



**The Alliance School of Milwaukee**

850 W Walnut St.  
Milwaukee, WI 53205  
(414)-267-5400

27th August 2021

Dear Charter Review Committee,

This letter is to inform you of our intent in seeking a 5-year renewal of our contract with MPS.

For over 15 years, the Alliance High School of Milwaukee has provided a vital service to students in MPS and the Milwaukee area. Our mission to provide a safe, student-centered, and academically challenging environment is strong as ever and important to the community. We continue to serve unique students from diverse backgrounds that only Alliance can serve. We provide a safe place particularly for LGBTQAI+ students as no other school in the district that is specifically catered. Furthermore, this school has undergone many changes since the last charter review, the most dramatic being a change in leadership. These changes are all positive and focus on the overall improvement of our school. The staff is committed to making this school a better institution and striving as an MPS instrumentality charter.

Based on the rationale above, we seek a 5-year renewal of our instrumentality contract. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Ms. Smith APIC

## **Alliance Charter School Application**

### **Current Charter School Performance**

The Alliance School is a small, democratically run Instrumentality charter school opened in 2005, as the first school in the nation to start with a mission of reducing bullying. At our inception, we were at the forefront of providing a safe educational space for LGBTQIA+ youth. Our work has continued to this day, and we continue to lead the way in gender inclusion practices locally and nationally.

Additionally, we are often consulted to share our expertise in gender inclusion practices, trauma-informed care, student-led learning, and restorative practices both within the district and beyond. Many of the practices we have successfully implemented from our inception are recognized as best practices across the nation in educational settings.

Approximately 50% of the students at Alliance self-identify as LGBTQIA+ and 37.5% of students at Alliance are students with disabilities. Overall, the district has an average of 19.6% students with disabilities (high school has 22.1%). This makes Alliance one of the schools with the highest percentages of students with disabilities.

These two groups have a higher than average risk of victimization in traditional school settings. Since most of the students who come to Alliance experience this victimization before attending the school, Alliance School has a unique challenge of addressing the educational and emotional delays created by these past experiences of victimization and serves an invaluable purpose within the Milwaukee Public School community. The school community is committed to helping students develop a trusting relationship with school while at the same time preparing students to meet the academic and behavioral expectations needed for post-secondary education.

In 2019, the Alliance School faced a major challenge when the previous leader unexpectedly left Alliance. We did not have an APIC for over a month, but luckily Ms. Smith came to our school. At first, her challenge of getting Alliance back on track seemed insurmountable, but through her perseverance and the dedication of the staff, Alliance bounced back and was able to recover. Just a few months after Ms. Smith took over, another major event occurred, the Covid-19 quarantine. She only had a few months at Alliance before this new challenge. With her leadership and focus on success, we were able to adapt and excel during the extended school closure.

The last five years has been a difficult and challenging time for Alliance, but with the shift in leadership and the continued support of our dedicated staff, Alliance is ready for new challenges and serving MPS and the Milwaukee community in the future. We are dedicated to serving some of the most difficult and challenging students in our community. We believe that we serve an essential service to our students - a service and school they can't get anywhere else in Wisconsin where they are welcomed and supported despite their unique personalities.

## **Educational Program**

Our educational program is designed around the following currently embedded best practices:

- Safe learning environment
- Restorative Practices
- Inquiry-based learning
- Experiential learning
- Service Learning
- Blended learning
- Additional practices

### **Safe Learning Environment**

Safety is one of the most important components of any productive, educational environment. Students will not be able to learn or take the risks needed to learn if they feel that their safety is threatened. The Alliance School places safety as a top priority, knowing that our students often come from unsafe environments in which bullying and harassment occurred. Our staff is dedicated to the inclusion and well-being of our students.

According to SPEAK, a leading organization that promotes the prevention of youth suicide:

- Suicide is the leading cause of death among Gay and Lesbian youth nationally.
- 30% of Gay youth attempt suicide near the age of 15.
- Gay and Lesbian youth are two to six times more likely to commit suicide than Heterosexuals.
- Almost half of the Gay and Lesbian teens state they have attempted suicide more than once.
- It has been conservatively estimated the 1,500 Gay and Lesbian youth commit suicide every year.

