Once a family knows they want to be a part of our program, they should have a fair chance to do so. The only preferences we offer are to the children of founding partners and to siblings of students already enrolled.

The admission procedure was created to allow sufficient time for eligible students to consider the mission of the school and why it would be a good option for them. In accordance with the legislation governing charter schools, the timetable fills available enrollment openings with Norristown students before students from other districts are considered. The lottery system assures a fair and random selection of students from the pool of qualified applicants. The PVCS will not discriminate against any applicant for admission in any way that is illegal based on Pennsylvania Department of Education standards, including race, religion, intellectual or athletic ability, status as a person with a disability, or proficiency in the English language.

3. Human Resource Information

A. Describe the standards to be used in the hiring process of teachers, administrators, and other school staff.

All faculty and staff applicants must submit a cover letter, resume, and letters of recommendation from past employers. Background checks, as required by Pennsylvania Law, will be performed before a contract is offered. The school will seek the qualities listed below in creating an excellent environment for learning.

Teachers

- Pennsylvania Certification;
- Experience working with the proposed age groups;
- Strong educational background, in a major subject area, or in education;
- Superb communication and technology skills;
- Experience with different learning styles;
- Shared view of the mission of the school;
- Highly positive recommendations from past employers;
- Teachers with Special Education training and experience (as enrollment dictates);
- Self-motivated;
- Ability to work on complex tasks with minimal supervision.

CAO

- Certification as an administrator in the State of Pennsylvania;
- Experience as both an educator and administrator;
- Knowledge and vision of the role of technology in education;
- Experience developing and managing budgets;
- Experience in staff development and evaluation;
- Strong educational background;
- Superb communication and technology skills;
- Experience with different learning styles;
- Deep commitment to the mission of the school;
- An ability to envision an organizational design and help others realize this vision.

Business Manager

- Experience working with both charter and public schools;
- Budgetary training from Pennsylvania Department of Education;

Degree in finance or business administration;
Superb skills in developing and managing budgets;
Experience in negotiating with vendors;
Knowledge of tax implications of 501(c)3 status;
Experience budgeting with private and federal grants;
Strong cash-management experience;
Experience preparing for audits.

B. What is the targeted staff size and teacher to student ratio?

The staff size target for the first year of operation—School Year 2001-02—is 41, with one lead teacher, 30 teachers, 3 special education teachers, and several administrators. PVCS teachers will serve students at a ratio of 50:1. Special education teachers will operate on a 25:1 ratio, on average.

C. What professional development opportunities will be available to teachers and other staff?

In order to be successful, an innovative model such as PVCS requires intensive, on-going professional development for all of its staff. The primary goals for professional learning in the community will be:

1. For Teachers

- Understanding the school's curriculum
- Using diagnostic assessments and checklists
- Managing our student information system
- Using on-line teaching tools
- Using technology for communicating with students, parents, and other teachers
- Developing on-line learning projects
- Using the student information system to track progress
- Assessing student progress in a virtual environment
- Finding and synthesizing Web-based resources
- Participating in a professional learning community

2. For Parents

- Using the on-line resources for facilitating student learning
- Participating in on-line parent communities
- Finding learning resources on the Web
- Communicating with students/children and school staff
- Reaching out to others to provide social, cultural, and other enriching activities for students
- Facilitating self-direction in children/students

3. For Administrators

- Using the student information system

- Using technology to reduce purchase costs
- Using technology to expedite purchases
- Managing and supporting a geographically spread community
- Understanding trends in digital learning technology
- Using technology for communicating with staff, parents, and students
- Complying with charter, federal, and state educational guidelines

4. For Support Staff

- The elements of the PremierSchool learning programs
- The communications infrastructure
- Major presentation and information processing tools
- Using the Web as an educational resource

Professional development will be built into our school's program in two key ways. First, formal face-to-face learning will be utilized to help build social cohesion among the staff members, as well as to increase opportunities for collaborative knowledge building. These sessions will be facilitated by Lead Teachers. Second, professional learning will be facilitated by Web-supported communities created by both the PVCS and by other agencies across the Web.

