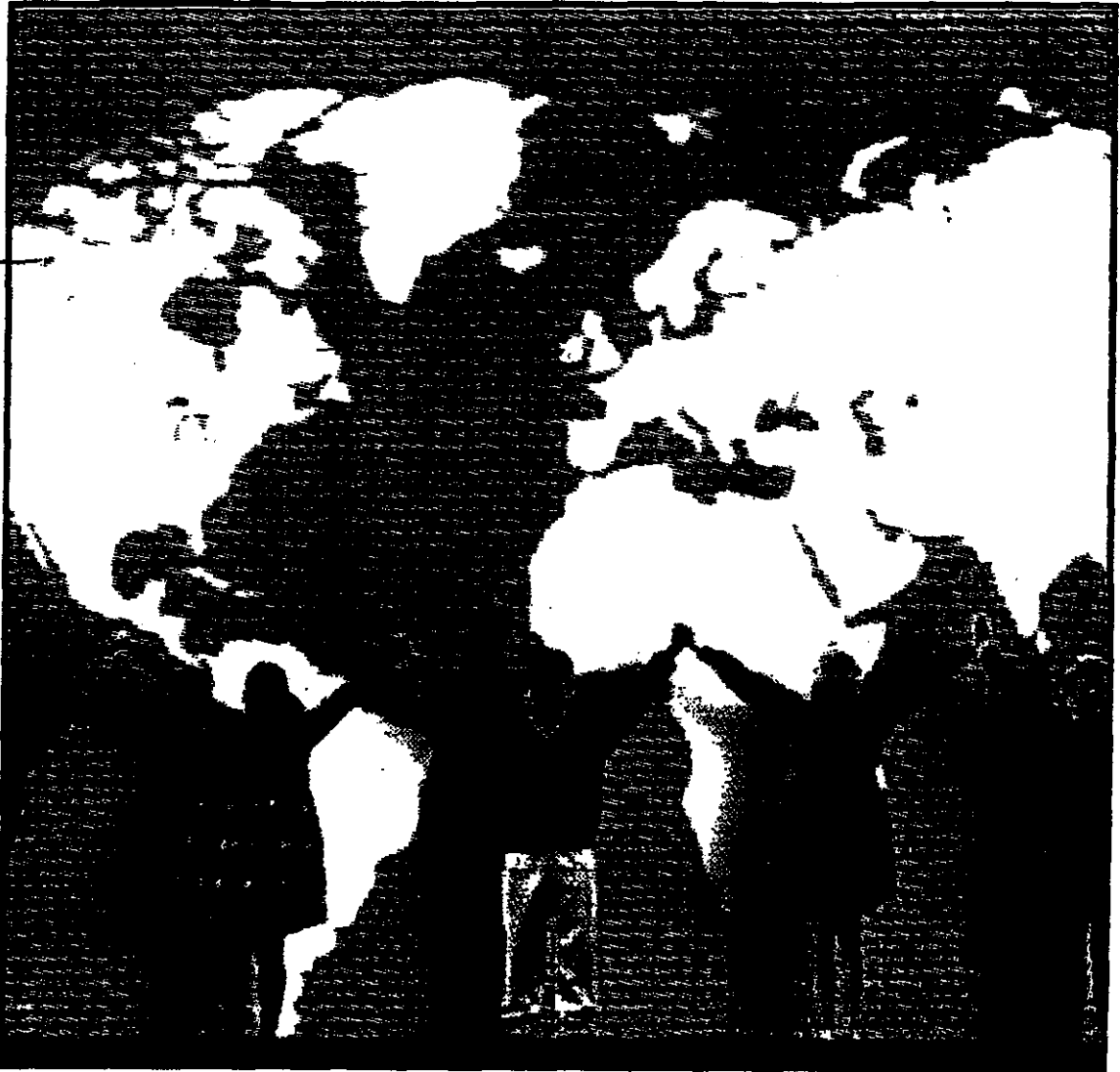


a public school of choice

UNITY

CHARTER SCHOOL



"Never doubt that a small group of
committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

— Margaret Mead

CER
Revised:
1/26/99



Message from Staff:

We look forward to a year of exciting adventures, community building and incredible possibilities. As the first members of Unity Charter School, we forge a new path into the twenty-first century. The dream of Unity has become a reality. We are most grateful to the founders of Unity Learning Environments for their courage and persistence in creating the charter, which envisioned an environment with unique integration of ecoliteracy and democratic governance. We also appreciate the endless hours of work and conversation that the board, the planning team, parents and community members engaged in to weave the fabric of Unity.

