



**LUSHER**  
**-CHARTER SCHOOL-**

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**TEN YEAR RENEWAL PRESENTATION**

## **LUSHER CHARTER SCHOOL'S TEN YEAR RENEWAL PRESENTATION**

Lusher Charter School (“Lusher”) respectfully submits this Presentation in support of its request for a 10 year renewal of its charter. As set forth herein, Lusher has amply met or surpassed all benchmarks for a ten year charter renewal by providing an outstanding, nationally recognized and culturally diverse arts based educational program. Further, a ten year charter will demonstrably enhance Lusher’s long term sustainability, financial independence, and ability to continue to operate effectively and fulfill its mission to provide an arts integrated program in a high academic setting to a culturally diverse student population.

### **I. NACSA Recognizes that Lusher Has Met or Exceeded 10 Year Renewal Standards**

During its charter term, Lusher has consistently met or exceeded the educational, financial and organizational performance benchmarks established by Orleans Parish School Board (“OPSB”). Lusher also has been awarded a five star performance rating (the highest possible) from the Louisiana Department of Education.

Recognizing Lusher’s outstanding performance in all major areas, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (“NACSA”) has recommended Lusher for “Automatic Renewal” because it

“has met or exceeded the District’s renewal benchmarks for the last three years as set out in OPSB Policy A127; has demonstrated growth in academic achievement; and has had no significant audit findings during the term of the charter agreement.”

Ex. 1, p. 3.

A copy of NACSA’s January 2011 evaluation of Lusher is attached as Exhibit (“Ex.”) 1. NACSA’s Automatic Renewal recommendation signifies that Lusher has met the standards for a 10 year renewal based on the record already before OPSB. Lusher is the only charter school in Orleans Parish to receive such a recommendation. Put simply, Lusher respectfully submits that it has earned a 10 year charter renewal.

#### **A. Lusher Has Met or Surpassed All OPSB Educational Performance Standards**

NACSA has recognized that Lusher has met or exceeded every one of OPSB’s 16 benchmarks for Educational Performance during each year of its charter term. Ex. 1, p. 6. The following statistics provide further concrete proof of Lusher’s outstanding educational success, rivaling top college preparatory programs across the nation:

- 98 percent or higher college acceptance rate in every charter year; one hundred percent college acceptance in 2010;
- acceptances at over 155 leading national colleges and universities, including Yale University, University of Chicago, University of Virginia, Rice University, Dartmouth College, Oberlin College, Vassar College, Wesleyan University, New York University, and all major Louisiana public and private colleges and universities. This year’s senior

class of 103 students has already received acceptances from Stanford University, Brown University, University of Michigan, Dartmouth College, and Georgia Tech, among many others. A complete list of Lusher college acceptances is attached as Ex. 2.;

- more than \$18.8 million in merit-based scholarship offers from 2008-2010. In 2009 alone, Lusher received \$122,000 per student in merit-based scholarship offers - the highest in the Greater New Orleans area for public, private, and parochial school students;
- performance scores in the top tier of all Louisiana public schools for the past 15 years;
- increased school performance scores and exceeded target growth goals set by the state for school performance each year of charter term. *See* Lusher Charter School Five Year Report attached as Ex. 3, p. 5;
- growth from 1150 students in 2005 to over 1630 students today, making Lusher the state's largest charter school and New Orleans' only K-12 charter school. Ex. 3, p. 2;
- one of the city's most highly diverse student bodies (38 percent African American, 11 percent Hispanic, Asian or other minority, 51 percent Caucasian). 27 percent of the student body is eligible for the federal free and reduced lunch program. 36 students are English language learners, and 61 students are classified as homeless. Ex. 3, p. 2;
- school faculty on a par with leading college preparatory schools around the nation;
- outstanding comprehensive arts programs (music, visual, dance and dramatic arts). National, state and local recognition in the arts, including superior ratings for orchestra and symphonic band from Louisiana Music Educators Association and Scholastic gold and silver key winners in creative writing, visual and media arts;
- an athletic program featuring 28 teams, middle and high school. In the 2010-11 school year, Lusher went to state playoffs in high school football, volleyball, girls and boys soccer, indoor track, swimming, and girls and boys basketball. The Lusher Lions were also district champions in high school boys basketball and girls basketball and volleyball;
- special programs for students with significant literacy, numeracy, and learning issues as well as other special needs. 5% of the population are classified SPED students who qualify for special education services with 6% being 504 students who qualify for multiple accommodations. Lusher offers both faculty and programs to meet their needs. Lower, middle, and high school divisions have extensive intervention and RTI programs. Special programs in literacy, numeracy, behavioral and academic support are offered during and after the school day and during the summer break. Staff includes special education teachers, "504" coordinators, student assistance team members, social workers, counselors, and speech and occupational therapists. *See* Lusher Five Year Report, Ex. 3, pp. 12, 18-19, 21.

