

YorkCounts pursues a new city charter school

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A York County nonprofit coalition is pursuing the creation of a new, regional charter school in York City with an international program officials hope will lure suburban families and city workers.

YorkCounts, a quality-of-life community group, was awarded a \$75,000 grant recently by the York County Community Foundation, a grant YorkCounts officials said will be used toward legal fees as it prepares a charter application.

YorkCounts wants to open an International Baccalaureate charter school for kindergarten through 12th grade, although it would likely start with just K-2. The school would be based in York City -- York City already has several charter schools, but none with the International Baccalaureate program.

If approved, York City would have the only K-12 International Baccalaureate program in central Pennsylvania, officials said. The nearest one of its kind is in Bethlehem; the Lehigh Valley Academy Regional Charter School draws from 17 school districts.

The International Baccalaureate program, a standardized program around the world, emphasizes learning foreign languages, understanding other cultures and group problem solving. The program is interwoven into regular core subjects.

YorkCounts officials said they would want the school chartered by two districts, York City and one neighboring district to be determined, so there could be a mix of city and county students. If class space is available, more students from around the county could attend.

A charter school is funded by the chartering school district and any district that sends students to the school, but it operates independently.

Grew from Rusk report: The school proposal is the result of the 2002 recommendation by urban policy expert David Rusk to establish a charter or magnet school -- a magnet school offers a specific academic theme -- to help improve York City's economic condition.

YorkCounts' Metro-York Educational Opportunities Subcommittee has been working in recent years on how to fulfill Rusk's recommendation, said Sue Krebs, who has led the subcommittee with Dennis Baughman, who recently retired as superintendent of Northeastern School District.

"It would be a real anchor for redevelopment," Krebs said, noting YorkCounts specifically wants to address poverty in the city.

York City, York Suburban, West York and Dallastown school districts have been among those that have worked with Metro-York in developing the idea, said James DeBord, YorkCounts director.

DeBord believes a regional charter school would have countywide appeal.

"A lot of successfully revitalized communities have provided this kind of educational opportunity," DeBord said. YorkCounts is hoping to file its charter application by November, when it would go up for approval by chartering districts.

Historically, school districts usually reject charters, but the state has an appeal process. York City-based Lincoln Charter School recently won an appeal with the city school board to get a new middle school.

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