

**INDEPENDENCE CHARTER SCHOOL**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

**2007 – 2009**

**Adopted by the ICS Board of Trustees**  
**April 11, 2007**

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## **OUR VISION FOR ICS IN 2017<sup>1</sup>**

By 2017, the Independence Charter School is one of the best schools in Philadelphia and renowned for its language and world cultures programs far beyond the city. We have a \$20 million endowment and enviable facilities with multiple locations. ICS is attracting the best teachers and graduating successful students, since we provide a supportive, nurturing, and enriching environment for children of all backgrounds. The Board has streamlined its roles and responsibilities and “long” Board meetings are now no more than two and a half hours. ICS is the benchmark for parent involvement in governance.

There are 20 children in every class and both teaching and learning are personalized for individual needs. Our excellent veteran teaching staff feels fully supported. There are fewer discipline problems and we have a more streamlined discipline process. Families are choosing to stay at ICS beyond fifth grade for ICS’s exceptional educational programs. We have a stable, balanced, and rigorous curriculum which challenges students at every level and includes the fine arts, business and managerial classes, life skills courses, one of the best geography programs in the country, and a foreign exchange program. In addition to offering a top-notch education, ICS meets both the physical and emotional needs of its children, including encouraging children to be more aware of and responsible for their health. We have a healthy school lunch program, recycle paper, cans and plastic, and offer transportation services.

We have bridged the gap between the FLES and immersion programs and have become one, cohesive community. ICS is a model for superb language instruction. There is now a high school choice for ICS students that want to continue in immersion and we are facilitating the placement of every eighth grader into a quality high school and helping them to secure scholarships. We are graduating fluent Spanish-speaking students, as well as multilingual speakers. And our first graduates are now gainfully employed in work that they enjoy.

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<sup>1</sup> This section was created at the Strategic Planning Retreat as a brainstorming exercise among the participants to generate ideas and energy for the future.

## **OUR CORE VALUES**

- ❖ We have high academic standards that apply to all students.
- ❖ We are committed to graduating bilingual and multilingual students.
- ❖ We value small class sizes. Teaching and learning should be personalized.
- ❖ We value diversity, and that is reflected in our students, staff, families, Board, and international curriculum.
- ❖ We respect one another and practice honest, open, and direct communication, assuming positive intent.
- ❖ We teach critical thinking and problem-solving skills so that our students become life-long learners who really “understand,” rather than merely “know” things.
- ❖ We have high behavioral expectations for our students and believe that, given a nurturing environment, children can succeed.

## **STRATEGIC GOALS FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS**

### **Curriculum**

- Revise, develop, and improve our international/world cultures curriculum so that it is a model program;
- Revise, develop, and improve our language acquisition programs; and
- Establish a curriculum framework that is fully developed, streamlined, and consistent with the mission, including a framework for the middle school.

### **Teachers & Staff**

- Offer a competitive compensation program, including benefits, leave pay, etc. and recruit diverse, experienced personnel.

### **Board**

- Establish clear expectations and procedures for communication and the delegation of decisions among and between the Board, staff, and the school community.

### **Fundraising**

- Develop a program and plan to raise enough funding to sufficiently support ICS's mission and goals.

### **Facility**

- Expand and improve our facilities to accommodate the needs of our growing student population.

## **TACTICS FOR ACHIEVING STRATEGIC GOALS**

### **I. Expand and Enhance the Curriculum**

- A. Revise, develop and improve the FLES and immersion programs so that we have a model ICS foreign language program
  - 1. Establish a task force comprised of Board members, teachers, parents and administrators to evaluate the two programs.
  - 2. Establish a process for evaluating other language programs by January 10, 2007, including research and soliciting expert input on various models, as well as input from the school's various constituencies.
  - 3. Make a final decision at the June 2007 Board meeting, based on the task force's recommendations.
  - 4. Revise the primary grade education model by December 1, 2007, if necessary, in preparation for 2008.
  - 5. Evaluate staffing needs consistent with the decision made in June and develop a plan to retain, train, and recruit appropriate staff for the adopted model by September 1, 2007.
  
- B. Establish a curriculum framework that is fully developed, streamlined, and consistent with the mission, including a framework for the middle school
  - 1. Establish a review process and timeline to evaluate the middle school curriculum by May, 2007.
  - 2. Complete a review of the middle school curriculum by November of 2007.
  - 3. Evaluate potential adjustments to the middle school curriculum by March of 2008.
  - 4. Adopt a model ICS middle school curriculum by May of 2008.

- C. Revise, develop, and improve our international/world cultures curriculum so that it is a model program
  - 1. Adopt a definition of “model program” by April 2008.
  - 2. Establish a process to evaluate the world cultures curriculum by May 2008.
  - 3. Complete the evaluation of the world cultures curriculum, including the evaluation of other model programs, by November 2008.
  - 4. Adopt adjustments and revisions to the program by February 2009, if recommended.
  - 5. Implement adopted model program by September 2009.
  