At Unity we are involved in great work. We are building a community of learners of all ages. These future leaders come from many districts. We are enriched by the diversity of our membership, and your willingness to share your talents.

We encourage you to refer to this handbook often throughout the school year, as we all deepen our understanding of our philosophy, and methods. Please do not hesitate to share an idea or question. Inquiry is a worthwhile pursuit for each of us. It is a privilege to be part of this creative endeavor.

Sincerely,

The Unity Staff

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What is a Charter School?

Charter Schools are public schools, financed by the same per-pupil funds that fund traditional public schools. Each charter school has a contract specifying how it will operate. The contract holds the charter school accountable for improving student performance and achieving the goals of the charter. Unity Charter School is monitored by the New Jersey Department of Education and is responsible for following the New Jersey State curriculum.

Charter schools are not affiliated with other local school districts and consequently have the freedom to develop programs which provide school choice for parents and students.



Mission of the Unity Charter School

The mission of Unity Charter School is to provide an environment for learning which fosters the development of the responsible use of freedom, promotes a choice of interests in which to master fundamental concepts and which encourages ownership and personal power within the context of an ecologically responsible community.

Philosophy

Students of all ages are curious, innovative, and responsible. They possess their own unique knowledge and experiences; they think creatively, and make decisions based on their own interests and goals. Motivation and self-direction are inextricably linked, whether in the workplace or in our schools. Freedom and choice are not extras or "enrichment," they are the heart of our democratic society and the essence of a meaningful life.

Expectations

Learners are expected to:

- ✓ **respect** themselves, others, and the environment
- ✓ **take an active role** in their own growth and learning
- ✓ **encourage others** to grow and learn
- ✓ **contribute** to the Unity community
- ✓ **constantly reassess** their goals and work hard to achieve them
- ✓ **develop** their strengths
- ✓ **make growth and learning priorities** in their lives
- ✓ **challenge themselves**

Parents are expected to:

- ✓ **encourage** learners to set goals and develop personal strengths
- ✓ **support** learners in establishing their individual style and rate of learning
- ✓ **develop** an understanding of the educational philosophy of the school



- ✓ **attend** learner-parent-learning facilitator conferences and informal discussions throughout the school year
- ✓ **challenge themselves**

Learning Facilitators are expected to:

- ✓ **provide a learning environment** that is comfortable, creative, attractive, and conducive to learning
- ✓ **provide challenging learning activities** and leadership for learners
- ✓ **be involved** as learners, and model enthusiasm, curiosity, and hard work
- ✓ **support** learners in establishing their individual style and rate of learning
- ✓ **provide a democratic atmosphere** that respects the dignity of each person
- ✓ **provide a climate of responsibility** that develops learner self-discipline
- ✓ **be aware** of the academic and social growth of each learner and accurately record and communicate this growth to the learner and parent
- ✓ **challenge themselves**

Assessment

The aim of the Unity assessment program is primarily to educate students and improve their performance, not merely to audit it. Portfolios and charts (rubrics) build a profile of individual achievement. On a yearly basis, students participate in a comprehensive standardized testing of achievement. The TerraNova series by CTB/McGraw-Hill has been selected as the measurement tool because of its validity and reliability based on recent norms, and its user friendly format and design. It is given in October to allow time for the results to be used diagnostically. In addition, students considered as fourth and eighth graders participate in state mandated standardized testing.



Conflict Resolution

Unity is implementing the Conflict Mediators Program. This is a structured, student-based program. The staff and students are trained in mediation skills, problem solving, assertiveness, listening and leadership skills. Student Conflict Mediators mediate non-physical disputes among fellow students at school. Students with conflicts seek out, or are referred to Conflict Mediators. Conflict Mediators promote a more peaceful environment at school by helping students express their problems clearly and reach their own resolutions, reducing the necessity for serious adult disciplinary actions. Consequences for misbehavior will be logical and/or natural.

Democratic Governance

Democratic governance is an integral part of the Unity learning experience. It provides a voice for every member of the learning community and provides an opportunity for students, parents, and staff to join the board of trustees in the decision making and governing process. The Unity Charter School democratic model is different from a representative democracy such as a student council. Each member of the community may participate in shaping important decisions. The Unity model is comprised of three governing bodies.