## B. Lusher Has Met or Surpassed OPSB Financial Performance Standards

NACSA also confirms that Lusher has consistently met or exceeded OPSB benchmarks for Financial Performance in each charter year. Lusher “has exhibited strong financial performance . . . during the term of [its] charter agreement,” with “an overall ‘net worth’ [of] \$14.7 million,” and cash reserves “supporting up to 5.3 months of expenses as of June 30, 2010.” NACSA Evaluation, Ex. 1, p. 7. Lusher operates efficiently, devoting its revenues to educating its students as opposed to paying for administrative costs. “Program expenses represent more than 91% of total expenses over the last four years” - far above the 65% minimum recommended by NACSA. Ex. 1, p. 7. Moreover, Lusher has operated well within its financial means, with the result that its “net assets have increased in each of the past five years” - to \$14.7 million at June 30, 2010. Ex. 1, p. 7.

The following statistics further substantiate Lusher’s stellar financial performance over the term of its charter:

- raised over \$6 million in private funding for facilities and programs since September, 2005;
- increased net assets from \$5.5 million as of June 30, 2006 to \$14.7 million as of June 30, 2010. Ex. 1, p. 8;
- increased cash on hand from \$4.5 million as of June 30, 2006 to \$5.8 million as of June 30, 2010. Ex. 1, p. 8;
- fully balanced budgets and in good standing on financial obligations in every charter year. Ex. 1, p. 7;
- unqualified audit reports with no material weaknesses or major findings. Ex. 3, p. 12.

## C. Lusher Has Met or Surpassed OPSB Organizational Performance Standards

NACSA has recognized that Lusher has met or surpassed OPSB Organizational Performance Standards, including those relating to:

- Special Education Compliance
- ELL Program Implementation
- Student Enrollment
- Student Discipline Compliance
- Health and Safety
- Governance
- Facilities Maintenance
- Notifications

- Charter Contract Compliance
- Charter Law Compliance
- Other Legal Compliance  
[NCLB compliance issues in 2006-07 were promptly clarified and resolved].

Ex. 1, pp. 9-13.

Far beyond the above organizational benchmarks, Lusher has played a leadership role in the charter movement. Even before Katrina struck, Lusher had applied for a type three charter, serving as a model for many other public schools to follow. In the wake of Katrina, on September 14, 2005, Lusher amended its charter application to provide for operation of a kindergarten through high school program in partnership with Tulane University. The amendment was intended in part to provide a school for the children of employees of Tulane, Loyola, Dillard and Xavier to encourage them to return to New Orleans.

After OPSB assigned the abandoned Fortier facility to Lusher in exchange for its middle school building on Carrollton Avenue, Lusher moved quickly to raise over \$2.7 million in funds from Tulane University, Atlantic Bridge, RosaMary Foundation, Schlieder Foundation, and other major private funders to substantially renovate the Fortier main building and gymnasium. Lusher also marshaled thousands of hours of community and neighborhood volunteer service in painting, landscaping, cleaning and other repair to the Fortier facility at no cost to OPSB. These proactive efforts enabled the building to re-open in August, 2006 in order to serve Lusher's middle and high school students (including the students residing in the former Fortier school district). Since Katrina, Lusher has:

