



November 21, 2001

Ms. Kelly Hodge-Williams
1001 Fleet Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Ms. Hodge-Williams:

This letter is intended to notify you that the request of the Sylvan Learning Foundation to sponsor New Connections Academy Charter School has been denied.

The primary justification for this denial is based on the qualification of the sponsoring organization. The organization does not meet the requirement in MS 124D.10, Subd. 3, which requires that the sponsor be registered with the Attorney General's office in the charities division. Also, the nature of the sponsorship raises some questions. The Affidavit of Intent to Sponsor indicates a one-year "interim" sponsorship. Although not specific to the charter school law, the Department of Children, Families & Learning has expectations of sponsors and their schools that develop over time. The short duration of this sponsorship impedes the sponsor from carrying out its duties as required by law.

Secondly, there is no clear indication of how special education services will be delivered to the students who need them. Although the New Connections committee agreed during the interview to abide by all federal and state statutes, it is not clear how they will accomplish this. In any future application this must be addressed and included in the budget.

Third, again there is no clear indication of how state testing will be administered. During the interview, it appeared that the committee did not understand the responsibility of the school to administer a secured state test. In the proposal, the logistics of test administration are completely ignored. The New Connections committee had not considered the transportation of students to testing sites.

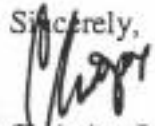
There is an indication that a board will be appointed rather than elected. There does not seem to be a plan in place to elect teachers, parents and community members to this board. MS 124D.10, Sec. 21, Subd. 4c states that operators authorized to organize and operate a school "...must establish a board of directors composed of at least five members until a timely election for members of the charter school board of directors is held according to the school's articles and by-laws."

There is a limited presentation of the curriculum. It is not clear who is developing the curriculum or what type of accountability is in place to track student improvement. There is no way to know who is developing the courses or what best practices are addressed in the development of the curriculum used by the school. There are no provisions for students to access transportation to school related activities; this is a critical issue for special education students.

In this proposal the role of the parent and the role of the teacher is very confusing throughout. The success of the student seems to be connected to the skill of the parents. In the proposal the school will require parents to "demonstrate the ability to use robust technology tools." It is not indicated how New Connections Academy will develop this skill in the parents and what the implications are for the student whose parents do not succeed, or do not wish to develop the skills themselves.

Should this proposal be resubmitted by an eligible sponsor, the proposal must address the concerns related in this letter.

Sincerely,



Christine Jax, Ph.D
Commissioner

CC: Mr. Robert Meller

Executive Summary for New Connections Academy
Submitted October 1, 2001

New Connections Academy is an online charter school seeking to serve students in grades six through nine the first year of operation. The school plans to expand each year until all grades are addressed. The first year projected enrollment is for 260 students. The proposal indicates a limited interim sponsor relationship for one year with the Sylvan Learning Foundation. This Foundation is not registered with the Secretary of State. There are only two developers (the law requires five) of this proposed online charter school, and only one outdated license is included in the application. There is a note that another person is in the process of being renewed, but there is no information regarding the type of licensure that will be forthcoming. According to the Articles of Incorporation, there are plans to have one person as the sole director until a Board of Directors is appointed.

There is no copy of the notification letter to the district where the school will be located.

Concern 1. The Affidavit of Intent to Sponsor indicates a one-year "interim" sponsorship. Although not specific to the charter school law, the Department of Children, Families & Learning has expectations of sponsors and their schools that develop over time. A short duration of this sponsorship impedes the sponsor from carrying out its duties as required by law. If this "interim" sponsorship is included in some future contract, the charter school may not find another acceptable sponsor by the end of the contract period, and the school could be required to close under Minnesota law (MS 124D.10, Subd 23 b). The sponsoring agency for New Connections Academy Charter School is not registered with the Secretary of State. There are also fewer than five developers for the charter school.

Concern 2. There is an indication that a board will be appointed rather than elected. There is no commitment to have teachers, parents, or community members on this board. Minnesota Statute 124D.10, Sec. 21, Subd. 4c states that operators authorized to organize and operate a school "...must establish a board of directors composed of at least five members until a timely election for members of the charter school board of directors is held according to the school's articles and by-laws."

Concern 3. There is no clear indication of how special education services will be delivered to the students who need them. There appears to be some assumption on the part of the school that belonging to the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools will guarantee the services of a special education director. The services of the special education director and all special education programs are the responsibility of the charter school. There is no provision for a special education director in the proposed budget.

Concern 4. There is a limited presentation of the curriculum. It is not clear who is developing the curriculum or what type of accountability is in place to track student improvement. There is not way to know who is developing the courses or what best practices are address in the development of the curriculum used by the school.

Concern 5. There are no provisions for students to take state tests nor to have transportation to the activities described in the curriculum.

Concern 6. The success of the student is connected to the skill of the parents. The school will require parents to "demonstrate the ability to use robust technology tools."