

Lycee Francais Charter School: Charging Tuition Violates Federal Charter School Funding Rules

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The Lycee Francais de la Nouvelle Orleans charter school opened this year with only prekindergarten and kindergarten. Lycee Francais received a federal Public Charter School Program (PCSP) grant, which requires the school to be tuition-free; and, at the same time, the school collected nearly \$5,000 tuition for each child enrolled in prekindergarten. Lycee Francais included prekindergarten in its application for federal funds, but did not disclose that it charged tuition. But, in a separate application, which it submitted to BESE for approval as a charter school, Lycee Francais acknowledged that it charged tuition for prekindergarten. Since prekindergarten children are re-enrolled into the tuition-free kindergarten, and since only prekindergarten and kindergarten are entry levels into the elementary grades, Lycee Francais is able to manipulate its enrollment in favor of those who can afford to pay for prekindergarten. The misuse of federal funds in support of a tuition program, along with the re-enrollment of those prekindergarten children, who pay tuition, into the tuition-free elementary grades is a tragic example of how the charter school concept is manipulated.

Lycee Francais, like most charter schools in New Orleans, are not schools of choice for parents. Rather, it is the school that chooses its students; and, in this case, the choice is based on wealth. By request of readers, additional information on this misuse of the charter school concept is provided in this article.

What does it take to get into Lycee Francais?

It takes a lot of money to get into Lycee Francais de la Nouvelle Orleans charter school in uptown New Orleans. According to their brochure (*Appendix A*), the cost of prekindergarten is \$4,720, which includes tuition of \$4,570 plus a consumables fee of \$150.

Prekindergarten children pay tuition. Kindergarten and the following elementary grades, which are planned to be added each year, are tuition-free. But, the catch is that prekindergarten and kindergarten are the only entry level grades to the elementary school.ⁱ

Entering prekindergarten is through tuition. Entering kindergarten is through re-enrollmentⁱⁱ first, and then through a lottery. The prekindergarten children who paid tuition of nearly \$5,000 each get to fill up the kindergarten spots, and eventually fill up the entire school, since there are no other entry level grades.

The Deceptive Lycee Francais Application for Federal Charter School Grant Funding - -- Tuition Not Mentioned

The Lycee Francais application for federal funds from the Public Charter School Program (PCSP) was submitted to the United States Department of Education, and funding was granted in the amount of nearly \$140,000. (Appendix B) On the [Cover Page of the Lycee Francais application: www.researchonreforms.org/html/documents/LyceefrancaisPCSPApplicationCover.pdf](http://www.researchonreforms.org/html/documents/LyceefrancaisPCSPApplicationCover.pdf), there is a signed assurance that the school will “comply with all provisions of the [Non-regulatory Guidance for the Public School Grant Program of the United States Department of Education: www.researchonreforms.org/html/documents/USDOECharterSchoolsGuidance.pdf](http://www.researchonreforms.org/html/documents/USDOECharterSchoolsGuidance.pdf) This guidance states that:

*“The enactment of State charter school laws is solely a State prerogative, and the definition of a “charter school” under State law is a matter of State policy. However, in order to receive CSP funds, a charter school must meet the definition in section 5210(1) of the ESEA, which is as follows: **The term “charter school” means a public school that: Does not charge tuition.**”*

And, according to the application submitted for the federal charter school funds, Lycee Francais included prekindergarten as a part of its charter school, and included prekindergarten in the budget submitted with the application.ⁱⁱⁱ However, Lycee Francais does not disclose that the prekindergarten is a tuition program.

The Louisiana State Department of Education office that oversees charter schools claims that the prekindergarten can charge tuition since that office only regulates kindergarten - 12th.^{iv} However, their statement is not consistent with the [Lycee Francais Application for PCSP funds: www.researchonreforms.org/html/documents/LyceefrancaisPCSPApplication.pdf](http://www.researchonreforms.org/html/documents/LyceefrancaisPCSPApplication.pdf), which specifically includes prekindergarten as a part of the charter school, and which specifically includes a request for funds for prekindergarten as well as other grades:

- “Lycee Francais de la Nouvelle Orleans will be a Pre-K through 12th grade school.” (p.1)
- “The curriculum begins at the pre-kindergarten level and continues through the 12th grade.” (p.2)
- “Lycee Francais will be the first Pre-K through 12th grade French school within the universe of public U.S. Charter Schools.” (p.3)
- “LFNO will open with Pre-K3 – Kindergarten and add one or more grade level(s) each year thereafter culminating in 12th grade. The first year’s student age range will be 3 – 5 or 6. Ultimately, the student age range will be 3 – 18 or 19.” (p.3)
- “LFNO offers PreK-3 in addition to PreK-4 to prepare kids for Kindergarten (p.4)
- “Lycee Francais will have space for 135 Pre-K through Kindergarten students the very first year.” (p.6)

