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To: Dr. Mary Pfeiffer, District Administrator
Board of Education

From: Steve Dregel, ^{SD}Assistant District Administrator of
Learning and Leadership

Date: December 12, 2013

Re: River Oak Middle School Contract

The contract between the Neenah Joint School District and the River Oak Charter Council, Inc. for the purpose of establishing River Oak Middle School will be considered with a first reading at the December 17, 2013 Board of Education meeting. A vote on the contract is anticipated for the January 14, 2014 Board meeting.

Mr. Mike Tauscher, Horace Mann Principal, will provide an overview of the contract. Mr. Tauscher, members of the River Oak Charter Council, Mr. James Lewicki, planning consultant, and I will be available to answer any questions about the contract.

Contract Agreement between
Neenah Joint School District (NJSD)
and
River Oak Charter Council, Inc.
for the purpose of establishing
River Oak Middle School

According to Section 118.40 of the Wisconsin Charter School legislation, a school board may, of its own initiative, establish a contract for a charter school, or multiple charter schools. The purpose of this document is to provide the NJSD Board of Education the opportunity to grant approval and agreement for the establishment of the River Oak Middle School within NJSD.

1. NJSD will establish River Oak Middle School as an instrumentality of the school district.
2. The River Oak Charter Council, Inc. governs River Oak Middle School.

Under the authority of s. 118.40, *Wisconsin Statutes*, NJSD, with the approval of the Board of Education, hereby grants to River Oak Charter Council Inc., a charter to govern River Oak Middle School under the terms and conditions of this Contract.

Charter School Vision and Curriculum

River Oak Middle School will serve 100-150 students in grades 6, 7, and 8. Initial implementation will be 50 6th grade students in fall of 2014. This staged implementation will be followed by the 7th and 8th grade students the following year(s).

River Oak Middle School is a middle school using project-based learning with a community focus, interdisciplinary teaching, and integration of a liberal arts, standards-based curriculum.

Mission:

Empowering learners to engage--with confidence--the complexity and change inherent in our global society.

We believe:

1. Project-based learning and interdisciplinary studies deepen students' understanding and application of knowledge; provide a strong academic foundation; and develop 21st century skills for life.
2. Students learn best in environments that facilitate different rates and styles of learning and promote active engagement.
3. Learning is enhanced when students apply their knowledge in a variety of realistic, creative, and constructive ways.
4. Helping students develop an understanding of their role in society as they make connections to their larger community, its environment, history, economy, culture, and diversity will increase the relevance of learning and nurture active citizens.
5. Middle school exposure to and efficacy in world languages and global studies is an essential skill for our global society and can be enhanced through an integrated studies approach.

Five defining characteristics drive River Oak's educational program.

Students will:

- Become successful contributors to our global society through a strong **21st century skills, liberal arts education.**
- Build and apply their knowledge using a **project-based learning approach.**
- Make meaningful connections and build literacy skills across subject matter through **interdisciplinary studies.**
- Learn in meaningful context through **community partnerships.**
- Benefit from **literacy collaboration** across disciplines to close the achievement gap.

Project-based Learning

In project-based learning, students work in teams to explore topics in authentic ways and create presentations to share and apply what they have learned, resulting in deeper knowledge of subject matter, increased self-direction and motivation, and improved research and problem-solving skills. Often students will explore problems in depth.

Community-based Learning

Community-based learning is a set of teaching and learning strategies that enables youth and adults to pursue learning within the unique context of their community. Often referred to as place-based learning, it is a broad framework that includes service learning, experiential learning, school-to-work, youth apprenticeship, lifelong learning, and other methods. In this context, *community* includes the schools, formal and informal institutions in one's neighborhood, and the entire world through such resources as the Internet. In summary, setting is used explicitly to develop connectedness to one's place that leads to an ethos of civic responsibility and stewardship.

The role of the student will be to:

- Act and collaborate as an **investigator.**
- Act and collaborate as a **researcher.**
- Act and collaborate as a **leader.**
- Act as a **thinker**; considerate of others, perceptive in knowledge, and empathetic in execution.
- Be a **questioner**, concerned with learning more.
- Be a **connector**, building a bridge from school to the community.

The role of the teacher will be to:

- Engage in joint exploration and wonder with students.
- Build a school community promoting enthusiasm, a passion for learning, and an equal voice for all students.
- Dedicate themselves to working collaboratively with colleagues and being an expert guide for students.
- Facilitate multi-age group learning in a variety of community settings.
- Actively participate and give diligence to learning and achieving.
- Explore ways to create a difference in the school community and the community at large.
- Understand personal learning preferences and styles to achieve academic and artistic success.
- Pass their knowledge on to others.