According to the MPS 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, students that identify as LGBTQIA+ are:

- Twice as likely to self-harm
- Over twice as likely to consider suicide
- Three times as likely to attempt suicide
- More likely than non-LGBTQIA to use and abuse drugs

With these sobering statistics in mind, The Alliance School continues to provide a safe and inclusive environment for students who are often bullied or harassed because of their sexual

orientation, gender, abilities, appearance and/or beliefs. One of the reasons for starting the school was that research showed that approximately 10% of students who dropout of school do so because of repeated bullying or harassment. The issue of bullying and harassment is still a pervasive issue in schools.

According to data from the website [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov), 20% of high school students experience bullying, and bullying decreases academic achievement (GPA and standardized test scores) and school participation. Students who have experienced bullying are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school. Students who transfer to Alliance, on the other hand, show increased attendance, fewer incidents and suspensions, and a higher GPA, according to our school impact summary.

Students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual) face an even greater risk of bullying than their straight peers. The 2019 GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network) National School Climate Survey reports that in the nation's schools: 59.1% of students surveyed felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation; 68.7% were verbally harassed in the past year because of their sexual orientation; 20.7% were physically harassed because of their sexual orientation; 11% were physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation. The report also found that: 44.9% of students experienced cyber-bullying; 32.7% missed at least one entire day because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. LGBTQIA+ students are well-accepted members of the Alliance community. The students feel safe and accepted, and because of that they are able to thrive in high school rather than just survive. We achieve this safe environment through multiple practices including but not limited to:

- Full inclusion for students with special needs
- Gender neutral bathrooms
- Full-Time Support Staff
- Positive Student Teacher Relationships to foster a collaborative learning environment
- Daily advisories for continual student check-ins
- Bullying report forms
- Honoring student voice and choice
- Established community partnerships

### **Restorative Practices**

The Restorative Practices (RP) Program at Alliance integrally facilitates the creation and sustainment of a safe space by teaching others and collaborating between the disciplines. All staff members are trained in RP. This training is led by our RP teacher and supported by students.

We are currently offering two RP classes each day, a beginning class and an advanced class; these classes cultivate critical ELA skills while focusing on leading a variety of circles within our school, as well as with people from the local, national, and international communities.

During the past five years, the students in the advanced class have shared the work of RP beyond Alliance. They went to Harvard University to teach how youth-led RP can support the dismantling of structural oppression. They also traveled to Northwestern Pritzker School of Law to teach how youth-led RP can interrupt the adultification of youth. Additionally, they have taught RP to young people and adults in Milwaukee and around the state in places like Viroqua, WI. During the pandemic, they participated in a participatory action research project to develop a strengths-based model that elevates the work of youth RP practitioners and taught RP to their families.

Restorative Practices are fundamental in the operation of the school. We begin each staff meeting with a community building circle, hold quarterly school-wide circles to build connections between students, solve problems using the circle process, address staff and student discipline issues in the circle, and we teach in circle. All of these practices work together to help build the strong school climate that Alliance is known for.

### **Inquiry-based Learning**

Over the last four years, Alliance has incorporated inquiry-based learning as an essential teaching practice and our general curriculum. Inquiry learning is “the process of active exploration by which [students] use critical, logical, and creative thinking skills to raise and engage in questions of personal interest” (Llewellyn, 2013 p. 15).

Inquiry-based learning is used in World history and upper level ELA courses. In these courses, students are given an overarching, open ended question that guides their exploration of the topic. Other questions are added along the way as students continue to analyze and explore the question. This gives students more control over their learning experience while still working on the targeted standards. Social studies classes as well as some ELA courses use DBQs (Document-based Questions) in the curriculum. DBQs start with a question and then provide some background information concerning the topic. Usually, six primary documents are presented to be evaluated, analyzed, and synthesized. Students are guided through the designing of an argumentative essay on the topic. DBQs is one way that inquiry-based learning is implemented at Alliance. Platonic seminar-style questioning and root-cause analysis are also used in AP English and history courses.

