



Living School

An equity-focused, democratic, project-based high school

Fall 2018 Charter School Application

Eligibility Determination & Threshold for Evaluation (Part 1)

Executive Summary

Provide a two to four page overview of your school or network, including:

- (1) Explain the mission and vision of your school. What will your school set out to achieve in the long term, what will success look like, and how will your school get there?
- (2) Include information on what success will look like for students while attending your school, and after they leave your school (The outcomes you will achieve);
- (3) How does your school align with the district's charter authorizing priorities?
- (4) What are the elements of your educational model that will meet the needs of your target student population?
- (5) Explain why your school would be important to the community in which you are proposing to locate.
- (6) Who will your school collaborate with? What community support has the school generated? Who will your school work with to be well positioned within the city and community?

TYPE YOUR RESPONSE IN THE BOX BELOW, IT WILL EXPAND AS NEEDED.

(1) What if New Orleans public schools were designed to improve life through the way they educate students? What if they focused on graduating healthier students? What if our schools were charged with creating more equitable communities and a deeper relationship with nature? In short, what if, in addition to providing a strong academic experience, our schools could help students improve all aspects of their lives, communities, and environment?

In the 13 years since Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans has seen a renaissance of energy, resources, and attention for its effort to improve public education for all (Leonhardt, 2018; Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, 2018; Vanacore, 2017; and New Schools for New Orleans, 2015). However, there is a broad consensus that despite this progress, our schools are still falling short of delivering on the promise of equity to all students in New Orleans (Urban League of Louisiana, 2018; Cowen Institute of Tulane University, 2018; New Orleans Equity Index, 2017; Orleans Public Education Network, 2016).

We need our schools to give all of our children a world-class education that helps our entire city become healthier & more equitable.

Living School is an equity-focused, democratic, project-based high school that improves life for all. We provide our students with a totally new type of education that delivers a rigorous academic program while fostering holistic wellness, active citizenship and social entrepreneurship.

Our Mission:

Living School cultivates equity by nurturing students to do work that improves their lives, communities, and environment through holistic health, citizenship, and entrepreneurship.

Our Vision:

We envision a world where all children get what they need to live healthy, rewarding lives in equitable, peaceful communities. Our school improves lives by helping students graduate with college-acceptance, a living-wage job offer, and the habits of a holistically healthy life. We intentionally integrate diverse people and methods in a democratic and cooperative setting to do real work that benefits real people, communities, and ecosystems.

Our Long-Term Goals:

Our mission, vision, and design principles have helped us articulate long-term goals. We aim to make three key impacts in service of our mission:

1. **Alumni outcomes:** We cultivate authentic, equitable life outcomes for our students.
 - a. **Post-secondary success:** 100% of Living School alumni are persisting in post-secondary education and/or careers with growing socio-economic opportunity. All students will continue making positive life choices after graduation that improve their own health and that of their community and environment.
 - b. **Sustained health:** Longitudinal metrics indicate that 100% of our alumni perform significantly above average in six measures of holistic health: prevalence of preventable & treatable disease, avoidance of high-risk behaviors, housing stability, healthy relationship networks, healthy habits, and sense of well-being.
 - c. **Real-world work:** Our students & alumni do work that improves our city's ongoing ecological, social, economic and political challenges.

2. **Proof point:** We create and spread an equity-focused, democratic, project-based model that proves it is possible to educate our children based on multiple bottom lines.
 - a. The prevalence of college-persistence, living-wage persistence, and longitudinal holistic health become industry standard for schools across New Orleans.
 - b. We are impacting local Graduate Schools of Education to support accreditation and growth for master teachers in our multidisciplinary, project-based pedagogy.
 - c. We support the incubation of similar models elsewhere through collaboration, professional development, teacher residencies and fellowships, and university partnerships.
 - d. Local CMOs borrow and iterate on elements of Living School's model to both expand and improve it, shifting the dialogue around New Orleans education.

3. **Equitable organization:** Our employees represent our stakeholders (primarily native New Orleanians of color), and we pay all at least a living wage, and promote equity through our organization.
 - a. All team members have opportunities for growth and development, and they report improving measures of holistic health.
 - b. Our investments align with our values: we bank and partner with minority-owned businesses, vendors, and organizations that embody our values.
 - c. We cultivate critically conscious teams that promote equity and diversity.

(2) **Our Authentic, Equitable Student Goals**

We believe that the way to accomplish our long-term goals is to build a school that focuses on authentic equitable life outcomes. Specifically, our model focuses on cultivating the following 3 authentic, equitable life outcomes for all students:

1. **College:** All students will graduate with college acceptance in-hand (supported by strong ACT performance and a portfolio of real-world work).
2. **Living-wage careers:** All students will graduate with a living-wage job offer in-hand (supported by CTE certifications and internships).
3. **Habits of holistic health:** All students will graduate as the healthiest versions of him or herself, having developed habits that support their individual, community, and environmental health.