1. **The Board of Trustees**, comprised of up to 12 members will be the official governing body of the school. These representatives will ensure that the school operates in compliance with the Charter School Program Act of 1995. Meetings are held on the first Monday of each month.
2. **The Assembly**, comprised of parents, students, staff and board will advise, recommend and vote on general policies and fiscal matters. Unless the recommendations prohibit the board from fulfilling it's requirements under the law, those recommendations will be given priority in determining the governing of the school. The Assembly will meet at least two times each year.
3. **The School Meeting**, comprised of staff and students, will offer our young learners the experience of self-governance and self-management. It is our belief that this will help them become thoughtful, responsible, and effective citizens. The scope and jurisdiction of the school meeting will be focused on non-pedagogical operations. Students will have a budget and have the opportunity to decide on vital day to day issues. The meetings will be held every Friday morning.

Homeroom

Homeroom is essential in helping students establish a sense of belonging and community. Homeroom meets every Monday through Thursday morning from 8:10-8:50. Children ages 5-12 will be part of each homeroom. It is the role of the homeroom teacher to:

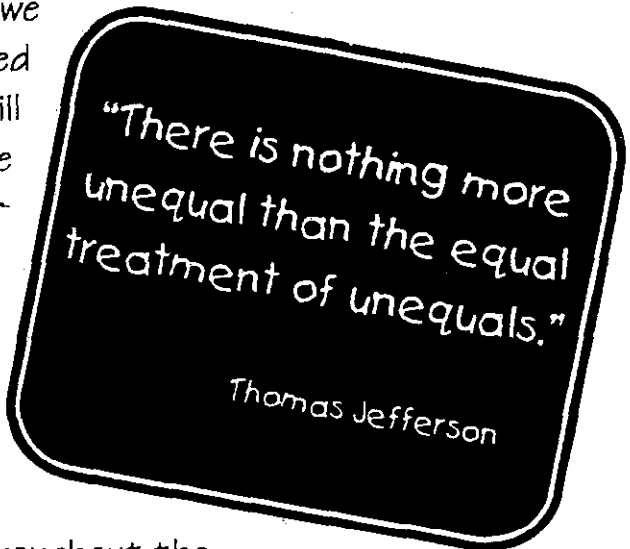
- ✓ assist students in getting to know and appreciate each other more fully
- ✓ encourage students to explore, discuss and evaluate their own values and opinions
- ✓ encourage students to listen to the opinions of others
- ✓ help students learn the skills of problem-solving and group decision making
- ✓ help students plan, organize, assess, and schedule their learning activities for the day
- ✓ encourage students to set realistic goals for their day
- ✓ assist students in evaluating their learning

The Homeroom Teacher

- ✓ Meets frequently with each homeroom student to review his/her program
- ✓ Meets regularly with the content area teachers to discuss their homeroom student's progress in each subject area
- ✓ Communicates the student's progress with his/her parents.

Personalized Learning Program

Each Unity student is recognized as being unique from all others, and based on this fundamental understanding, we have developed personalized learning plans. Students will have the opportunity to realize their full potential as their unique learning styles, multiple intelligence, weaknesses, strengths, academic passions, and individual interests are identified, assessed, and supported. Opportunities will be given to each student throughout the school day to learn at their own pace and appropriate level.



Age Groupings

Students at Unity will be grouped in different age group configurations determined by the purpose of each learning environment.

- ✓ homeroom communities are composed of students ages 5-12.
- ✓ Core subjects will be divided according to general developmental ages.
- ✓ interest groups and independent study will be based on the student's choice.

Student Choice

Students will have a three hour period from 12:30-3:30 PM on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, during which time they may explore areas of personal interest using a wide array of materials. Students may choose to collaborate, or work independently. The art and technology consultants, as well as parent mentors will offer workshops during this period. This program will provide opportunities for students to identify and evaluate their own strengths and interests, as well as initiate group activities.

Core Curriculum

The New Jersey State Department of Education has written standards that define New Jersey's expectations for student learning. Higher order thinking skills are incorporated into units of study. Focus is on investigation of a topic while mastering knowledge and skills. These sixty one Core Curriculum Content Standards, and their related progress indicators define expected results in seven academic content areas:

- visual and performing arts
- comprehensive health and physical education
- language arts literacy
- mathematics
- science
- social studies
- world languages.