The presence of Lead Teachers in the school, who will serve as master teachers for the other teachers, will provide guidance in identifying weaknesses and finding resources for educational improvement. The CAO will, at the direction of the Board, help to set the agenda for professional development for each year. Teachers will be encouraged to take courses and to visit and learn about other schools across the country that are creating on-line learning communities.

Administrative staff and support staff will also be encouraged to participate in a community of learners that includes teachers, university professors, educational experts, and assessment specialists. Learning opportunities will be available for these staff members to participate in: face-to-face learning and collaboration; streaming, live video presentations and teleconferencing; and independent on-line learning accessing the resources of the World Wide Web.

The schedule for professional development activities will be arranged so as not to interfere substantially with students' access to the teachers during standard learning times. Several of the professional development activities will be available on the Web, and will thus allow teachers flexibility in scheduling their learning. Orientation activities will include extensive professional development on teachers' roles and responsibilities in students' learning.

Teachers and other staff members will be assessed regularly with regard to their understanding of their roles in PVCS. This information will be used to tailor professional development opportunities for them in the future.

D. Describe your human resource policies governing salaries, contracts, hiring and dismissal, sick and other leave, and benefits.

In general, the Founding Coalition seeks to hire employees with a range of experiences.

The Board of Trustees shall direct the CAO to prepare a Staff Handbook. The Handbook will contain a description of the PVCS mission, goals, assessment and evaluation procedures, policies dealing with equal opportunity employment, sexual harassment, affirmative action, compensation, contracts, hiring, discipline, and dismissal, professional development, sick and other leaves, benefits, travel, holidays, personnel files, work day and work year, attendance at meetings, assignments, grievance procedures, and relationships with students, parents, and community. Drafts of some of the Human Resource Policies (which are unofficial until Board approval) follow.

Equal Opportunity Employment - The PVCS will strive to recruit, hire, train, and promote the most qualified candidates for every job description, without regard to race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, handicap or disability, marital status, veteran's status, citizenship status, sexual orientation, or any other protected group status. In addition, all personnel actions and/or employment decisions will be based on and administered in accordance with all federal, state and local laws, ordinances and regulations on equal opportunity employment. The PVCS will not tolerate a violation of this policy by any employee. Violations may be grounds for dismissal.

Reasonable Accommodations for Qualified Individuals with a Disability - Any qualified individual with a disability who requires reasonable accommodation(s) in order to perform the essential functions of his/her job must speak to the CAO. The PVCS may require documented medical evidence of the need for an accommodation before granting any accommodation. (Note: We believe that the unique nature of this virtual charter school will create excellent opportunities for educators with disabilities.)

Policy Against Harassment - Each individual employed by the PVCS and each student attending the school has the right to be free from inappropriate conduct where that conduct could be viewed as workplace harassment. Inappropriate conduct based on an individual's age, race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, handicap or disability, marital status or sexual orientation also may constitute prohibited workplace harassment.

Sick Leave - Sick Leave is defined as the absence from his or her post of duty by any faculty or staff member due to personal disability due to illness or injury, or because he or she has been excluded from school by the school's medical authorities on account of a contagious disease or of being quarantined for such a disease in his or her immediate household. All faculty and staff will be granted five sick leave days as of the first official day of the school year, or the first day on which they report for school each year. All persons initially hired after September 1st shall be entitled to use sick days on a pro-rata basis during first year of employment, depending upon the number of months worked in the first year. Unused sick days do not carry forward from one year to the next.

Customer Relations - The success of the PVCS depends upon the quality of the relationships between the PVCS, our employees, our families, and the general public. Our families' impression of PVCS and their interest and willingness to place their children in our care is greatly formed by the people who serve them. In a sense, regardless of position, employees are ambassadors. The more goodwill that is promoted by staff, the more families will respect and

appreciate that staff. Staff members could do the following to help give families a good impression of PVCS.

1. Act competently and deal with families in a courteous and respectful manner.
2. Communicate pleasantly and respectfully with other employees at all times.
3. Follow up on all questions promptly, provide businesslike replies to inquiries and requests, and perform all duties in an orderly manner.
4. Take great pride in their work, do their very best, and have fun doing it.

