



New county charter school takes shape

A plan from YorkCounts calls for a new charter school in the city, but not all the details have been decided.

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An application for the York Academy Regional Charter School will be submitted next month in a move to open the city's fifth charter school.

The school, which is being proposed as a joint venture for students in York Suburban and York City school districts, would be the first of its kind in the county because it aims to combine the two districts into one charter school.

The idea was generated by a YorkCounts committee, but will eventually be taken over by a separate nonprofit. The opening date is planned for August 2011.

The committee was studying ways to break up pockets of concentrated poverty in city schools, said Dan Fink, spokesman for YorkCounts.

In York City, nearly half of the high school students don't graduate, more than 80 percent of students are in poverty, and none of the schools met federal No Child Left Behind goals this year. Located just a few miles away, York Suburban, on

the other hand, is considered one of the best in the county.

The aim is to attract parents who live in the suburbs but work in the city, said Sue Krebs, co-chair of the committee that is heading up the school's development. To make the school attractive to that group, the charter school is eyeing real estate in the downtown area, she said.

"We would love to find a place close to the business district if we could," Krebs said.

The school's supporters first need to win approval from the two school districts because that's where they are applying. Another "small" district that Krebs would not name was also expressed interested, but it was too late to add them to the application process, she said.

So far, the York Suburban School Board said it supports the idea. Several York City School Board members say they want more information before deciding.

Both school boards should receive a detailed application from the charter school by the Nov. 15 deadline. It will outline the curriculum, estimated enrollment, location and directors. The boards are required to vote on that proposal 30 days after receiving it, according to the state's charter school law.

Charter schools are public schools, but they are not run by the school districts that approve them. They are funded by tax dollars, with money

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coming from the students' home school district. A board of appointed leaders run a school board and they do not have to live in the district that a charter school is located in.

York City board member Samuel Beard, who is a charter school supporter, said he would like reassurance that city children would not be overlooked in a joint venture with the suburban district.

If the school is not approved by the districts, it will probably lose a year by going through the state appeals process, Krebs said. If the state grants the appeal, the school could open regardless of what the districts' school boards want.

The curriculum for the school is being written by two recently retired Spring Grove Area School District administrators, David L. Stricker, the former superintendent, and Nancy Ahalt, who was the assistant to the superintendent for curriculum.

As the school's educational consultants, Stricker and Ahalt recently visited the Lehigh Valley Academy Regional Charter School, which has children from urban areas but met all federal testing standards last year. Krebs noted that the school does not have union representation for teachers, so they worked longer days and school years.

The charter school plan would eventually call for it to become an International Baccalaureate program, a type of curriculum that highlights

intercultural learning.

However, it would not open as an International Baccalaureate school. The school would need to be in existence for a few years to be accepted into the program, Krebs said.

The school would be the city's fifth charter school. But unlike Lincoln Charter Elementary, the Helen Thackston Charter Middle School and the New Hope Academy Charter School, the proposed school would not have ties to a for-profit company, Krebs said. Crispus Attucks YouthBuild, a charter school with high-school students, is tied to a nonprofit.

"All the money that comes in will go to the students at the school," she said.

The York City School Board's vice president, Tom Foust, has spoken out against for-profit programs, saying he does not like that they take money out of the community. At Lincoln Elementary, for instance, about \$1 million a year goes to a New York City-based group for management services.

Charter schools are funded based on the number of children that enroll. For instance, for every child living in the city who goes to a charter school, about 80 percent of what would have been spent to educate her in the district goes to the charter school instead.

Foust said he doesn't know enough about the newest proposal to say where he stands. If the charter school meets all the requirements of the

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state's charter law, he'll vote for it, he said. But he'd like to read the application to make an informed decision, he said.

The request for more information will likely have to wait until the application is complete. The charter school's legal advisors have told them to wait until then, Krebs said.

"We are thinking once the application has been filed then we can answer questions," she said.

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ON THE WEB

To learn more about International Baccalaureate, Lehigh Valley Academy Regional Charter School and YorkCounts, check out these Web sites:

www.ibo.org

www.lvacademy.org

www.yorkcounts.org

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