In addition, five cross content workplace readiness standards define what students must acquire as part of their transition from school to work: career planning and workplace readiness skills; use of information, technology, and other tools; critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving; self management skills; and safety principles. The Unity Charter School curriculum has been written to enable our students to meet these expectations.

Environmental Education

Ecological studies go beyond the curriculum, and an understanding, love and respect for the earth. For learners to become the leaders who implement real change they must learn to identify and analyze concerns, brainstorm solutions, and experience authentic audiences who validate their ability to promote real change. This process gives learners knowledge of government systems, creates a need for effective communication, and provides opportunities for public speaking. Unity learners are involved in their community as catalysts, who work to create a sustainable environment for all.



Ecological Education is implemented at Unity Charter School in three ways:

1. Infusion into all curriculum areas
2. Involvement in real life environmental issues in their own communities
3. Generation of a model of sustainability through our daily operational practices



Field Trips

Students have the opportunity to explore their local bioregion and conduct scientific field research, as well as experience numerous cultural resources during weekly Friday field trips. Trips will be grouped alternately by homeroom, special interest, and age.

Independent Learning

Students have opportunities for inquiry and investigation of topics of personal interest. Learning is shaped by studying the individual's intellectual and imaginative powers, and competencies, rather than by "subjects" as conventionally defined. Learning is oriented to problem solving and decision making: embedded in real-life tasks and activities for thinking and communicating. When a student proposes a topic for an independent study they will be asked to complete the following:



1. Brainstorm questions about their topic
2. Locate and select resources
3. Gather background information
4. Select a focus problem for investigation
5. Decide on a product
6. Identify an audience for the product
7. Present the product for an audience
8. Evaluate the project

Multi-disciplinary Learning

Knowledge does not fall neatly into separate categories or disciplines. While specialization can be useful, the world is best understood as a whole with the various branches of knowledge supporting each other.

Parent and Community Involvement

The School Volunteer Program is a network of parents, grandparents, community members and senior citizens who donate time and service to our school. Our volunteers are trained to be clerical, classroom, library and computer aides and mentors and workshop facilitators who provide a valuable service to our school. A database will be created to match student interest with parent talents and careers. If you are interested in participating in the program, please contact the school.

Attendance

School Hours Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 8:00-3:30
Wednesday 8:00 - 11:30

Each child is an important contributing member of the Unity community, therefore, consistent attendance is imperative. Parents must notify the school office before 8:00 AM if their child will not be in school that day. If a child does not arrive at school, and the school has no record of the absence, someone from the school will call home to verify the child's whereabouts.

Arrival/Dismissal

To ensure the safety of our students, parents, students and visitors will enter school through the front door. Parents who drive their children to school should park in the designated parking spaces, and walk their children to the front entrance. Parents are asked to follow established traffic patterns and parking regulations. Traffic must enter on Ames Avenue and exit from Speedwell Avenue.

Please attempt to schedule medical, dental or other appointments at the end of the day's session. If it is absolutely necessary to schedule appointments during the school day, and a dismissal during school hours is necessary, the student will be dismissed only to a parent and only if the office has a signed and dated note. The student must report to the office to be dismissed from school.

Schedule

8:00 - 8:10	Arrival
8:10 - 8:50	Homeroom
8:50 - 11:30	Core Curriculum Subjects (English, Math, Science, Social Studies)
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch and free choice including playground recess
12:30 - 3:30	Interest Groups, Independent Study - students select from an array of choices

Visitors: All visitors, regardless of age, will be given an identification tag so that staff and children may readily recognize them as visitors. They are also required to sign in at the office when they arrive and sign out when they leave.

Clothing

Children should be prepared for the possibility of outside play or field study everyday. Please encourage your children to always wear a hat and sun block when playing out of doors. The children will need a smock for art class and slippers for indoor activities. Any clothing which, by slogan or illustration, is offensive or promotes the use of drugs, alcohol, or violence will not be permitted.



Affirmative Action

The school's Affirmative Action Plan is on file in the school office.

Affirmative Action Officer:

Susan Paynter, Director
340 Speedwell Avenue
Morristown, New Jersey 07960

504 Exemptions

The Board of Trustees recognizes that a student is disabled pursuant to 29 U/S.C. 794 or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), if she or he has: a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person's major life activities; has a record of such an impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment. Additional information on Section 504 services may be obtained by contacting the school office.