### **Service Learning**

Service learning affords students the opportunity to apply what they are learning by providing service to the community. Our Restorative Practices classes engage in service learning and have taught Restorative Practices to young people and adults in a number of places, including, but not limited to: The Youth Social Justice Forum at The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Highland Community School, Community High School, Howard Fuller Academy, Youth Initiative, Harvard University, Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, and The Milwaukee Public Library. The students have also taught ambassadors, from various countries, who

participate in the International Visitors Program through the Department of State. Each year, the students decide who they will serve through their work.

### **Blended Learning**

The staff at Alliance has been at the forefront of teaching and learning through the use of technology and blended learning. While some might think blended learning is solely a combination of technology and traditional classroom instruction, the true definition of blended learning goes beyond that concept. In a blended learning classroom, teachers utilize a mixture of web-based technologies and combine a variety of pedagogical approaches to create an optimal learning environment (Driscoll, 2002). Within a blended classroom, one might see a lesson built through a constructivist lens, while also noting a teacher delivering direct instruction, followed by students using an innovative web-based program meant to reinforce learned skills. During the September 1st, 2021 High School Regional Walk-Through, team members observed “an amazing implementation of IM Math (district-adopted math curriculum).” In addition, they noted the effective use of technology in every classroom they visited.

With blended learning, teachers are able to easily differentiate learning, make learning global, and allow for student application of skills. Through the use of universal supports in the classroom, students are able to practice their algebraic equations with the use of technology. With the utilization of Google Classroom during our school-wide “Write Days,” students and teachers were able to submit, edit, and converse about their essays in every single classroom, with every single teacher.

Through our use of Edgenuity and Newsela, we are seeing our students, who are overaged and uncredited, recover credits, improve their lexile levels, and annotate and discuss articles on current events. With the read and write google tool, we are seeing students who have struggled with writing in previous educational settings develop thoughtful and analytical essays through the help of these revolutionary tools.

Blended learning became much more important during the quarantine and the extended school closure. Alliance developed and implemented more strategies that made blended learning more effective. These strategies included PEAR deck and Jamboard as ways to encourage engagement through distance learning. Staff learned and shared new methods for making blended learning more successful with other staff members. The extended school closure affected our Alliance community dramatically. The strength and perseverance of our committed Alliance staff during this time allowed for our students and community to strive.

Whether students are participating in a video conference with a cartoonist from across the country, fighting for the right answer in a competitive game of kahoot, or developing their own definition of a “memoir” through research, blended learning allows for a differentiated and rigorous classroom setting.

### **Additional Practices**

In addition to core constructs, Alliance attributes growth, achievement, and behavior improvements to the following practices:

- Full inclusion of students
- A co-teaching model in core classrooms
- Freshman Cohort Classes
- Small class sizes
- Parent engagement, support and commitment
- Authentic collaboration and ownership amongst staff

### **Growth Measures**

During the term of the Alliance contract, Alliance has worked on a considerable number of objectives, goals, and areas of academic performance and has met many of these goals and measurable objectives.

- Graduate rates of our students who are over age and have been in attendance for five (2018-2019 school year: Alliance 79.6% graduation rate and district: 72.8%) or six years (2019-2020 school year: Alliance 81.8% graduation rate and district: 74.1%) have improved and exceeded district averages.

### **Financial Performance**

In the area of financial performance, The Alliance School has shown great strength. The Alliance School has maintained a sound and balanced budget for the past ten years, and has complied with all fiscal and financial management requirements as is evidenced in the 2020-2021 Alliance Charter School Performance and Compliance Audit Reports. The school ensures that it remains financially sound by employing the following practices:

- The school leader works with the assigned bookkeeper and district staff in the Office of Finance to ensure that all accountability measures and district practices for spending and receiving money are followed.
- The school leader checks the budget accounts in IFAS frequently throughout the year to ensure that no errors or unauthorized charges are made in the school budget accounts.
- The school is well-supported in the Milwaukee community and receives donations that help the school to offer additional services and experiences for the youth. All donations are reported to the Board using the required “Donation from an Outside Source” form.
- The School Engagement Council meets monthly to review the budget; financial information is shared, and feedback is encouraged.

