

Section 2. Demonstration of Need and Community Engagement

- a) **Describe why the district of residence or region of residence was selected. Clearly identify the rationale for selecting this model in the targeted district(s). Describe the perceived needs not currently being met by the existing school options and how the proposed charter school model will meet the perceived needs and offer the greatest educational benefit to the students in this district or region of residence.**

Lakewood was chosen for the site of our charter school because Lakewood Schools are among some of the most underperforming schools in the State of New Jersey and serves an extremely disadvantaged population with a Board of Education who appears to have interests other than efficient mainstream public education.

During the 2013-14 school year, the district has one high school, one middle school, three elementary schools (First - Fifth Grades), and a Kindergarten/Pre-School Center.

According to the most recent NJ Department of Education Statistics (2013-14), Lakewood has two elementary schools that have been designated as "Focus": Clifton Avenue Grade School and Ella G. Clark Elementary School. Oak Street Elementary School, which was a Focus school last year, is currently described by the NJDOE as following, "academic performance significantly lags in comparison to schools across the state. Additionally, its academic performance lags in comparison to its peers. This school's college & career readiness significantly lags in comparison to schools across the state. Additionally, its college and career readiness lags in comparison to its peers. This school's student growth performance significantly lags in comparison to schools across the state. Additionally, its student growth performance is about average when compared to its peers." In addition, Lakewood Middle School is labeled as a "Focus" School and Lakewood High School is labeled a "Priority School". The High School is also a recipient of the federal "School Incentive Grant" which is only given to the poorest performing school districts/schools in the nation.

According to the 2010 Census, Lakewood is the fastest growing community in the State of New Jersey. The 2000 Census shows Lakewood's population at 60,352 and the 2010 shows an overall increase in population to 92,843. Racial breakdowns show that the White community makes up the majority of the increase in population.

The Hispanic/Latino population has also increased. In the 2000 Census, they were 15% of the overall population with 9,053 residents. The 2010 Census shows an increase in population to 16,062 Hispanics/Latinos at 17.30% of the Town's population.

The African-American population has decreased in Lakewood. There were 7,273 African-Americans in Lakewood in 2000 but only 5,898 in 2010. Currently African-Americans make up 6.35% of the Town's population.

The Lakewood School Board is made up of 9 members. The current racial make-up of the Lakewood Board of Education is 7 White Males who have children attending private

Ocean Academy Charter School

Phase One: Section 2 – Demonstration of Need and Community Engagement

\$90,000 per year or more, while minority children generally receive services in the public schools.

“We’ve been saying it, we’ve been screaming it, and nobody wanted to listen,” said the Rev. Glenn Wilson, the head of Lakewood U.N.I.T.E., a local group that advocates for families in the public schools.”

On February 4, 2016, the tenure charges were sustained by arbitrator Michael Pecklers, Esq. <http://www.app.com/story/news/local/jackson-lakewood/lakewood/2016/02/08/lakewood-special-ed-helen-tobia/80012654/>

“In numerous cases, her directives favored the wishes of Orthodox Jewish parents and rabbis to have these children receive taxpayer-funded services in Orthodox yeshivas or costly private specialized schools, rather than have them placed in special-education programs within the public schools, Pecklers stated.

Several times, the arbitrator found, Tobia was "grossly insubordinate" by ignoring the explicit warnings of the district's own attorneys and the mandates of the New Jersey Department of Education and ordered Orthodox children placed in private schools that weren't accredited or approved by the state.

In other instances, Tobia insisted that children be denied services they were legally entitled to, according to the decision.”

The arbitrator’s decision can be found here in full, <http://www.state.nj.us/education/legal/teachnj/2016/feb/61-16.pdf>

According to the most recent (publicly available) Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC) report (January 2015), the Lakewood School District has failed its own report card, passing only two of the five components considered important for successful schools under the State’s Quality Single Accountability Continuum. The District, which is still being overseen by a state monitor, received a grade of 60% in instruction and programs, 48% in fiscal management, and 44% in governance. The District received a passing grade of 85% in operations and 80% in personnel.