- D. Consider the costs and benefits of shifting to one foreign language program.
  - 1. Establish a review process for our two program (FLES and Immersion) model by May 2009. An initial discussion of criteria for this decision process was generated at the planning retreat and is attached as Appendix A.
  - 2. Establish a timeline for making a decision to continue to offer two programs or make the change to one program.

## **II. Recruit and Retain a Competent, Experienced, and Diverse Staff**

- A. Review, evaluate, and strengthen our teacher recruitment efforts

The CEO and the Board of Trustees will work together to accomplish the following goals:

- 1. The CEO shall designate the person or team to be responsible for Black teacher recruitment.

2. Revise the teacher recruitment program by June 1, 2007 to strengthen the recruitment of a diverse teaching staff.
  3. Increase the diversity of the teaching staff, with emphasis on the middle school, for the 2007-2008 school year.
  4. Increase the diversity of the entire teaching staff for the 2008-2009 school year when opportunities are presented and consistent with our need to hire highly qualified teachers.
  5. Re-evaluate the recruitment process for immersion teachers.
- B. Assure that current teaching staff achieves certification by June 30, 2007
1. All current teachers who are not fully certified for the position which they hold must gain ABCTE temporary “certification” (highly qualified status) by June 30, 2007 and attest in a written, signed document their program of study in subsequent months to gain Pennsylvania Instructional I status.
  2. All current teachers who hold an Intern certification status will provide a written and signed document detailing their program of study in subsequent months to gain Pennsylvania Instructional I status.
  3. Teachers who have not undertaken any certification programs, including those named above, may be placed on probation and may not be offered a contract for the coming year.
  4. In every way possible, and especially the Principal/CEO will make every effort to recruit teachers who currently hold Pennsylvania certification.
- C. Increase staff retention
1. Establish “teacher retention” targets to decrease classroom teacher turnover at the end of the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years by June of 2007.

2. Establish and implement a process by January 2008 to ascertain the causes of staff turnover which were in excess of the targets.
- C. Offer a competitive compensation program, including benefits, leave pay, etc.
1. Complete a comparison between ICS salaries, salary schedule, and benefits package and other public charter schools, the Philadelphia public schools, and surrounding school districts by December 2007.
  2. Determine available resources to increase the competitiveness of the compensation packages for 2008-2009 school year by December 2007.
  3. Adjust the compensation packages as appropriate for each school year and continue to set annual targets until parity is reached.
- D. Establish competitive compensation for administrative and administrative support staff

### **III. Clarify Board Communication and Decision-Making**

- A. Assess and revise committee structure

The Executive and Policy Committees will work together to assess the current committee structure and determine if any adjustments need to be made to maximize productivity and efficiency. Any restructuring deemed necessary will be implemented by September 15, 2007. Each committee chair will be responsible for drafting a written set of responsibilities and establishing a regular meeting schedule.

- B. Create and implement Board meeting ground rules for communication

The Board developed and adopted a set of ground rules at its December 13, 2006 meeting. These will be reviewed, revised, and expanded as needed on a biannual basis. Ground rules are attached as Appendix B.

- C. Establish specific roles and responsibilities of Board members and staff

At the planning retreat, the participants brainstormed lists of responsibilities for Board members and the CEO, which is attached as Appendix C. The CEO will be responsible for drafting a list for teachers and other staff. The Board will review, revise, and finalize a staff model by June 2007 and all job descriptions by July 2007.

- D. Increase the efficiency of Board meetings

In addition to enforcing the established ground rules, the Board President will identify and implement additional ways to increase efficiency, including: streamlining the agenda, distributing materials well in advance of meetings, establishing allocated times per item for discussion, calling for votes, and announcing when decisions have been made.

- E. Improve communications among board via committees and by board to larger community

Effective January 1, 2007, all major committee activities and decisions will be communicated to the full Board, both electronically and in hard copy on a monthly basis. In addition, the Board will find improved ways to communicate with the larger community, including writing a column in the monthly parent newsletter (effective January 2007), sending home messages about important issues, and holding larger stakeholder meetings to convey significant developments as needed.

- F. Recruit Board and Advisory Committee members

Once the strategic plan is adopted, the Executive Committee will work with the Policy Committee to make a recommendation to the Board about the optimal number of board seats. The Executive Committee will work with the Community Relations Committee on nominations for open Board seats and the role and responsibility of the Advisory Committee, its relationship to the Board of Trustees, and plans for its recruitment. The goal is to have a full Board and the Advisory Committee active by the Board's December 2007 meeting.

#### **IV. Raise Sufficient Funding to Support ICS's Mission and Goals**

##### **A. Maintain an active Development Committee**

The Development Committee is responsible for identifying where revenue can potentially be increased, developing fundraising plans, presenting those plans to the Board for their revision and approval, and providing leadership for, organizing, and coordinating fundraising activities. The Committee will also be responsible for overseeing grant writing from a strategic policy perspective, while the Curriculum Committee and CEO are responsible for the actual writing.

