



Los Angeles County
ALLIANCE FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Overview of Charter School Network

Vision for the Alliance Charter Network

The Los Angeles Alliance for Student Achievement believes strongly that public education is essential and that we must find ways, as a not-for-profit organization, to support public education. Through our experiences as LAAMP and LEARN—and now as the Alliance—our commitment has been focused on raising student achievement and determining how we can address governance and structural issues that have limited the delivery of the public instruction and learning opportunities that students deserve.

The Alliance intends to create a network of charter schools that will be highly accountable models of innovation to stimulate effective change that can lead to the improvement of public education for all students in Los Angeles. We believe that these new public schools will provide for the development of valuable innovations that could create alternative models of change to improve instruction, student learning and achievement levels. They will also offer renewed opportunities for communities to be engaged in the education of their children.

Why a Network

There are charter schools in Los Angeles that are providing a quality education to their students, reaching out to their community, and engaging in innovative educational and governance practices. However, most of these schools are often isolated from other schools who are also engaged in innovative practices and providing a quality education. Creating a network of charter schools allows schools to collaborate, learn from each other, and support each other in their shared goal to provide a quality education.

A recent study found that when school networks create structures that decentralize power and distribute organizational resources throughout the network, they also enhance school capacity for reform (Wohlstetter, 2002). We believe that by doing this, we can inform policies and practices for the benefit of all students in the school system.

Education Model

Each school will have a curriculum, staffing, and teaching approach that is tailored to the specific needs of its students and their families. Yet all schools will employ a standard core curriculum, a standard student assessment system to measure progress, and a common reporting system for purposes of accountability. Every school will have a total commitment to student achievement.

Governance

An Alliance charter school will have representation from the community it serves on their Board of Directors for the charter petition and in its general operations as well as a member of the Alliance Board of Directors or staff.

Theory of Change

Our theory of change is predicated on two elements: 1) what the data show about student achievement trends and, 2) how our conceptual framework can create opportunities to build charter schools that meet the needs of the academically neediest students.

The key elements of our conceptual framework are as follows:

- Focus on student achievement
- Decentralization by design
- Local decision making and local budgeting involving all key stakeholders
- Educational decisions driven by student needs and differentiated professional education
- Direct state and federal funding based on students served
- A performance-based component of salary for faculty and staff
- School-based contracting for services
- A network of support based on individual school needs
- Families of schools from K through 12+ committed to having all students college-ready by the end of their secondary schooling

Community Outreach

The Alliance believes strongly that charter schools should reflect the community where they are located. The Alliance can facilitate the development of an outreach and community development plan that will seek to: identify families to enroll their children at the new school; identify and develop parent leadership in support of the school; identify and nurture strategic alliances with community and neighborhood groups and organizations to ensure broad support for the charter school; establish structures of support and participation within the school to ensure that parents and community engagement remain an integral element of the school's mission and scope of activities.

School Model

- **School calendar** is extended to 185 - 200 instructional days; year-round staff contracts, depending on school size and fiscal viability;
- **Administrative staffing model** will have a Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Academic Dean (instructional leader). This structure will nurture the creation of a "flat" organization focused on learning;
- **Collaborative professional education** will be embedded into daily operations of each school in order to support a professional teaching and learning culture focused on continuous improvement;
- **Compensation and benefits system** will be at or above the UTLA/LAUSD negotiated salary schedule, with bonuses based on performance and recommendations by peer-reviewed teacher evaluations.

- **Technology use** will be three tiered: management, monitoring, and instructional. For example, technology solutions will be applied to the following tasks:
 - Month-to-month cash flow monitoring;
 - Review of resource allocation and expenditures;
 - Network posting of student performance;
 - Connecting schools to all information required for internal accountability;
 - Computer-assisted assessment, instruction, textbooks, and homework completion (CDs).
- **Facilities** will be acquired and renovated to fit the school model, for example, to accommodate project-based learning and to create faculty space for lesson study planning and assessment (common planning space).

Educational Design

- School size: enrollment will range from 300 to 800. This design is based on small learning communities research to maximize student performance and best use of community facilities.
- Pedagogy and educational philosophy: all school instruction will be standards-based, project-based, and a strategy for measuring the quality of instruction; we will use regular performance assessments to create a powerful culture of respect for learning throughout the school and its community.
- Curricular content:
 - Language “bridge” programs for English Language Learners
 - Algebra preparatory programs
 - Project-based instruction (K-12)
 - Foreign language instruction (K-12)
 - ‘A-G’ requirements for all high schools
 - Higher education ‘bridge’ programs
 - All standards-based instructional program/assessments
 - Research-based reading and mathematics programs
 - Visual and performing arts for all students (K-12)
 - High school pathways such as: Advanced Communications (Multimedia and Design, Telecommunications), Global Dynamics (Law & Order, Economic, Marketing/Advertising), Professional Sciences (Biomedicine, Forensic Sciences, Environmental Sciences), Engineering and Product Development (Engineering Design, Product Development) based on English Language Arts, Science, Mathematics, Technology, and Finance
- Student performance data to inform instruction and assessment at all levels, starting with the student level to classroom, to school and to network levels.

Proposed Alliance Partnership Elements

The substance of the partnership between a developer of a charter high school and the Alliance centers on several key areas of agreement:

1. The Alliance will assist the developer in the completion of the charter petition through guidance and evaluation of proposal.
2. In collaboration, we will identify space for a potential secondary school in that can serve as a small learning community for no more than 800 students (9-12th grades).
3. The Alliance will assist in the acquisition and financing of facilities for the charter school.
4. The Alliance will help identify potential funders and facilitating grant applications (such as planning and implementation funds from the state).
5. The charter school will be aligned to state standards and with an innovative design.
6. The Alliance will offer the charter school support for "back office" activities as needed (business plan, budget, human resources, credentialing through county, curriculum and service ideas for special education and English Learners).
7. The Alliance will offer professional development for teachers in coordination with other schools in the Charter network that the school faculty will participate in.
8. A school- and network-wide accountability system will be established for the charter school to inform instruction and report student achievement to the classroom level, school-wide, and to the district and communities.
9. The school will provide evaluation of progress and work with the Alliance to capture best practices and lessons learned to share more widely.
10. The Alliance will assist in developing outreach strategies to inform and engage the community about the charter school.

The Alliance will not charge directly for these services, but, once the school is operational, will have a mutually agreed upon fee for services.