River Oak's collaborative learning system relies on *partnerships*. Teachers, parents, and community members work together to stimulate students' intellectual curiosity, emphasizing the role that strong communications skills play in developing perceptive thinkers. This dynamic process empowers our students and prepares them for success in high school and beyond. Flexible scheduling and a fresh look at the definition of "the classroom" allow for creative, collaborative efforts among students and in the larger community. A small student body, multi-age groups, and advisory groups also foster a strong, close-knit community of learners.

River Oak will address state education goals and the closing of the achievement gap by focusing on disciplinary literacy, use of technology, development of 21st century skills, providing for parent and community involvement, and addressing unique learning styles and different rates of learning. Students will be assessed using formal and informal methods, with an emphasis on performance-based assessment and benchmark assessment. Parent-teacher conferences led by students, a quarterly progress report card based on learning benchmarks and a grading system, use of student digital portfolios, culminating project events, and virtual communication between home and school will be used to inform parents about their children's progress in the curriculum.

River Oak Middle School Strategic Goals

These are six overarching goals for the River Oak Middle School:

1. Create a community of learners for students to become successful contributors to our global society through a strong 21st century skills, liberal arts education.
2. Build and apply student knowledge using a project-based learning approach where social and academic needs are met through innovative projects aligned with Wisconsin Academic Standards.
3. Learn in meaningful, place-based contexts through community partnerships that empower students to learn by engaging the resources, issues, and people of the Neenah community and surrounding area.
4. Make meaningful connections and build literacy skills across subject matter through interdisciplinary studies. This interdisciplinary effort will build collaborative classrooms and climate that result in solid literacy and language achievement while developing life-long learning skills.
5. Benefit from literacy collaboration across disciplines to close the achievement gap.
6. River Oak faculty and staff will have an opportunity for professional development that includes skill development chosen by the River Oak faculty with on-site training and coaching, and learning at relevant education conferences.

Academic Goals

Each year, by August 31, specific academic goals will be submitted by the River Oak Charter Council to the NJSD Board, with a full report to be shared at the end of the school year in June discussing how these academic goals were met, any challenges that exist, and steps to address those challenges. These annual academic goals are guided by district school improvement plan protocols, prior year student data, Charter Council strategic plan, and academic performance.

Pupil progress in attaining the educational goals will be measured and may include, but not be limited to the following:

- Student performance on the WKCE or equivalent
- STAR testing in Reading and Math
- Parent satisfaction survey
- Quarterly report cards
- Student attendance data
- Student discipline data
- Parent/teacher/student conferences
- Ongoing teacher evaluation of student progress
- Comprehensive student portfolios
- Performance-based assessment
- Subject area and skill-based tests
- Nationally recognized pre/post test
- District Assessment

Governance/Structure

The governance structure of the school, including the method to be followed by the school to ensure parental involvement.

The River Oak Charter Council and NJSD School Board agree to build--within NJSD--a vibrant and productive partnership between the River Oak Charter Council, NJSD Board of Education, NJSD administration, NJSD faculty, NJSD students, families and the Neenah community.

As a charter school contract in accordance with s. 118.40, *Wisconsin Statutes*, and in particular, the provisions specified under sub. (1m)(b) 1. to 15., the River Oak Charter Council, Inc. is the governance entity carrying out the scope and intent of this charter contract. River Oak is an instrumentality of NJSD Board of Education, as delineated by Wisconsin State Charter School Law.

The River Oak Charter Council will consist of not less than five (5) nor more than nine (9) members. The Council will include parent(s) or guardian(s) of River Oak students, and community member(s). A majority of the Charter Council will be community members and/or parents and not employees of the school district.

The River Oak Charter Council shall manage the following educational and collaborative aspects of the River Oak Middle School as the council works in partnership with the NJSD Board and NJSD administrative leadership to implement successfully the River Oak Middle School.

- Curriculum and instruction
- Personnel and professional development
- Budget expenditures of allocated budgets, grant funds, and funds donated specifically to River Oak
- Calendar and daily schedule
- Marketing and enrollment

The River Oak Charter Council will initiate, develop, and sustain a new entity of community leadership and governance to sustain the mission of River Oak's project-based pedagogy. The River Oak Charter Council is committed to ongoing and annual accountability to its authorizer, the NJSD Board.