Despite the numerous of private schools in Lakewood, there is only one private school that tries to engage Lakewood’s minority student population, Calvary Academy – Christian School (PreK-12, Religious). Unfortunately, the per pupil tuition costs are unaffordable for most of Lakewood parents. Due to a lack of enrollment (tuition costs), the local Catholic School (Holy Family) closed its doors in June 2015.

The Township’s private schools are religious schools (Orthodox Judaism) and charge tuition. There are over 100 private schools serving the Orthodox Jewish students. These children are not permitted to attend public schools because of religious restrictions and needs (e.g. boys and girls must be separate, dress codes, and dietary restrictions). Because of such strict religious standards, these schools are not an alternative for those not of the Orthodox Jewish Faith.

Ocean Academy Charter School

Phase One: Section 2 – Demonstration of Need and Community Engagement

There are some Lakewood public school students who have opted to take advantage of the State's Inter-district School Choice Program but due to state funding limitations, this program is currently capped; thus, making admittance into the program highly competitive and restrictive. In addition, there are transportation problems as parents must find transportation to and from school for their children. There are Lakewood students attending Deal Elementary in Monmouth County which is about 19 miles from Lakewood and some Lakewood students attending Central Regional High School which is about 16 miles from Lakewood High School.

Most Lakewood parents and community stakeholders perceive Lakewood Public Schools as not meeting the needs of the community it serves as demonstrated by its governance and not meeting the academic needs of the students as evidenced by the District's test scores. It is not unusual to find hundreds of participants at school board meetings; almost all of whom take issue with how the schools are being run.

Several years ago, minority civic leaders and pastors founded the organization U.N.I.T.E. which stands for United Neighbors Improving Today's Equality. The main goal of the group is to protect the rights of Lakewood public school students to be afforded equal opportunities in education. U.N.I.T.E. boasts of membership of over 500 and has an active Facebook page and email subscription list for news (advises on all meetings, meeting results, newspaper stories, etc.)

Exerts below are from a May 7, 2014 Asbury Park Press article entitled "In Lakewood, Diverse Groups Unite to Protect Public Education":

"After years of watching in frustration, Wilson and other leaders in the black and Hispanic communities, along with church leaders, parents and senior citizens, banded together in a historic coalition to stop the actions of the Board of Education. The group fears the school board — dominated by Orthodox Jewish residents, most of whom send their children to private religious schools — might not have the same educational priorities as they do.

Coalition members say they have united to protect the educational interests of nearly 5,000 public school students, as the district falls further into financial crisis, [grappling with a \\$5 million budget deficit](#). They organized a Town Square rally last month, attracting more than 400 people.

Two days later, the new coalition — perhaps the largest in the township's history — orchestrated a 500-person turnout at a Board of Education meeting, again to voice anger about the plight of Lakewood public schools."

<http://www.app.com/story/news/investigations/watchdog/taxes/2014/05/06/lakewood-school-cuts-split-town-unite-communities/8781199/>

Several members/subscribers of U.N.I.T.E. are Founders of Ocean Academy Charter School.

Ocean Academy Charter School will be a public school option for parents who are seeking a better academic environment for their children without the cost of tuition and a culturally sensitive environment. The Founders of Ocean Academy Charter School believe that

Ocean Academy Charter School

Phase One: Section 2 – Demonstration of Need and Community Engagement

all parents should have the right to choose a school that is best suited to their child's needs. This school will make choice possible for the low-income families of Lakewood that cannot afford the tuition at private schools.

The Founders of Ocean Academy Charter School see a strong academic need for an alternative to Lakewood Public Schools and they are actively addressing it. Many of this Board's members have been addressing reform measures with the Lakewood Public Schools for over fifteen years. Little if anything has been accomplished. Now is the time to address this serious problem in a pro-active manner by giving parents a choice in public education.

The school will meet and exceed the needs of Lakewood's most disadvantaged students and it will offer the greatest educational benefits to students by incorporating the concepts made below along with a commitment to excellence.