Confidential Information - Our families entrust the school with important information relating to their children. The nature of this relationship requires maintenance of confidentiality. In safeguarding the information received, PVCS earns the respect and further trust of our families. Employment with PVCS assumes an obligation to maintain confidentiality, even after employees leave the school. Any violation of confidentiality seriously injures the PVCS reputation and effectiveness. Therefore, employees are not to discuss PVCS business with anyone who does not work for the school, and are never to discuss business transactions with anyone who does not have a direct association with the transaction. Because of its seriousness, disclosure of confidential information could lead to dismissal. Students under an IEP will be disciplined in accordance with the IEP recommendations.

Discipline - The discipline policy applies to all employees. Under normal circumstances, the CAO is expected to follow the three-step procedure outlined below. There may be particular situations, however, in which the seriousness of the offense justifies the omission of one or more of the steps in the procedure. Likewise, there may be times when the CAO may decide to repeat a disciplinary step. Steps toward staff discipline are outlined below.

Step One: Oral reminder

The CAO will meet with the staff member to discuss the problem, making sure that he/she understands the nature of the violation and the expected remedy. The staff member will be informed that the Oral Reminder is the first step of the disciplinary procedure. The CAO will fully document the Oral Reminder, which will remain in effect for 30 days. Documentation of the incident will remain in the CAO's file and will not be placed in the permanent employee record, unless another disciplinary transaction occurs.

Step Two: Written reminder

If the staff member's performance does not improve within the 30-day period, or if he/she is again in violation of PVCS practices, rules, or standards of conduct, the CAO will discuss the problem with the staff member, emphasizing the seriousness of the problem and the need to immediately remedy the problem. Following the conversation, the CAO will write a memo summarizing the discussion. The original memo will go to the staff members and a copy will be retained by the CAO and placed in the employee's permanent file.

Step Three: Decision-making leave

If performance does not improve within the 30 days following a Written Reminder, or if he/she is again in violation of PVCS practices, rules, or standards of conduct, they will be placed on Decision-Making Leave—the final step of the PVCS disciplinary procedure. Decision-Making

Leave is an unpaid, one-day disciplinary suspension. Employees on Decision-Making Leave will spend the following day away from work deciding whether to correct the immediate problem and conform to all of the school's practices, rules, and standards of conduct, or to resign and terminate their employment with PVCS.

If the staff member's decision following the Decision-Making Leave is to return to work and abide by PVCS practices, rules, and standards of conduct, the CAO will write a letter explaining their commitment and the consequences of failing to meet this commitment. The staff member will be required to sign the letter to acknowledge receipt. A copy of the letter will be placed in their permanent file. The staff member will be allowed to return to work with the understanding that if a positive change in behavior does not occur, or if another discipline problem occurs within the next 30 days, they will be terminated. The conversations, events and/or communications with the employee may be used by the CAO in employee evaluations.

E. Identify the proposed faculty.

The proposed faculty will be comprised of the following positions:

- Chief Administrative Officer
- Assistant Principal
- Business Manager
- Director of Technology
- Special Education Director
- Administrative Support
- Lead Teacher(s)
- Teachers
- Special Education Teachers
- Substitute Teachers

[Note: Not all of these employees will be necessary in the school's first year of operation, and some of these positions may be contracted out. We expect the staffing needs to increase as the school's enrollment grows.]

The actual employees who will fill these positions will not be hired until the Spring or Summer of 2001.

F. Attach a report of criminal history record, pursuant to Section 111 of the Public School Code for all individuals seeking the charter who shall have contact with students.

Criminal history records will be obtained by the Founding Coalition for all staff and proposed staff following approval of the charter. These records will be submitted when they are received to the NASD to be included as amendments to this application.

G. Attach an official clearance statement regarding child injury or abuse from the Department of Public Welfare as required by 23 PA. C.S. Chapter 63 subchapter C.2 for all individuals who shall have direct contact with students.

Child injury or abuse clearance will be obtained by the Founding Group for all staff and proposed staff following approval of the charter. These statements will be submitted when they are received to the NASD to be included as amendments to this application.