Administration

Daily administration of River Oak Middle School will be the responsibility of a NJSD administrator leading the faculty and staff as a collaborative team. This charter administrator will manage the overall operations of the River Oak Middle School and, working with the River Oak teacher collaborative, will be responsible for the following:

- Discipline in accordance with NJSD code of conduct and Board of Education disciplinary policies.
- Implementation of an effective system for evaluating the school goals included in this contract and those academic annual goals developed each year.
- Budget management along with the finance committee of the Charter Council.
- Leadership, management, and evaluation of academic personnel.
- Provision of appropriate professional development to meet the mission of River Oak, in collaboration with the faculty and Charter Council.
- Marketing the district and schools together with NJSD staff, Charter Council, and School Board.
- School leadership, along with the Charter Council, for community, business, and educational partners.

Staff

The River Oak faculty will develop and sustain itself as a professional learning community. All River Oak teachers will hold a valid Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction license. River Oak certified staff and support staff members will remain employees of NJSD and will retain all rights, privileges, and status. NJSD current employment policy manual and individual teacher contracts will pertain to all River Oak teachers. When teacher and/or staff vacancies occur, the River Oak Governing Council will collaborate with NJSD administrative team to fill the vacancy. Staff vacancies will be filled through a process that adheres to the NJSD Human Resource hiring protocols.

NJSD will verify an applicant's credentials and background prior to his or her hire. All school staff members will be employees of NJSD, will follow all employee practices and policies of the District, and will be subject to the appropriate contractual agreements by the District with its employee groups, if any. Staff shall be evaluated for job performance as required by the District.

Parent and community involvement

Parent and community involvement will be an integral part of River Oak. As part of a small school community, parents and families are invited to collaborate with the faculty in building a vibrant and relevant place for learning. Parents, relatives, friends, and neighbors will support the River Oak place-based project learning curriculum initiatives. Parents and community members serve an integral role on the Charter Council and subcommittees for the school, taking part in decision-making, advancing the mission and vision of the school, entering into charter contracts with NJSD, fundraising, assisting in the classroom and in the community, and grant writing.

The means by which the school achieves a racial and ethnic balance among its pupils that is reflective of the school district population.

River Oak Middle School is a public school and shall not discriminate in admission or deny participation in any program or activity on the basis of a person's sex, race, religion, national origin, ancestry, pregnancy, marital or parental status, sexual orientation or physical, mental, emotional or learning disability. Further, River Oak shall not discriminate against any qualified employee or qualified applicant for employment because of sex, race, religion, color, national origin or ancestry, age, disability, lawful source of income, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, past or present membership in the military service, familial status, or based upon affiliation with, or perceived affiliation with any of these protected categories.

Health and Safety

River Oak Middle School will follow all health and safety guidelines, policies and rules, established, now or in the future, by NJSD. This will include, but is not limited to, conducting fire and severe weather shelter drills, development of a building security plan, and ensuring cleanliness of the site and classrooms.

Enrollment

The requirements for admission to the school.

1. River Oak is a school of choice and participation is entirely voluntary. Students will be accepted for admission into River Oak pursuant to the procedures set forth below.
2. River Oak Council in collaboration with District will establish an enrollment window by which all applications (“applications date”) for enrollment in River Oak must be received in the District Enrollment Office.
3. Any student wishing to attend River Oak may make application to enroll.
4. Applications will be available from the River Oak website, office, and District office.
5. If the number of persons seeking admission exceeds the capacity of the open seats available, then a lottery shall be conducted by the River Oak Council to select the individuals who will be assigned the open seats. A totally random selection will ensure fairness and equal access without regard to ethnicity, national origin, disability, gender, or income level.
 - a. The River Oak Council will perform the lottery, and it will be part of the school record.
 - b. To be eligible for admission through this lottery-placement process, individuals must have submitted complete and valid enrollment applications by the end of the established registration window.
 - c. Those students not accepted by the lottery will be placed on a priority waiting list in the order drawn. If or when openings occur, students will then be contacted in the order established by the lottery, or if no lottery is required, in the order applications were received.
6. Exemptions from the lottery shall be granted, in the following order:
 - a. Siblings of students currently attending River Oak
 - b. Children of River Oak faculty and staff
 - c. Founders of Charter School who are noted below:
Kathleen Hallett
Jodi Blank
Jean Maurice Boyer
Catherine Holecko
Kim Krause
Sonja Rusch
Tracy Romzek
7. The Charter School will not be required to admit any student who is under a current expulsion order from a school district.
8. Students cannot be placed at the Charter School by District.