(3) Our model aligns well with all 4 of the [district's draft authorizing priorities](#):

Priority 1: School programs and services addressing the unique needs of diverse learners in inclusive settings: Our model is biodiverse by design--and accordingly honors the value of neurodiversity--with a commitment to full inclusion (Armstrong, 2015). We intentionally recruit students from across New Orleans' wide spectrum of culture, ability, and perspective, providing a dedicated

special educator alongside two accredited teachers in every single class, allowing each team of highly skilled adults to serve the unique needs of all students in an inclusive setting.

Priority 2: Intentionally-diverse schools that are representative of the population of New Orleans:

Intentional Biodiversity is one of our core design principles. Our model is designed to serve both New Orleans's most ambitious and creative students and our most challenged and struggling students in a highly-personalized, adaptive learning environment. To support the healthy integration of students across lines of race, culture, and socioeconomic status, we use structures like advisories, collaborative project-work, random groupings, affinity spaces, and universal access to all programming like honors, internships, dual-enrollment and CTE programming.

Priority 3: Schools, programs, and services addressing youth ages 15-21 (MS and HS):

Our school day is designed to offer accelerated options for overage students to earn credits at their own pace, and for all students to explore various pathways to both college and career. Additionally, as an open-enrollment high school with a small, nimble model, we are poised to replicate and create more high quality, diverse high school seats in different neighborhoods throughout the city.

Priority 4: Schools, programs, and services that seek to interrupt and/or address students entering the school-to-prison pipeline:

As an equity-focused high school, we are deeply committed to practices that promote equity and interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. These include: a commitment to restorative practices (International Institute of Restorative Practices, 2015), and the prioritized development of responsive relationships through advisory and small class-sizes (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). The goal is to prevent disruptive behaviors through proactive relationship-building, and address challenging behavior when it does occur in empowering, restorative ways. We avoid removing students from learning while teaching them the skills they need to resolve conflicts both inside and outside of school.

(4) Our Design Principles:

Our school began as a community organizing effort in 2012, with a vision for a new type of school focused on cultivating equity. We have studied best practices from and collaborated with mentor schools (like High Tech High and High School for the Recording Arts), organizations (like the National Equity Project and Overcoming Racism), governments (like Sweden and Bhutan) and thought leaders (like Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Lisa Delpit) around the world that lead us to **Our 4 Design Principles:**

1. **Equity** - We measure success with outcomes that promote equity: student health & achievement, community health & equity, and environmental health (Hardy, D., Kincaid, M., & King, I., 2018).
2. **Intentional Biodiversity** - We intentionally integrate diverse people and methods to create the conditions where a healthy ecosystem of learning can flourish (Wells, A., Fox, L., Cordova-Cobo, 2016).
3. **Democratic Community** - Students, families, and staff form democratic branches that collaborate on every element of the school to build community and balance institutionalized power (Meier, D. & Gasoi, E., 2017).
4. **Real-World Work** - All learning is facilitated collaboratively through interdisciplinary projects, authentic inquiry, problem-solving, internships, and apprenticeships (Heller, R. & Wolfe, R., 2015).

The first student need that we meet is a 100% graduation rate with **college access**--the first of our 3 Authentic, Equitable Student Goals (Urban League of Louisiana, 2018). We do this with the following structures:

- **Real-world, project-based learning** - All learning is done in the context of real-world, multidisciplinary projects co-lead by two certified teachers *and* a special educator in collaboration with community partners who facilitate our students contributing to real-world projects.
- **Exhibitions & POLs** - Learning is assessed in authentic Exhibitions where students publicly share their project work in groups in an authentic space to an authentic audience. Then, each individual student does a Presentation of Learning (POL) as a self-assessment for the term.
- **Mastery Transcript** - All learning is assessed based on authentic mastery of the competencies outlined in state standards, meaning grades are completely transparent, authentic and rigorous, normed with criteria for success shared with students prior to assessment, and available for as many practice and re-take opportunities as a student needs in order to achieve mastery.
- **Digital Portfolios** - Students build professional resumes & portfolios throughout their real-world projects and internships, building a professional, personal website cataloging their work.
- **Universal authentic writing** - Every teacher of every subject teaches writing in the context of authentic, professional writing in their field. Students publish authentic writing in every course.
- **Universal ACTs, College Apps, & FAFSA** - All of our students prepare for and take the ACT multiple times, apply to a diverse portfolio of colleges, and fill out the FAFSA to ensure they graduate with college-acceptance and a clear understanding of how to pay for it.
- **Universal Honors & Dual enrollment** - Every student has opportunity to earn honors credits and participate in dual enrollment courses at local colleges and universities.