4. Code of Conduct

A. Discuss any rules or guidelines governing student behavior.

Student behavior, whether on-line or at school functions, must meet the rules and expectations outlined in the School Handbook. Central to these are academic honesty and concern for the safety of self and others. All forms of dishonesty (cheating, lying, or any other type of plagiarism) are considered serious offenses and are reported to the CAO. See the Appendix for a draft of the school's suspension and expulsion policy.

B. Describe your school's policies regarding student expulsion and suspension.

The school will reserve the right to expel students who are in violation of the rules laid out in the School Handbook. The CAO will make the expulsion or suspension decision, and will be responsible for notifying the parent and student, and for providing an explanation for the action. Appeals can be made to the Board of Trustees, who will review the case. Suspensions will involve the removal of students from participation in the larger community of learners by removing their access to communications technology that allows them to participate electronically in that community. The Code of Conduct will contain rules and consequences leading to (1) short-term suspensions; (2) long-term suspensions; and (3) expulsion. Disciplinary procedures for students with disabilities will be followed as required by IDEA.

PVCS will comply with the policies set forth in Pennsylvania Code PS 13-1318 (Suspension and Expulsion of Students) as follows:

"Every principal or teacher in charge of a public school may temporarily suspend any pupil on account of disobedience or misconduct, and any principal or teacher suspending any pupil shall promptly notify the district superintendent or secretary of the Board of school directors. The board may, after a proper hearing, suspend such a child for such time as it may determine, or may permanently expel him. Such hearings, suspension, or expulsion may be delegated to a duly authorized committee of the Board, or to duly qualified hearing examiner, who need not be a member of the Board, but whose adjudication must be approved by the Board."

A draft suspension and expulsion policy is provided in the Appendix.

C. Describe your school's mandatory attendance plan and its fit with the code of conduct.

All students at PVCS will participate in at least 180 days of schooling during each school year, and/or will document at least 900 hours of engagement in school learning activities in the elementary grades and at least 990 hours in the secondary grades. Because the school will

provide opportunities for students to learn at any time, from anywhere, a system of on-line activity tracking backed by a parent log of student learning activities (not to mention regular assessments) will be part of the student administrative system. When a student appears to be falling behind expectations regarding student progress, the system will notify the appropriate personnel and teachers will intervene to bring their students up to speed.

The attendance plan will be a major component for promoting personal responsibility in students. The amount of time students spend and the quality of time they spend will depend in part on their ability to set goals and manage their time as they progress. All attendance records will be kept by the CAO in the school's central office in Norristown. Parents will be expected to model and monitor time management for their children. The PVCS Code of Conduct will be located in the school's School Handbook. The attendance plan will be included in the Code of Conduct and in the Handbook, along with guidelines for helping students to develop time management skills necessary to become responsible users of the learning system.

5. Transportation

A. Discuss plans for transporting students within the local district to and from school. What arrangements, if any, will be made with the local school board?

Because PVCS is a virtual school, there will be no need to transport students to or from a school building on a daily basis. On rare occasions, students and parents will be required to meet their fellow school community members or take proctored examinations in nearby locations and regional centers, or in the home base in Norristown. For these occasions, transportation will be provided or arranged when necessary, subject to the terms of the Student-Parent-School Compact.

B. If you plan to implement an extended-day or extended-year program that requires transportation beyond that which the district provides, what arrangements will be made to transport students?

Transportation will not be needed for extended-day or extended-year programs.

C. What plans are being made for coordination of transportation of students who live outside the local district to be transported to the school?

Ordinarily, transportation will not be needed for our school. In the case of mandatory school-sponsored trips, transportation may be provided or arranged for some students, subject to the terms of the Student-Parent-School Compact.

6. Food Service

A. Describe the food service plan of the school.

The school will not offer food service.

B. What are the plans for free lunch or reduced lunch or breakfast?

The school will not offer food service.

7. Timetable

A. Provide a detailed timetable of projected steps and dates leading to the opening of a charter school.

Year 2000 Activities

August-October	Planning sessions by the Founding Coalition.
September-October	Discussions and writing a draft of the application for a charter school.
November	Founding Coalition approves the submission of the application.
November	Application receives a final review prior to its submission.
November 15	Application is submitted.
December-February	Meetings with community residents and potential parents and students to inform groups about the school's programs.
December	Founding Coalition prepares for Norristown School Board hearings.
December	Founding Coalition prepares for the transition to the Board of Trustees.