Exemption from Regulation Variations.

Under Wis. Stat. sec. 118.38, school boards may request the Department of Public Instruction to waive certain state requirements, (chps. 115-121 and/or administrative regulation), regarding public education. River Oak will take these state exemptions in order to maximize the flexibility afforded to charter schools by state law.

- a. Length of School Day – Statute 120.12(15): Requires school boards to establish rules for scheduling hours in a normal school day. River Oak staff in conjunction with the Governing Council will establish the school’s schedule.
- b. Number of Days and Hours – Statutes 121.006(2)(a) and 121.02(1)(f): Requires school districts to schedule 180 school days annually, less any days during which the State Superintendent determines that school is not held or educational standards are not maintained as a result of a strike by school district employees and requires school districts

to annually schedule at least 1,137 hours of direct instruction. Due to the Project-based design, River Oak will establish a schedule for its students that accommodate those students' needs, which may or may not reflect the exact number of days or hours for students cited in this statute.

School District Policy Waivers:

River Oak abides by district-wide board policies, which are not delineated within this contract and reserves the right to seek waiver of additional policies by presenting its case to the school board for review and agreement. The following district policies are hereby waived:

a) In-service Program for Teaching Staff

River Oak staff will need to pursue professional development beyond district requirements. Professional development will focus on the specific pedagogy of River Oak.

b) Selection of Textbooks and Related Materials

One of the basics of this charter is the development of a project-based, place-based curriculum and therefore different criteria and selection process of resources will be established.

c) Outside research and survey projects

To allow for various surveys and questionnaires to be developed and utilized as part of the inquiry method of learning.

d) Daily Schedule of classes

To be exempt from existing 6th grade 8-period schedule and 7th and 8th grade 7-period schedule to allow for flexible schedule with PBL projects.

e) Curriculum Improvement

While district curriculum plans will often coincide with charter initiatives, the project-based focus of this charter will prompt additional and/or different curriculum development at times.

f) Field Trips

Planning community based learning may require more established means for having "school" at a different place. Approval processes may need to be revisited to accommodate the generative nature of this charter for its continuous field studies. Parental permission forms may need to address different factors.

Additional Criteria

1. The procedures for disciplining students. The River Oak Middle School will discipline students in accordance with all NJSD School Board policies and procedures.

2. The public school alternative for pupils who reside in the school district and do not wish to attend or are not admitted to the charter school. No student is required to attend River Oak. A student will attend NJSD Middle Schools if they do not choose to attend River Oak.

3. No tuition is required. As expressed in Chapter 118.40, *Wisconsin Statutes*, the River Oak shall not charge tuition. Students may be required to pay school fees in accordance with district policy and/or Charter Council policy. If an out-of-district student does not apply during the open enrollment period and the out-of-district family elects to pay tuition, the student may be accepted. This is totally voluntary by the family and NJSD would direct the family to enroll through the open enrollment process as soon as the window comes around again.

4. Special Education Services. Special education services are available from NJSD for any qualified students in River Oak.

Financial/Operational Criteria

1. Autonomy.

The Charter Council will work with the River Oak staff, in partnership with the administrative team, to implement the contract of the River Oak Middle School.

2. River Oak Budget.

The School District shall provide the River Oak Middle School with an operational budget. School shall then submit a plan for the expenditure of said funds showing the District its best estimate of its proposed total expenditures and liabilities for administering the Contract during the upcoming period of July 1 to June 30. Operational funds shall be available to River Oak at the same time and in the same manner they are made available to other schools within District. District has made an ongoing commitment to continue to fund and support River Oak Middle School. River Oak will be allocated funds in the same manner as other District schools. As an independent entity, the River Oak Charter Council has the discretion and authority to independently apply for and independently administer grant and gift resources. District will allocate any federal formula funds that River Oak is eligible for (e.g., Carl Perkins, ESEA, etc.) according to those funding guidelines and aligned with the District allocation process.

3. The manner in which the annual audits of the financial and programmatic operations of the school will be performed. River Oak Middle School adheres to all NJSD financial and accounting policies and procedures. An annual report including financial and programmatic aspects of River Oak is submitted to the Board each year.

