

**RICHLAND ACADEMY OF THE ARTS
COMMUNITY SCHOOL APPLICATION APPROVAL POLICY**

Adopted: February 25, 2016
Revisited

POLICY: COMMUNITY SCHOOL APPLICATION APPROVAL

SUBJECT: Community School Sponsorship Duties

PURPOSE: To establish a policy which ensures community school (school) applications are approved after being thoroughly vetted through a well documented and systematic application process.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENT: Ohio Revised Code 3314.016

INTRODUCTION

As a sponsor of community schools, Richland Academy of the Arts (RAA) is committed to offering quality public school choice options to the students and families in Ohio. We continually strive to partner with school governing authority boards (boards) to meet the needs of struggling students and to make strong academic programs available to all students in Ohio. We believe together we – the sponsor, governing authority and community school leadership, staff, parents and students – can accomplish this goal through a strong, transparent, well documented and systematic community school application process and agreement.

RAA believes that an arts and academic integrated curriculum, which supports and offers superior arts and academic opportunities, will provide students with an opportunity to develop their talents, gifts and abilities and flourish in both arts and academics. To this end RAA's mission, vision and focus is to promote and support the development of community schools which offer an arts and academic integrated curriculum based on Ohio's Academic Standards. We have also become aware of a significant need for high quality bilingual schools in Ohio to meet the needs of Hispanic and Somali students. To this end RAA will give proposals addressing the needs of these students a high priority.

RAA'S EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

Mission: To provide the oversight, monitoring, resources and leadership needed and wanted by its sponsored community schools for them to provide their students with superior academic opportunities while maintaining sound financial viability without violating their autonomy.

Vision: To sponsor schools with autonomous boards who are knowledgeable, capable and dedicated to continuously ensuring their schools meet superior academic, financial, organizational and governance standards and are committed to protecting the student and public interests.

Principles and Core Values: RAA's five core values align with NACSA's Core Principles. NASCA's Core Principles:

- Maintain high standards for schools
- Uphold school autonomy
- Protect student and public interests

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RAA's Education and Development Program Five Core Values are:

- **Commitment:** The Education and Development Program is committed to continuously evaluate its work against its mission, vision, goals and outcomes and to ensure it is meeting its sponsor obligations and compliance with applicable laws through quality oversight practices that promote high educational and operational standards, preserves school-level autonomy, and safeguards student and public interests.
- **Professionalism:** The Education and Development Program demonstrates professionalism by treating community school governing authorities, staff, students and parents with respect and dignity through oversight, monitoring and technical assistance. RAA's sponsor expertise and referrals align with national and state standards and principles in order to meet the needs, wants and desires of the sponsored community schools. RAA's focus is to assist its schools to excel academically, meet high financial standards and safeguard student and public interests while preserving school-level autonomy.
- **Creativity:** The Education and Development Program will promote creative educational experiences for all students in the schools it sponsors through its contract education plans, newsletters, resources and grant opportunities. Our focus is the students and what they learn and create, as we strive for ingenuity and unique learning opportunities. Research demonstrates that high-quality arts education engages students in the work of learning, thinking, communicating, creating and collaborating. It fosters 21st century skills needed for advanced learning and career success. It also helps meet the increasing demand for imagination and creativity that enrich culture, drive economic progress and help solve the problems of a complex, global society.
- **Inspiration:** The Education and Development Program identifies and promotes resources that will enable its schools to provide students with meaningful and inspirational educational experiences that can be applied to their lives. RAA will achieve this through providing its community schools with attractive and informative technical assistance resources and information that is relevant and immediately applicable. The information will validate and supplement current knowledge and life experiences which lead to the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and abilities, provides opportunities for practice and positive feedback and engages their passion for their schools' students, staff, board members, parents and community.
- **Community:** The Education and Development Program philosophy regarding parent community and community involvement can be summed up in this statement: for community schools to succeed they must promote, develop and nurture positive, supportive and cooperative relationships with their parents and community.

Pledge for The Education and Development Program

We are determined to provide our schools with oversight, monitoring, technical assistance, autonomy and transparency with passion, dedication, fervor and creativity.

RAA'S SCHOOL APPLICATION GUIDELINES

Process, Timeline, and Clarity of Directions

- RAA's application process will be well documented and systematic.
- RAA's application timeline allows for a pre-opening stage of least nine months so that the application process is carried out with quality and integrity. It aligns with the school year and provides ample time to adequately complete the application, plan, and prepare for the school's opening.

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- RAA's application guidance is documented, detailed and readily available to the public through the sponsor's website.
- RAA's application includes the procedure to submit (word length, font size, electronic/paper), includes references to assist the applicant, etc.).
- RAA's application provides clear directions on required content and format.
- RAA's application includes documents and clearly communicates to applicants the criteria it uses to evaluate its applications.
- RAA's application clearly states the sponsor's chartering priorities.
- RAA's application process includes interviewing final applicants before adopting a contract.