Emergency School Closings

Announcements will be made on radio stations WMTR, WOR, and on Fox TV-Good Day New York (Channel 5), at intervals from 6:30 to 8:30 AM, when an emergency school closing is necessary. These stations will also announce delayed school openings. Listen for the Morris School District closings, as Unity Charter School will not be specifically named.



When a delayed opening occurs on a full day of school, opening times will be two hours later than the scheduled opening time and the regular closing time will be in effect. When a delayed opening occurs on a scheduled Wednesday, that day will automatically revert to a full day schedule, and the regular full day closing time will be in effect.

Fire Drills

Two fire drills a month will be practiced in accordance with New Jersey State Code.

Emergency Cards

Emergency Cards assist the school in reaching a parent or guardian in case of an emergency or illness. Parent's phone numbers and the phone number of a nearby friend or neighbor (supplied by the parent) are also listed. The office should be promptly notified of any change of address, home telephone or emergency telephone numbers.

Communicable Diseases

Parents are asked to cooperate in preventing contagious diseases by inspecting their children each morning for signs of cold, rash eruptions, or other deviations from normal health. When the parent is in doubt, a child should be kept at home and the family physician consulted. In the case of the common contagious diseases of childhood, the following rules must be adhered to: (NJ Statute 18A 40-10)

Please follow the procedure that pertains to your situation

Chicken Pox: Must stay at home for one week from onset of the eruption

Scarlet Fever: If adequate specific therapy (ie. penicillin) is given, the child should be approved for return by the school health office.

Strep Throat: Child may return 24 hours after the medication is started if there is no high temperature

Children who have had contact with above diseases:

There are no restrictions on children who have been exposed to cases of the above mentioned diseases. In addition to the usual communicable diseases of childhood, children afflicted with ringworm, pediculosis, scabies, pink eye and impetigo will be excluded from school until such time as the affliction is cured or will not spread to other children.

Administration of Medicines and Drugs at School

According to state law, the school can administer medicines and drugs, only under exceptional circumstances - where the child's health may be jeopardized without it and, then, only after **all the following requirements have been met:**

1. A signed note from the child's doctor indicating the kind of medication, the dosage, and the purpose of the medicine
2. A written request from the parent or guardian to give the prescribed medication
3. The medication must be in its original container from the drug store -
4. The parent delivers the medicine to the school

This includes the use of asthma inhalers by students while at school. Students are not allowed to carry any medication with them during the school day.

VACCINATIONS:

Children must have their immunizations up to date in accordance with New Jersey State Law.

Health Services

FIRST AID is the only treatment given in school.

ACCIDENTS such as head injuries or broken bones are promptly cared for and parents contacted.

ILLNESSES are cared for until parents can be reached. Only a parent or a person specified by the parent, can pick a child up from school in case of an emergency or illness.

**School Nurse
hours are :
Mon, Tues, Thur,
11:30-12:45
Fri
9- 3:30**

Staff Profiles

As part of our community of learners, our staff continues to pursue professional development. All of our teaching staff are New Jersey Certified.

Susan Paynter - Director

BA - Fine Art

MA - Educational Administration

M.Ed. Special Education

19 years of public school teaching experience

Teri Cosentino - Science Specialist

BS - Biochemistry

MA - Education

7 years of private school teaching experience

Nancy Bennett - Math Specialist

BS - Biology

MS - Education

Ed.D. Candidate - Curriculum and teaching

21 years of public school teaching and administration

Stacy Pendergrast - English Specialist

BS - Elementary Education

MA - Special Education

17 years as a learning consultant and teacher in public schools

Bertin Lefkovic - Social Studies Specialist

BA - Political Science

Ed.M. - Social Studies

Patrick Pergola - Environmental Specialist

BS - Environmental Science and Forestry

MA - Candidate - Education

1 year of public school teaching



Trudy Dunham - English Specialist

BA - English Education

MS - Gifted Education

30 years of public and private school teaching and administration

Martha Romano - Art consultant

Graduate of Newark School of Visual Art

20 years of teaching adults and children in college and workshop settings

Wendie Blanchard - Computer Consultant

B.F.A. - Fine Art

7 years as College Graphic Design department chair; 8 years computer graphics professor; 2 year college administration