4. A description of the school facilities and the limits of the liability insurance that the school will carry.

River Oak Middle School's first year will be at Horace Mann middle school campus. The liability coverage falls under the same coverage as for all other NJSD educational activities.

5. Transportation:

NJSD provides transportation to students who reside within its district boundaries as per district policy/guidelines. For students who live outside the district boundaries, parents will have to provide transportation.

6. The effect of the establishment of the charter school on the liability of the school district.

The liability coverage is the same NJSD coverage that applies to all NJSD educational activities.

7. Sustainable Funding Commitments.

NJSD has made an ongoing commitment to continue to fund and support this school. The River Oak Governing Council will assume responsibility for developing grant applications, and creating adequate fundraising activities for professional development and school development beyond its usual funding capacity as needed.

8. Duration of the charter school contract.

This contract will be for an initial period of five years, and may be renewed by NJSD Board of Education as described in paragraph 11 below.

10. Reporting and Progress.

River Oak will report to the Board of Education on a yearly basis to review goals and show a rate of progress on identified school goals and objectives. The District shall evaluate the performance in the areas of curriculum implementation and student achievement.

11. Renewal

During the fourth full academic year of this Contract the District shall conduct a review of the NJSD Community School's performance to date. The District shall specify in writing the subjects of the review at least 3 months prior to the beginning of the fourth full school year of operation. The measures for evaluation shall be derived from the following sources:

- a) River Oak Charter School Contract
- b) River Oak Middle School Academic Goals
- c) River Oak Annual School Accountability Plan and Progress Report
- d) River Oak Charter Council Bylaws, meeting minutes
- e) River Oak Curricula
- f) River Oak Community Partnership, Parent, and Student Evaluations

NJSD shall complete the review and shall issue a written report by the end of the fourth full school year of the Contract. River Oak shall have the opportunity to rectify any negative findings. The results of the review, the Schools' action plan, and subsequent results will inform the District to determine whether it will negotiate a Contract renewal with the School during the fifth year, for another five year contract taking the school into year six through ten.

12. Administrative Fee

There is no administrative fee from the authorizer, NJSD to River Oak Middle School.

13. Compliance with Applicable Law: The Charter School shall comply with Applicable Law, which may change from time to time and which may include, but is not limited to:

- (1) Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d-2000d-7;
- (2) Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. ss. 1681 et seq.;
- (3) Age Discrimination Act of 1985, 42 U.S.C. ss. 6101 et seq.;
- (4) Sec. 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1974, 29 U.S.C. s. 794 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. ss. 12101-12213.
- (5) Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. ss. 1400-1485 et seq.
- (6) 20 U.S.C. s. 1232(g) of the General Education Provisions Act, 20 U.S.C. ss. 1221-1234i
- (7) Drug-Free Workplace Act, 41 U.S.C. 701 et seq.;
- (8) Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act, 15 U.S.C. ss. 2641-2655; and
- (9) No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and its implementing regulations, 20 U.S.C. 6301 to 6578, 34 C.F.R. § 200.

If the Applicable Law requires the District to take certain actions or establish requirements with respect to the Charter School, the School shall cooperate with those actions and comply with those requirements.

14. District Commitment to River Oak:

River Oak will each be allocated funds in the same manner as other NJSD schools. River Oak shall be eligible to receive remedial services, IT services, student support services, and testing/assessment services available to other schools in the District, with the distribution of such resources to be determined in a manner consistent with the distribution of such resources to other schools in the District.

Terms of the Charter:

The River Oak charter is granted for five years according to Wisconsin law with a District requirement for an annual report to the Board of Education describing progress, challenges, solutions and outcomes.

The River Oak staff members remain employees of NJSD and retain all rights, privileges, and status as staff members of the District.

Either party may revoke the charter, allowing for the following provisions:

- A) Violation of this contract. Written notice of breach of contract must be provided by the party claiming the breach to the other party and the other party shall have sixty (60) days to cure the breach prior to the contract being revoked on the basis of breach of contract. Violation of the contract that results in the removal of charter status would take effect after the completion of the school year for the fall of the next year to assure student academic continuity.
- B) The pupils enrolled in the charter school failed to make sufficient academic progress under Wisconsin STAT. 118.01
- C) River Oak shall become insolvent or be an 'undue fiscal hardship' on NJSD.
- D) Written agreement by both parties to terminate the contract.

The River Oak Middle School contract agreement is hereby approved.

Governing Council Chair

Date

Board President

Date

Board Clerk

Date

Superintendent

Date