## **Organizational Performance**

When the charter team chose to petition the School Board for a contract with the Milwaukee Public Schools, one of the key reasons for the decision to become an instrumentality charter of the Milwaukee Public Schools was the ability to work with the district offices to provide the best opportunities and resources for youth. As an instrumentality charter school, The Alliance School has the benefit of being able to work with a team of individuals in Central Office who provide training, support, and resources to the school and help to ensure that all Board policies are followed. This district level of support nourishes the school's organizational structure, which is the heart of what makes this school work.

The Alliance School uses a democratic model of leadership, where the administrative responsibilities and decision-making are shared amongst the staff. This shared leadership creates a greater sense of ownership, responsibility and buy-in from teachers and staff and ensures that all staff members maintain strong connections with students, families, and the community.

The relationships that we have built with community agencies and organizations help us to provide a continuum of services to students. In the past five years, we have partnered with the following organizations, as well as many others:

- The Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin to address health and wellness issues for youth
- Pathfinders of Milwaukee, to address the issue of homelessness and counseling services for families
- The Milwaukee LGBTQIA+ Community Center and Project Q, to provide opportunities for LGBTQIA+ youth to engage in activities outside of school
- Riverside University High School for athletics
- Illinois State University, Alverno College, Chicago Theological Seminary, MATC, and UWM, for observation opportunities for teachers in training
- The International Peace Studies Program, to share information about restorative practices in schools
- The ACLU of Wisconsin, to provide opportunities for youth to become civically engaged
- The Medical College of Wisconsin, to provide nurse practitioner services for students
- Diverse and Resilient, to provide information and resources on Healthy Relationships, HIV, STI, and alcohol abuse

These connections and many other partnerships create a safety net of resources for students and families, many of whom are dealing with hardships that extend beyond the school day.

The relationships we build with parents and family members are also key to organizational performance. Parent involvement is valued and invited at The Alliance School. We host monthly Student Engagement Council Meetings and Family Unity Nights, and we share information with families regularly through newsletters, phone calls, letters, emails and the

school webpage. Parents are encouraged to use the Parent Portal, email teachers or staff members if they have a concern and join us during our virtual Parent/Teacher Conferences..

The fact that we continue to enroll students from Milwaukee and the surrounding communities, with many students coming to Alliance from suburban communities or coming back to MPS after having attended schools outside of our district, is a testament to the success of the program.

## **II. Plans for Continued Success:**

### **Educational Performance**

The Alliance School is dedicated to continuing our mission of servicing unique, different students. Many of our students come to our school from difficult circumstances. Often students come to us as over-age and undercredited. Considering that our current student population is 37.5% students with disabilities, the Alliance School will receive training to support students with disabilities and better serve these over-age students. Alliance School staff will receive District best-practices professional development and support from our SST to implement strategies that address the academic progress of these students. Using credit recovery and project-based instruction as well as other strategies, Alliance will continue to support these students.

The school will implement a school-wide literacy initiative which is a part of our SIP. The literacy plan has become a cornerstone of our educational mission and is embedded in every discipline. In the upcoming years, we will continue to expand the initiative by fostering more writing across the curriculum, continuing to host school-wide Write Days, reading and comprehending informational texts, and strengthening grammar and conventions school-wide. In order to address such pressing issues as attendance, GPA, behavior, and graduation, we have morning advisories in our first hour classes. These advisories allow for students to have a contact person within the school with whom they can discuss their grades, attendance, and any other concerns. Attendance is key to obtaining a high GPA and graduation, and these advisories encourage students to be accountable and regularly discuss progress toward their goals.

### **Goals and Measurable Objectives:**

- Increase the number of students scoring “on target” or “significantly above target” on their STAR reading test by 5% over the course of a five year contract term
- Increase the number of students scoring “on target” or “significantly above target” on their STAR math test by 5% over the course of a five year contract term.
- We want to maintain the school daily attendance rate of 85.7%

- Decrease suspension rate from 20.7% to 18% over the course of a five year contract term
- Accomplish the following major ACT Aspire goals over the course of a five year contract term
  - Increase the number of sophomore students who rate in the range of READY or EXCEEDING on the English subject test by 5%
  - Increase the number of sophomore students who rate in the range of READY or EXCEEDING on the Reading subject test by 5%
  - Increase the number of sophomore students who rate in the range of READY or EXCEEDING on the Writing subject test by 5%
  - Increase the number of sophomore students who rate in the range of READY or EXCEEDING on the Math subject test by 5%
  - Increase the number of sophomore students who rate in the range of READY or EXCEEDING on the Science subject test by 5%
- Continue to close the achievement gaps in reading and in math on the state assessments