(Source: Lycee Francais Application for Public Charter School Program (PCSP) Funds)

The [Lycee Francais PCSP Budget: www.researchonreforms.org/html/documents/LyceefrancaisPCSPBudget.xls](http://www.researchonreforms.org/html/documents/LyceefrancaisPCSPBudget.xls) that accompanies its application lists funds to be used to purchase supplies and equipment for the prekindergarten.^v

The Lycee Francais application never reveals to the U.S. Department of Education that the prekindergarten charges tuition. Lycee Francais does not disclose this because the PCSP federal funds can only be used for a charter schools that is “tuition-free.”

Did the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Know of this Deception?

It can only be concluded that “Yes, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education knew of this deception” because BESE first received and approved the Lycee Francais application for the PCSP funds. The U.S. Department of Education entrusts BESE and other state school boards to distribute the federal charter funds received for the state.

BESE knew that Lycee Francais was going to operate a tuition prekindergarten,^{vi} as this information was contained in Lycee Francais’ application to BESE for charter school approval.

(See [Lycee Francais Charter School Application: www.researchonreforms.org/html/documents/2010ApplicationforLyceeFrancaisNewOrleans.pdf](http://www.researchonreforms.org/html/documents/2010ApplicationforLyceeFrancaisNewOrleans.pdf)) Prior to applying for federal funds, Lycee Francais had to first become approved as a charter school.

In applying to BESE to become a charter school, Lycee Francais advised that the prekindergarten will be a tuition program:

“Lycee Francais will not charge tuition except for its prekindergarten.” (p.45)

The Louisiana Department of Education attempts to justify allowing Lycee Francais to charge tuition in prekindergarten by stating that Louisiana’s charter school office only monitors grades kindergarten through 12th. However, that justification falls short when the Louisiana Department of Education advances federal charter school funds to Lycee Francais for its tuition prekindergarten program.

Conclusion

While a state can define a charter school however it wants, only charter schools that meet the federal definition can receive charter school funds. In applying for federal charter school funds, the state and the operators of the charter school must sign an assurance that they will abide by the [Non-regulatory Guidance for the Public School Grant Program of the United States Department of Education: www.researchonreforms.org/html/documents/USDOECharterSchoolsGuidance.pdf](http://www.researchonreforms.org/html/documents/USDOECharterSchoolsGuidance.pdf) .” This guidance states that: *The term “charter school” means a public school that: Does not charge tuition.*”

Nearly \$140,000 of federal charter school funds was granted to Lycee Francais, whose application did not disclose that the prekindergarten charged tuition, but whose application did include funding for prekindergarten.

This misuse of the charter school concept, and this misuse of federal charter school funds, abuses the purpose for which charter schools are intended.

Endnotes:

ⁱ Lycee Francais Charter School Application, p. 8.

ⁱⁱ Lycee Francais Charter School Application, p. 47.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lycee Francais Public Charter School Grant Program application, pages 3, 4 and 6.

^{iv} Email from Veronica Brooks, Office of Parental Options, La Dept. of Educ., September 13, 2011: "Preschools are not technically part of charter schools since . . . no charter school grants/funding can be used towards pre-K."

^v Budget contained within Lycee Francais Public Charter School Grant Program application.

^{vi} Lycee Francais Charter School Application, p. 45.

APPENDICES A - B:



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Tuition | Pre-K3 & Pre-K4

2011-2012 Tuition & Fees

Kindergarten to 12th grade*:	FREE
Pre-K3 & PreK4:	\$4,570.00
Consumables*:	\$150.00

**2011-2012 school year will only include Pre-K3, Pre-K4 and Kindergarten*

***Includes all instructional supplies, materials, and workbooks. Not included are a student's personal supplies and field trips*

Tuition Payment Plans

1. Single Payment Plan: Tuition for Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 is due in full on **July 1st, 2011**.
2. Monthly Payment Plan: Total tuition is due in ten (10) equal loan payments. Loans are available through **ASI Federal Credit Union – ASI Tuition Loan Application**. Please email the loan application to Terri Miller at terri.miller@asifcu.com or Penny Sandras at penny.sandras@asifcu.com or fax to their attention at 504 733-1275. They can be reached at 504-733-1733 ext 79150 or 79148 for questions. *Loan applications are due to ASI by May 27th.*

Staff Log In

Tuition

For Pre-K3 & Pre-K4 only. Please mail tuition payments to:

LFNO
c/o David Bedell
5401 S. Claiborne Ave.
New Orleans, LA 70125

[more tuition info](#)

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