Application

- RAA's application process includes comprehensive, detailed application questions cross-referencing the four main areas of school planning and operations: the education, governance, finance (including market research) and accountability plans.
- RAA's application process includes a requirement for the applicant to provide extensive data for rigorous evaluation of the applicant's plans and capacities. Examples of such are but limited to:
 - The needs assessment of the school's target neighborhood and student population, including current student demographics and academic performance of other schools in the charter in which the school will be located.
 - A projection of the expected academic impact of the proposed school model on the students.
 - A detailed description of the process used to assess local need including details of findings.
 - An explanation and description of the school's curriculum, its alignment to the Ohio standards and benchmarks, specific instructional materials to be used to implement the curriculum.
 - The process the school will follow to evaluate, review and revise its curriculum on an annual basis.

Criteria for new applicants, including any affiliations with previously operating schools

- RAA's application requires all applicants to provide strong evidence and detail on all of the following:
 - a clear and compelling mission and vision;
 - a quality educational program;
 - a solid business plan (including market and charter research);
 - an effective governance and management structure;
 - staffing for people with diverse knowledge in education, school finance, etc.; and
 - clear evidence of capacity to successfully execute its plan.
- The applicant must explain any never-opened, terminated, or non-renewed schools.
- RAA's application includes a requirement to examine the proximately of choice options and niche schools, and unmet needs, such as lack of schools with specialized focus.

Criteria for existing school operators/replicators

- If a school is being replicated, it must have been in operation for two or more school years.
- RAA's application requires the applicant to meet the following criteria:
 - Clear evidence of capacity to operate a new school successfully while maintaining quality in existing schools;

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- Documentation of educational, organizational, and financial performance records based on all existing schools;
- Explanation of any never-opened, terminated, or non-renewed schools;
- Presentation of a growth plan, business plan, and most recent financial audits; and
- Meet multiple indicators of effectiveness in all of the following areas:
 - high academic,
 - organization, and
 - financial success to earn approval for replication (such as: never had an un-auditable school; no general education or special education school rated below the top two LRC categories; no dropout prevention and recovery schools rated below “meets”, etc.)

Criteria for schools changing authorizer/assignment of contract

- RAA’s application requires the applicant to provide educational, organizational, and financial performance records to evaluate the school’s capacity to operate successfully, meeting and/or exceeding its performance targets.
- RAA’s application process includes a face to face interview with the applicant *and* contact with the school’s current authorizer.
- RAA’s application process may include visiting the school and/or attending a board meeting.
- RAA’s application does not consider contracting with a charter school that is being non-renewed by its current authorizer.
- RAA’s application process to consider authorizing a currently operating school is publicly available.

Reviewer expertise

- Reviewers should have deep understanding of essential principles, gained through training and/or several years working in the field and mastering the principles.
- RAA’s reviewers have an understanding of community schools and authorizing for several years, and have diverse expertise (and certification where appropriate) in the following areas:
 - Curriculum, instruction and assessment;
 - Special education and ELL instruction;
 - School accountability;
 - School facilities;
 - School law;
 - School finance; and,
 - School governance.
- When existing RAA staff do not have the range of expertise needed, RAA contracts with external sources to complete particular aspects of the application review.

Protocols and training

- RAA’s evaluation includes a detailed review of the written application, an in-depth interview with finalists, and a thorough background review of the applicant’s experience and capacity.
- RAA’s application evaluators are trained annually on the selection criteria, the evaluation process and the protocols (e.g., interview guides used for all applicants, rubrics that require the evaluator to score and document how the applicant rates on the selection criteria, etc.).
- RAA’s review team documents in detail the evidence to support whether or not the applicant meets the selection criteria.

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- RAA's Conflict of Interest policy and process are consistently followed to ensure all internal and external reviewers do not have a real or perceived conflict of interest with the applicants they are reviewing.
- RAA requires a formal written conflict of interest statement to be signed by every internal and external reviewer of applicants.
- RAA initiates and documents the removal of an internal or external reviewer from evaluating an application if a formal conflict of interest is found.

Rigorous decision making

- Rigorous decisions are based upon a thorough analysis of a comprehensive body of objective evidence.
- RAA's application process only approves applicants meeting all, or almost all, of the complete criteria. Any perceived minor deficiencies are addressed in the contract process.
- RAA only enters into preliminary agreements with schools that meet all of the following specific criteria:
 - Clear capacity to successfully operate a new school (e.g., lack of staffing, lack of resources, questionable governance, history of poor performance, etc.);
 - Researched data shows strong market demand for the proposed school (e.g., mission, location, grades served, proximity of high quality public & private school options);
 - Quality educational program; and
 - Solid business plan and a start-up budget to support the school's launch and sustained early operations.
- RAA's application process will not approve a school that has been recycled (previously closed or non-renewed by its previous authorizer).