The extended school closure affected our Alliance community dramatically. The strength and perseverance of our committed Alliance staff during this time allowed for our students and community to strive. Despite the challenges of virtual learning, the Alliance staff continued to provide academic services as well as social emotional support for all of our students. Alliance staff had daily check-ins with students, set up meeting times with specific students during office hours, and served as club advisors. Teachers at Alliance used a variety of technical strategies like PEAR Deck, Jamboard, Flipgrid, Kahoot, and virtual circles to keep students engaged.

### **Financial Performance**

The school is on track for continued financial accountability and success. The APIC continues to work with the bookkeeper with the accounting practices, making them more accurate and efficient.

The Alliance School continues to receive support from organizations, agencies, and individuals from the community. We plan to continue to celebrate our successes with an annual fundraising gala and other fundraisers for staff and community members when covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

## **Organizational Performance**

In the fall of 2019, The Alliance School underwent a change in leadership. Allan Laird left the school and Phyllis Smith became the new APIC of Alliance. This dramatic and sudden change was a major challenge for Alliance.

The Alliance School will continue to maintain and strengthen the following systems and programs to engage parents and community alike:

- We will maintain a strong Special Education Department with a minimum of four special education teachers and two paraprofessionals. This will allow for more teacher to parent communication for a greater number of our students regardless of their specific educational needs.
- We will continue to maintain a dedicated full-time SST position to support teachers, parents, and students.
- We will offer Credit Recovery through the district approved programs and funding. Currently we utilize the Edgenuity program that allows for weekly updates and progress reports to be sent directly to parents of students in those classes.
- Students will create and sustain programs, clubs, events, and initiatives that both bolster school culture and invite the community at large.
- Our Parent Coordinator will engage families in the school community with a variety of events, such as: Student Engagement Council, Title 1 Parent Meetings, Family Unity Nights, and holiday potlucks. Our Parent Coordinator will continue to actively recruit parents and community members to attend our governance council meetings. Our Parent Coordinator will send out a monthly Newsletter and update our website in a timely manner. Some of the events listed may be held virtually due to Covid-19 protocols.
- We will grow our restorative practices program and expand our practices within the community by offering training for students, teachers, district leaders, and community members from around the country.
- Our staff will continue to warmly invite visitors from the district and the community to participate in initiatives and student-led programs, such as: Write Days, Restorative Practice Circles, and The Freshmen Issues Fair.

- Through our Freshmen Bridge Program and New Student Orientation we will initiate strong parent involvement through parent registration, parent circles, and a family potluck.

In the upcoming years, we have the following plans for implementation:

- Increase exploration of community opportunities through local college visits
- Increase the number of students who apply for FASFA thereby increasing parent involvement in post-secondary planning
- Continue to embed academic interventions within the classroom using programs such as Khan Academy and NewsELA
- Continue to expand the practices of our Professional learning Communities through regular collaboration, thereby increasing parent communication and involvement in testing, events, restorative practices, and literacy initiatives.

The Alliance school continues to honor our democratic governance structure. Through the utilization of restorative practices, a healthy and Student Engagement Council, and the district early start calendar we maintain an organizational structure led by staff, students, and community alike. An early-release day for students on Wednesday provides staff the opportunity to cultivate the work that is articulated in this charter in order to ultimately benefit our students.

### **Conclusion**

The Alliance School community is proud to be an instrumentality charter of the Milwaukee Public School system and hopes to continue this relationship with a five year contract term. The school community is committed to the continuous investment in practices that positively affect student achievement and to the continued collaboration with district, state, and national education leaders. The staff, students, and families appreciate the ability to work in a district that is dedicated to meeting the needs of all students and that turns no student away. As a small school dedicated to that same mission, we have made MPS our first choice for our charter contract relationship. We hope that the Milwaukee Public Schools will support the continued relationship by renewing its charter contract with The Alliance School of Milwaukee.