##### **B. Develop a comprehensive written fundraising plan**

The Development Committee will draft a multi-year fundraising plan, including policies, goals and methods, which will be reviewed, revised, and finalized by the Board by June 30, 2007. Subsequent annual plans will be developed each year by the Committee and reviewed, revised and finalized by the Board.

##### **C. Establish an endowment fund of \$2 million by 2010**

1. Develop a strategy, including materials and talking points, for the solicitation of donors for the endowment by June 30, 2007.
2. Identify initial potential donors for the endowment in 2007.
3. Establish annual goals for the growth of the endowment by 2007.

##### **D. Ensure that all Board members are actively engaged in fundraising**

Every Board member is expected to contribute both time and dollars. The role of the Board is clear and unavoidable: they must set an exemplary pace to all prospective donors by giving the most generous gift of which they are financially capable. The goal is to have 100% of the Board making at least a minimum personal gift, and where appropriate, a company gift. To this end, the Development Committee will recommend roles and responsibilities for individual Board members, as well as for the Board as a whole. Standards will be adopted by the June 2007.

- E. Ensure that all parents are making personally significant financial contributions each year

The Board will be responsible for communicating this expectation to each new family upon enrollment, and the Development Committee will be responsible for establishing and overseeing annual parent solicitation programs into its fundraising plans.

**V. Ensure that Facilities Meet the Needs of the Expanding Student Body**

- A. Establish facility options.

At the March 14, 2007 meeting, the Board voted to default on its Agreement of Sale with the School District of Philadelphia for the Durham Building, primarily because the project greatly exceeded our budget and did not provide the space and fit that we initially had hoped for. The Executive Committee is now in negotiations with CHAD and Designing Futures Foundation to purchase the first and second floors of the building we currently occupy.

- B. Secure additional space

Finalize the Definitive Agreement with CHAD/Designing Futures Foundation for the option to purchase these floors no later than May 9, 2007 and implement the decision by the June 2007 Board meeting.

- C. Assess future facility needs

In the event we are not able to work out an agreement to purchase floors in the building we currently occupy, the board will immediately establish a task force of Board members to revisit programming and facility needs.

**VI. Annually Review Progress on the Strategic Plan and Make Appropriate Adjustments**

- A. Schedule review of the areas of Curriculum, Teachers/Staff, Board, Fundraising, and Facility on an on-going basis
- B. Initiate a new strategic planning process in January of 2009

## APPENDIX A

### **FLES and IMMERSION: TO MERGE OR NOT TO MERGE?**

#### Established Criteria for Our Decision-Making Process:

- Can we staff the program?
- How will it impact the size of the school?
- What are the implications for a future facility?
- How will it impact future students and families?
- Will it create a stronger student body?
- Will it create a cohesive student body?
- What level of language proficiency do we want?
- What impact will it have on diversity of the school?
- What does Philadelphia need more?
- Is it consistent with our core values?
- How can we reduce the current disunity?
- What does the empirical data & research tell us?
- Will it allow us to achieve our 3-year goals?
- What is the fiscal impact?
- Is it the best program for the greatest number of children?

“Advisory straw pull” to present to the full Board:

# votes for one program	=	<b>9</b>
# votes for two programs	=	<b>7</b>

## **APPENDIX B**

### **BOARD MEETING GROUND RULES**

Adopted at the December 2006 BOT Meeting:

1. We assume positive intent.
2. One person speaks at a time, in order.
3. No sidebar conversations.
4. We want to hear from everyone.
5. Set and respect time limits.
6. We encourage brevity (no holding forth).
7. Apply a relevancy test when speaking.
8. We have clear goals for our meetings.

## APPENDIX C

### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### Board Responsibilities:

- Recruit, hire, evaluate, and when necessary, replace CEO
- Govern all operations, but may delegate day-to-day management to CEO
- Establish policies in accordance with charter
- Responsible for strategic issues, maintaining founders' vision and school's mission
- Fiduciary responsibility
- Anything related to facility/real property
- Educational programs and goals (the what, not the how)
- Appoint committees and govern selection of committee members and chairs
- Appoint transparent and functional committees
- Recruit new Board members
- Specify its responsibilities and those of staff
- Fundraising
- Provide written delegation of powers to the CEO
- Provide advice as requested and advised by the CEO (Executive Committee)
- Revise the by-laws when appropriate
- Communicate Board decisions to fellow members, staff, and the community at-large

### CEO's Responsibilities:

- Keep children safe
- Implement curriculum
- Keep the Board informed
- Research and recommend methods for attaining goals
- Implement policies and procedures
- Recruit, hire, supervise, and fire staff
- Complete tasks delegated but not executed by Board
- Delegate tasks to staff
- Develop and maintain communication between students, parents, teachers, staff, and Board
- Maintain student records
- Represent school to larger community
- Propose annual budget
- Implement Board approved and adopted budget
- Make recommendations for resource allocation and professional development
- Manage time of administrative staff to implement the goals of the Board
- Manage facilities
- Implement fundraising
- Facilitate administration and staff input into subcommittee process