The second student need that our programming meets is the need for pathways to **living-wage careers**--the second of our 3 Authentic, Equitable Student Goals--supported by Career Technical Education certifications (Cowen Institute of Tulane University, 2018). We do this with the following structures:

- **Community partnerships** - We work hard to cultivate a diverse array of community partnerships to help us with both our project-based learning and our internships.
- **Collaborative project-based work** - Most work is done collaboratively in various groupings, helping students learn the soft skills of working with diverse people, both peers and adults.
- **Universal CTE Work** - All students obtain 1 or more Industry Based Certifications.
- **Universal internships** - Through partnerships with YouthForce NOLA and local businesses, students participate in work-based learning at Living School. In 9th-10th grades, students have the opportunity to do job-shadow rotations exploring different careers. In 11th-12th grades, all students do professional internships of 1-2 days each week.
- **Universal career counseling & applications** - Every student receives career counseling to help supplement their Digital Portfolio. Every student applies to an array of living-wage careers to ensure that they graduate with a job offer in-hand.

The third and final student need that our programming meets is the need to develop the **habits of a holistically healthy life**--the third of our 3 Authentic, Equitable Student Goals (The New Orleans Equity Index, 2017). We do this with the following structures:

- **Advisories** - Students are part of a small advisory that meets twice daily throughout a student's entire time at Living School. This home-away-from-home is where students share meals, do chores, facilitate morning circles (the proactive part of our Restorative Practices), and manage Personal Learning Plan & IEP goals amongst other activities helping us ensure that every student builds a deep, caring relationship with at least one adult.
- **Restorative Practices** - We use morning circles and community meetings to do the proactive work of creating a strong, inclusive culture while using various levels of restorative interventions to address conflict and harm in a way that is healing and makes our culture stronger and safer.

- **Personalization through relationships** - By having 2 certified teachers and 1 certified special educator to every traveling group of 40, we have an incredibly low student-to-teacher ratio that ensures students get individual attention, feedback, and support in all classes.
- **Student Data Profiles & Personal Learning Plans** - We gather triangulated data, aggregated on our Student Data Profiles, to measure progress toward all of our student-outcome goals. Triangulation is a process by which teachers at Living School collect evidence of learning from three different sources including products, surveys, and observation.
- **SLCs** - Every quarter, each student leads a conference with their advisor and family to reflect on progress toward and revise PLP goals.
- **4 years of the arts & exercise** - Our students get daily physical activity at Living School and visual & performing arts all 4 years helping students establish habits and routines that support wellness.
- **Farming, Cooking, Family Meals, & Nutrition** - Students help in the farming, preparation, and service of 3 nutritious meals and 1 snack daily.
- **Stakeholder democracy** - Students, staff, and families all form democratic branches that collaboratively govern and manage the school.
- **On-site Wrap-around Services** - We seek to partner with a full-service health clinic, credit union, food co-op, and other services that benefit all members of our school and community.

(5) We plan to locate in New Orleans East, one of our city's most ethnically diverse neighborhoods, with a rich history of being a vibrant haven for middle and working class families. Recent data show that New Orleans East has the fewest school options per student and that its students, on average, travel farther to school than any other neighborhood in the city (Nobles, 2018). New Orleans East also has a low high-quality (A-, B-, or C-rated) high school seat-to-student ratio, highlighting the neighborhood's need for more high-quality high school seats.

Additionally, many of the schools consistently receiving the greatest enrollment demand in the city are intentionally-diverse, unique setting schools, none of which are located in New Orleans East. Living School's innovative program will offer a unique opportunity to New Orleans East's current portfolio of schools.

District E's (serving New Orleans East) recently elected City Council Member, Cyndi Nguyen, ran on a platform of economic development, career training, and neighborhood engagement. Living School's mission and programming are aligned with all three elements of her platform, positioning us to be strong allies for her team and the broader neighborhood's vision for itself. As an equity-focused, democratic, project-based high school with a college-and-career pathway for all graduates, Living School is an ideal resource for advancing economic development and career training. As a small high school with democratic governance and a plan for embedded resources like a health clinic, food co-op, farm, commissary kitchen, and credit union, we are well positioned to support our community.

(6) Our school has been a collaborative effort involving a wide array of educators, students, parents, and community members over the past 6 years, and will continue to be so as we open. We are working with City Council Member Nguyen along with neighborhood organizations and existing schools in New Orleans East for feedback and support. Additionally, we have generated broad support for enrollment, finances, and programming, including strategic partnerships with YouthForce NOLA, New Schools for New Orleans, the New Schools Venture Fund, and Communities in Schools. With their help, amongst others, we are working to cultivate a network of keystone organizations that help fund our launch, advise our programming, house our student interns, provide wrap-around services, and hire our graduates.

Dozens of students and families continue to be involved in our organizing, design, and pilots, and

interest in our vision continues to grow. To date, we've surveyed over 300 students and 100 parents about their priorities in a school, served 85 students through 4 pilot programs (over 75% of whom have indicated interest in enrolling at Living School), engaged over 20 students and families in planning our model through our advisory board and Board of Directors, and have garnered interest through our website and school contacts of another 40 students interested in learning more or enrolling at Living School.