The Founders believe that a high quality charter school must meet rigorous academic, financial, and administrative standards. Ocean Academy Charter School is committed to good governance to make sure rigorous standards are achieved and maintained for the well-being of the student body in accordance with the school's mission and vision.

In order to achieve these goals and the school's mission, Ocean Academy Charter School presents a diverse Founders Board with individuals who represent Lakewood's public school community and who are driven to improve public education in Lakewood. These individuals know that School Board governance influences outcomes!

The Founders are committed to taking advantage of all the professional development opportunities as offered by the New Jersey School Boards' Association in addition to the mandatory training. The Founding Board includes teachers, administrators, attorneys, and other individuals with direct charter school experience both in teaching and administration. (There will be detailed information on this provided in *Section 4: Applicant & Founder Information* in this application.)

According to the National School Board Association's Center for Public Education, research shows that school boards in high-achieving districts exhibit habits and characteristics that are markedly different from boards in low-achieving districts. Ocean Academy Charter School Founders will be using the National School Board Association's Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards as Ocean Academy Charter School's basic guidance in governance.

Another key difference of Ocean Academy Charter School is the acknowledgement and the importance of promoting the cultural backgrounds of the student population. Trustees, administrators, and teachers will be culturally-sensitive in addressing the students' ethnic and cultural needs as well as their social, emotional, and cognitive needs in order to obtain and maintain the students' and their families' cooperation and involvement. Such outreach fosters a trusting relationship and that is necessary for the student's success.

Helping students recognize the relationship between what they learn in school and the life they know outside the classroom is culturally responsive instruction that builds bridges between the school and home experiences. It lends itself to a better academic environment as well as better relationships for parents and all stakeholders.

Note that several of the Founders are of Hispanic/Latino decent and at least two others are active in promoting cultural sensitivity on behalf of Hispanics/Latinos on a statewide basis. These Founders know from first-hand experience that addressing the students' social and

Ocean Academy Charter School

Phase One: Section 2 – Demonstration of Need and Community Engagement

emotional needs is especially important when working with students in a socioeconomically disadvantaged community.

Founders are committed to engaging students and all school stakeholders in a positive and rewarding school culture.

Ocean Academy Charter School will be utilizing a multi-modality program where the learning needs of each student will be taken into account in order to foster strong critical thinking and academic skills. Students will be continuously monitored and programs may be adjusted to meet the needs of the individual student in order to assure that students success in learning.

The School will have a pro-active learning environment that is child-centered to promote a life-long love of learning.

Ocean Academy Charter School is designed and will be organized around a mission to teach Lakewood's economically disadvantaged students. The Founders believe that all children can learn and will set an atmosphere where parents feel comfortable to get involved with our school.

The Founders and the Administration are committed on creating an environment tailored to the needs of the student body. The school will use a "responsive classroom approach" with rigorous standards based curriculum and a school-wide way of life that will rely on continuous progress monitoring and making data-based decisions on student outcomes. Data can help identify students that need extra supports. Struggling students can be paired with the strongest teachers in remedial classes. Enrichment classes can be created to reinforce core academics.

Ocean Academy will also offer a longer school day. Additional time allows schools to address those in need in a variety of ways. Longer lessons allow for more student questions and review. It also allows for new and engaging enrichment programs.

- b) **Provide detail regarding the role of parents, families and the community in the application process. If possible, provide evidence of support among parents, students, teachers, community groups or any combination thereof. Provide attachments as necessary (letters, surveys, etc.)**

Ocean Academy Charter School Founders outreached to various civic, community, and religious groups to contact stakeholders in support of a charter school for Lakewood. Education Stakeholders have played a very large role in advancing a charter school in Lakewood. Community meetings have been held in churches and other locations where Founders have explained the concept and workings of a charter school.