- substantially renovated the main Fortier building, adding state-of-the-art computer and science labs and other major improvements. *See* before and after photographs attached as Ex. 4.;
- added grades 9-12 at the Fortier campus;
- used \$2.2 million in privately donated funds to construct the Goldring Performing Arts Center on the Willow street campus, a state-of-the-art, multi-purpose performing arts facility with auditorium, dance studio and music studio used for musical, theatrical, and visual arts productions. *See* photographs attached as Ex. 5.;
- used \$800,000 donated by the Drew Brees Dream Foundation to make major renovations to the Fortier campus athletic facilities, including weight room, field lights, bleachers, press box, and state-of-the-art track and field, used for football, track, soccer, and other athletic and school events. *See* photographs attached as Ex. 6.;
- used \$1.2 million in privately donated funds to fully renovate the gymnasium at the Fortier campus, used for basketball, volleyball, and other athletic events, musical and theatrical performances, and school events. *See* photographs attached as Ex. 7.;

- received Gulf Coast Recovery Grant -- \$2.5 million for Curriculum and Professional Development --Lead School in Consortium with Karr and New Orleans Science and Math Charter Schools;
- in 2010, added two kindergarten classes (50 additional students) by leasing space at the Jewish Community Center. Lusher has received approval to increase its kindergarten class to 152 students in 2011 in order to accommodate the growing waiting list of families applying for admission. Ex. 1, p. 14;
- fostered parental involvement at all levels, including a highly active and successful parent teacher support organization, Lusher Parent Teacher Student Association;
- incorporated “Friends of Lusher, Inc.,” a 501(c)(3) corporation, in 2010 with the sole mission of fundraising, financial and other support for Lusher;
- established District and Community Networking and Outreach: partnership with Tulane University; leadership of Eastbank Collaborative of Charter Schools; membership/participation in Louisiana Charter School Association, Achievement Network, Educate Now, Center for Developmental Learning, Brees Dream Foundation, Idea Village, Cowen Institute.

In sum, Lusher is a model of organizational achievement and a public school success story on all levels.

## **II. A Ten Year Charter is Critical to Lusher’s Future Sustainability and Success**

A ten year charter will demonstrably enhance Lusher’s long term sustainability, financial independence, continued operation and fulfillment of its educational mission, and achievement of its future growth plans and related goals. As reflected in the letters of support provided by the Brees Family Foundation, attached as Ex. 8, and Positive Vibrations Foundation, attached as Ex. 9, long term sustainability is critical to a charter school’s ability to make a compelling case for major private and public funding for programs and capital improvements. Therefore, a charter school with a ten year operating agreement is far better positioned to seek and obtain major long term funding commitments and achieve financial independence than would be the case with a five year operating term. Our community likewise needs and deserves the assurance of a ten year charter for its largest public charter school.

In 2010, Friends of Lusher, Inc. (“Friends”), a 501(c)(3) corporation was formed with the exclusive mission of fundraising, financial and other support for Lusher. As indicated in Friends’ letter of support, attached as Ex. 10, a 10 year charter renewal will greatly enhance parent, alumni, community and funder confidence, strengthening Friends’ fundraising appeals to parents, alumni, community members, foundations and other funding sources. Friends of Lusher successfully launched an annual giving program this school year which demonstrates the willingness of faculty, administration, and families to support the school.

439 Lusher students live in poverty. Ex. 3, p. 2. However, Lusher no longer receives Title I funds – making it dependent upon major fundraising to cover the funding gap. Additionally, continuing state and local revenue shortfalls jeopardize existing MFP funding levels and make future increases in MFP unlikely at best, while at the same time the already high costs of Lusher’s unique and intensive arts based programs are likely to increase. *See* Lusher’s June 30, 2010 audited financial report on file with OPSB, Statement of Activities, p. 4 (showing gap between MFP funding and expenses). Lusher therefore is likely to become even more dependent upon independent fundraising capacity to bridge the gap between MFP and the high costs of its programs and curriculum. These hard financial realities further drive home the need for the long term sustainability and financial independence that a ten year renewal will foster.

As recognized in NACSA’s Renewal Memorandum relating to Lusher, Ex. 1, pp. 14-15, Lusher’s growth plans and related goals underscore the critical need for long term sustainability. The following chart lists Lusher’s primary goals and summarizes how a ten year charter renewal will enable Lusher to achieve them.