Gerry Pflugh - Business Administrator

BS - Business Administration

Certified Municipal Finance Officer

20 years experience in accounting and business

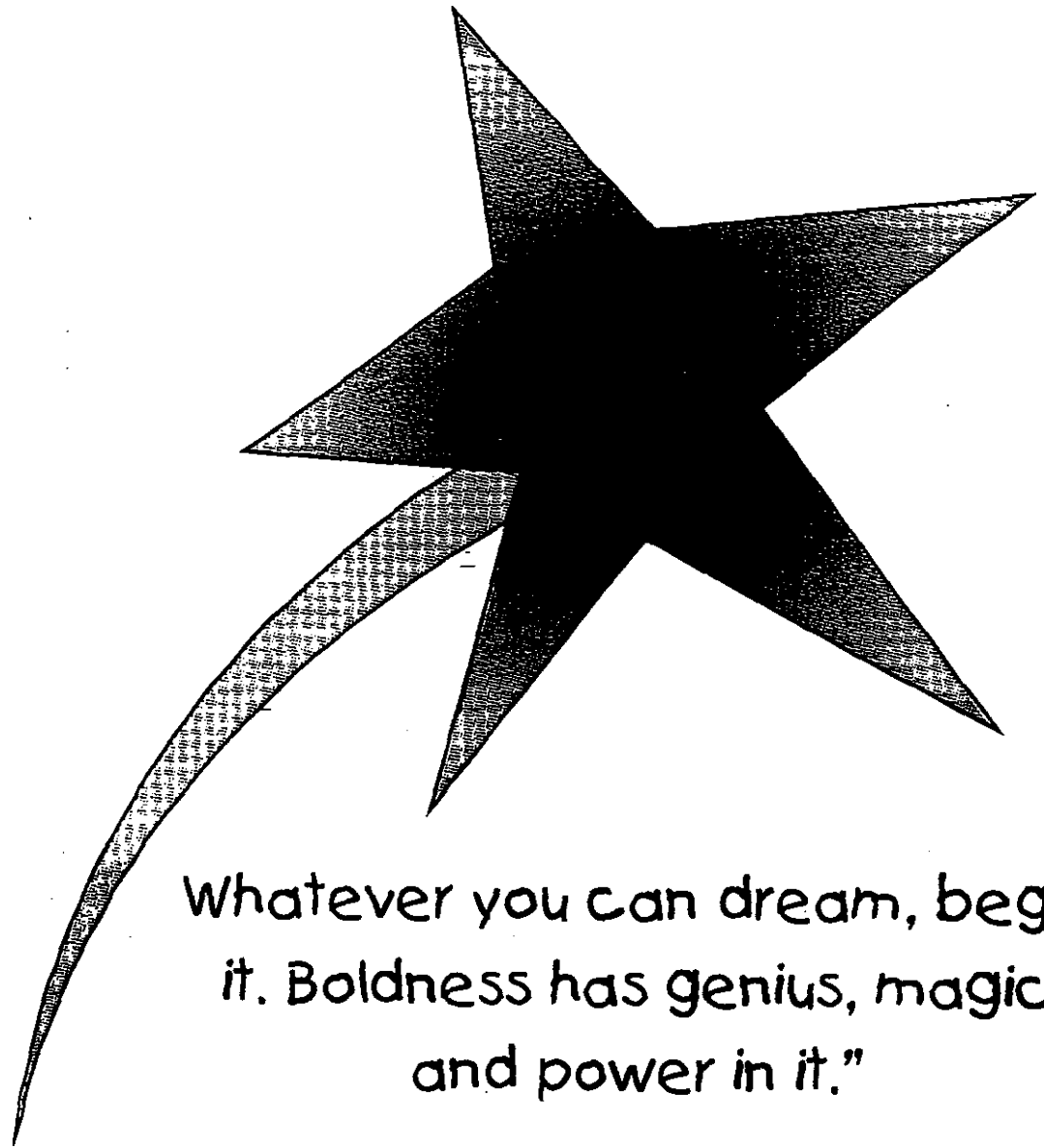
Nancy McNabb - Nurse

B.A. - Psychology

A.A.S. - Nursing

A.A. Humanities

Certified School Nurse - 10 years of public school nursing



Whatever you can dream, begin
it. Boldness has genius, magic
and power in it."

Goethe

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