The Founders have outreached and have held large and small group meetings including the following entities:

- All Saints' Episcopal Church, Lakewood, NJ
- Mexican Civic Association of Central NJ, Lakewood, NJ
- Puerto Rican Civic Association of Central NJ, Lakewood, NJ
- St. Anthony's Catholic Church, Lakewood, NJ
- Macedonia Baptist Church, Lakewood, NJ

Ocean Academy Charter School

Phase One: Section 2 – Demonstration of Need and Community Engagement

- Missionary Pentecostal Church, Lakewood, NJ
- Christ United Methodist Church, Lakewood, NJ
- Lakewood High School Students, Lakewood, NJ

Please see **Documents of Support** - Attached

- c) **Describe the plan for ongoing community engagement including any community meetings, parent, teacher, and student input, surveys of prospective stakeholders, etc. you plan to conduct.**

The Founders of Ocean Academy Charter School are well aware and sensitive to community engagement on the application level as well as the long term sustainability of the school. One goal for our school would be for Lakewood residents to look at the Charter School as an integrated part of the community. Founders believe this is important for the success of our school and the success of the students.

The Founders are planning for ongoing engagement by way of local community newspapers and e-communications. They will launch a website immediately upon approval of Phase 2 of this application process as well as building a Facebook page for pro-active engagement. The Facebook page is an easy way for people to show their interest in the school and directly receive real time updates. The school will use the geo-targeting marketing devices on Facebook to outreach to a broader base of the community, parents, and students.

The school will identify all relevant community and civic organizations and will try to partner with them in ensuring the broadest outreach as possible the town. The Founders will also place informational brochures and flyers in stores and restaurants in downtown Lakewood to generate interest and provide information about the school and how to contact school officials for more information.

Many of these efforts are geared to generating a data base so that the school can make contact with the community and to get them to come to the school facility for various meetings so that the school founders can get insight as to what community members would like to see in a charter school and what their general educational concerns may be.

Ocean Academy Charter School Founders are committed to improving opportunities for students and believe that community input is crucial for assessment. The school will hold periodic meetings of community stakeholders throughout the application process to solicit ideas/concerns and to educate community members about the application process and what to expect when the school opens.

Founders will actively network with as many community leaders as possible for outreach. This will include Mayor and Council Members, state legislators, county officials and other key figures in the community in order to understand the community's needs and visions and to garner support for the school. Such networking is also good for recruiting potential

Ocean Academy Charter School

Phase One: Section 2 – Demonstration of Need and Community Engagement

board members and committee members in order to broaden the expertise and skill base of those contributing to the school.

Founders will also be outreaching to local parents who do not speak English, primarily through religious groups, and will engage them in conversations in their native language. Spanish is the predominant language of the minority population of Lakewood.

Parent, teachers, staff, and students are an important part of the fabric of the school. Founders will be holding various meetings throughout the school setup and continuing once the doors are open for ideas, suggestions, and opinions. Strong communications between the school's Board of Trustees, the school community, and the Lakewood Community in general is of top importance.

Ocean Academy Charter School will conduct, on a periodic basis, thorough research and data-gathering of Lakewood's demographics and statistics. Trustees and Administrators will provide ongoing community input meetings to talk about these changes and their impact on the school and community. This is necessary in order to keep up-to-date with community issues and to fully understand the community's every changing need.

The Founders would appreciate the help of the community in fair and comprehensive student recruitment. They intend to network with the private and public pre-school and day care centers throughout the town.

The Founders are also planning outreach to our local high school students for a communications session with the young people of Lakewood as to what they may envision for a new elementary school. Discussions would focus on their experiences in grammar school, what they enjoyed, what they think could have been done better, and what they would like to see offered in a new school. Several Lakewood High School students helped out with our initial petition drive.

Lakewood is the home of Georgian Court University and the Founders of Ocean Academy Charter School hope to create a partnership with its well renown School of Education. In addition, Founders are looking forward to possibility of partnering with "Kean Ocean" of Ocean County College. Kean University offers many baccalaureate degree-completion programs as well as complete graduate programs on the campus of Ocean County College (OCC) in Toms River. Established in 2006, this partnership with Ocean County College provides articulated degree plans by which students complete a course of study at OCC, earn an OCC associate's degree, then continue with their studies on the OCC campus with Kean courses leading to a Kean bachelor's degree.