<u>GOAL</u>	<u>IMPACT OF 10 YEAR RENEWAL</u>
1. Increase enrollment to 125 K students each year to accommodate growing waiting lists.	10 year renewal greatly enhances sustainability, longevity and parent/family/community confidence – critical to successful recruitment and retention of students and families.
2. Recruit top faculty to accommodate growth of enrollment.	10 year renewal enhances sustainability, longevity, confidence and assurance critical to successful recruitment and retention of top faculty.
3. Purchase/acquire additional facility to replace temporary Jewish Community Center leased site in order to accommodate growing enrollment. Purchase equipment and materials for new facility.	10 year renewal greatly enhances sustainability and funder confidence, increasing public and private fundraising capacity for long term building acquisition, improvements, equipment and materials.
4. Continue to annually increase school performance score and meet or exceed annual growth targets, pass NCLB subgroup component standard, and maintain 100% college acceptance.	10 year renewal enhances sustainability and confidence of community, families, faculty and funders, strengthening Lusher’s ability to recruit and retain qualified students, top faculty and funding needed to meet these goals.
5. Continue to recruit, retain and serve special needs students.	10 year renewal enhances sustainability and confidence of community, families, faculty and funders, strengthening Lusher’s ability to recruit and serve special needs students, and to attract public and private funding to bridge the gap between special needs funding and the needs of those students.
6. Continue to improve existing facilities: <b>Fortier facility:</b> badly needed improvements to rear courtyard and exterior ( <i>see</i> photograph,	10 year renewal greatly enhances long term public and private capital fundraising capacity and financing at lower costs.

<u>GOAL</u>	<u>IMPACT OF 10 YEAR RENEWAL</u>
<p>Ex. 11 hereto), seal outer building envelope; replace deteriorating windows; replace aged HVAC; renovate interior; build auditorium for programs and productions essential to intensive middle/high school arts based programs.</p> <p><b><u>Willow Street:</u></b> complete building renovation including interior and exterior envelope; replace HVAC.</p>	
<p>7. Obtain long term financing for facility acquisition and capital improvements.</p>	<p>10 year renewal enables amortization of debt over 10 year period, increasing borrowing capacity and reducing interest expense.</p>
<p>8. Continue to meet the staffing, equipment, material and professional development requirements of Lusher's unique, comprehensive arts based programs in a high academic setting.</p>	<p>Lusher's unique, comprehensive arts based curriculum includes Certificates of Artistry in music, dance, theatre, creative writing, musical theatre, media arts, stagecraft and visual arts, in addition to a basic four year academic diploma. <i>See Lusher Five Year Report, Ex. 3, pp. 10-11.</i> The significantly higher costs of these intensive arts based programs are not covered by current or possibly shrinking MFP funding levels. Long term sustainability, assurance, and fundraising capacity resulting from a 10 year term are needed to bridge the funding gap.</p>
<p>9. Improve student achievement through (a) curriculum mapping K-12, (b) quality, balanced assessments linked to student learning K-12, (c) benchmark testing in all subjects grades 2-8, (d) value-added teacher evaluation, (e) on-site SAT-ACT teacher training and student classes, and (f) incorporation of the national common core standards K-12.</p>	<p>Long term sustainability and funder confidence resulting from a 10 year operating term will bridge the gap between stagnant or shrinking MFP and the funding needed to achieve these professional development, technology, staffing and equipment goals. Additionally, the 10 year term will strengthen Lusher's ability to attract the top faculty and other professionals needed to achieve these goals.</p>
<p>10. Continue to provide services to students living in poverty.</p>	<p>As Lusher no longer receives Title 1 funding, enhanced sustainability and fundraising capacity resulting from 10 year renewal will enable it to bridge the funding gap.</p>
<p>11. Develop Friends of Lusher, Inc. – 501(c)(3) established for the financial and other support of Lusher.</p>	<p>Ten year term will increase community, parent, alumni, and funder assurance and confidence, strengthening Friends of Lusher's fundraising appeals to parents, families, alumni, community members, foundations and other public and private funding sources.</p>



## **CONCLUSION**

Lusher greatly appreciates OPSB's consideration of this Presentation. Lusher looks forward to working closely with OPSB over the next ten years to fulfill the common mission and goal of delivering excellent public education to the children of New Orleans.