Year 2001 Activities

January	Founding Coalition selects the Board of Trustees.
January	The Board of Trustees is seated and sworn in; votes on policies and program, begins the selection of the CAO position and announces the next positions to be advertised.
February	The Trustees interview and select a CAO.
March	Pre-registration of students.
March-June	Interviews and selection of other school personnel.
March - June	The Board announces the results of the enrollment drive and submits to the state department of education documentation to support the acquiring of start-up funds.
March-June	The CAO meets with parents, potential staff members, and community members to form the formal and informal structures identified in other sections of this application, i.e., committees, advisory councils, etc.
March-June	Orders and purchases are filed and approved by the Trustees so that all needed materials will be on hand for the summer work of staff and for the opening of school in September.
April	Hold a lottery among those students who have applied for admission. Develop a waiting list for those students not admitted due to registrations larger than the available seats in each grade.
June-September	All administrative building code inspections have been completed.
July	Student rostering and faculty assignments are completed.
July-August	Summer professional development work completed.

August	Students and parents are sent orientation packets regarding the school's program. Parents are directed to view the school's website in preparation for the start of the school year.
August	All students and parents have completed an orientation to the school, have received all appropriate information about the start of school, and have obtained their equipment and materials and are ready for the opening of school.
August	Students and parents will have met with their teacher in person to begin establishing a strong, supportive relationship.
August	All students assessed through placement tests for assignment to appropriate learning modules.
September 5	School opens.

8. Safety

A. Submit written documentation of intent to comply with the following to demonstrate the safety and structural soundness of the school:

Because the school will be a virtual school, there will be no need for a school building where classes are held. Administrative offices will comply with all ADA and OSHA requirements. The school will obtain all necessary permits for these offices prior to opening in 2001.

9. School Health Services

A. Describe your plan for providing school health services as required under Article XIV of the public school code.

Although our charter school will be primarily a virtual school, with students remaining with the families or guardians for instruction, we do expect that students will meet in person and participate in some school-sponsored activities together. Therefore, it will be necessary that all children obtain the immunizations required for school attendance in Pennsylvania prior to their starting school, and that we have nursing services available for school-sponsored events.

Immunization forms and other pertinent medical records will be kept by the school administration. Nursing services will be contracted when students gather for events. Parents are expected to obtain proper immunizations prior to matriculating their children. Those parents who are having difficulty obtaining immunizations for their children will be provided information on where to get immunized in their community. The immunizations required for attendance at PVCS are listed below.

Immunizations¹

All children, prior to attending school, must be immunized as required by the Department of Health under 28 Pa Code Chapter 23 as a condition of attendance at school, unless exempt for medical/religious reasons under 28 Pa Code §23.84. Specific dosages and time schedules are described in Pa Code 28 §23.83 (a), (b) and (c).

¹ 22 Pa Code 11.20 Non-immunized Children

The following is a list of required immunizations for attendance: Diphtheria, Tetanus, Poliomyelitis, Measles (rubeola), German measles (rubella), and Mumps.

The following is a list of required immunizations for entry for first time kindergarten or first grade students: Hepatitis B, Diphtheria, Tetanus, Poliomyelitis, Measles (rubeola).

B. Describe how school nursing services, including administration of medication, will be delivered?

Although the great majority of time our students spend in school activities will be under the supervision of their parent or other responsible adult, there will be times when they are gathered for school functions when a nurse may be in attendance. The nurse will be hired on a part-time or contracted basis for these activities.

At these special school gatherings, the nurse will:

- A. Provide emergency care for accidents and illness in the school.
 1. Evaluate condition of ill or injured students and take appropriate action.
 2. Follow established policies in rendering first aid to student and school personnel.
 3. Assist in recommending policies for care of the ill or injured.
 4. Administer medication to students as per approved Board policy.
- B. Communicate with students, parents/guardians, teachers, and administrators to serve the best interests of students regarding health services.
 1. Promote health education through student contact.
 2. Provide health education resource materials within the limits of resources available.
 3. Participate in faculty and student teacher orientation to Health Services program where applicable.