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York County's Afternoon Paper

Two charter schools get four hearings at three school districts

ANDREW SHAW *The York Dispatch*

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December will be a busy month for charter school hearings.

YorkCounts, a nonprofit quality-of-life group, will have hearings Monday, Dec. 7, before the Central York and York Suburban school boards to review its plan for its proposed K-12 York Academy Regional Charter School.

The hearings will both be at 6:30 p.m., giving the public and school boards an opportunity to ask questions about the school.

York City School Board, the third district that received a YorkCounts application, will hold its hearing at 6 p.m. Monday, Dec. 14.

Back-to-back charter hearings: That's not the only new charter school York City is being asked to approve.

HOPE for All Charter School will also have a hearing at 5 p.m. the same night, making it a back-to-back charter event.

York City already has 25 percent of its student population attending charter schools; such schools are independently operated but

financially supported by chartering districts.

Some York City board members have expressed concern about the district's taking on more charter schools, but York Suburban and Central have been generally supportive, said Sue Krebs, co-chair of the YorkCounts committee overseeing that organization's school application.

"This is not a hostile process with Suburban and Central," she said.

York Academy would eventually be K-12, but start with three classes each in K-2. The school would be located in downtown York City in the Smyser-Royer complex, part of the Northwest Triangle

redevelopment.

The process: While York City board members Gerry Turner and Tom Foust have said charter schools are driving the district bankrupt, financial concerns cannot be factored into whether a charter is approved, Krebs said.

Factors such as uniqueness of the program and site location are considered, but the state's charter school statute won't allow a district to deny the application based on funding concerns.

"Let them go with the financial argument, because they will never prevail with that," Krebs said.

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York Academy would have the International Baccalaureate program, which is intertwined into teaching methods. Subjects are taught in an interdisciplinary fashion, with an emphasis on students' asking questions to drive instruction. Foreign culture and languages are emphasized.

"This is entirely unique to the community," Krebs said.

HOPE program: The HOPE school would be located in the building occupied by the HACC-York campus on Pennsylvania Avenue, at the edge of York City School District.

The school is designed for students in grades 10-12.

Students would learn entrepreneurial skills through a café, plus have office and technology internships through the school. HOPE is an acronym for Help Opportunities Practical Experiences Empowerment.

Aiko Malynda Maurer, board secretary and treasurer for the school, said the program offers unique internship experiences to students with more individualized attention than the York County School of Technology.

The thought of adding more charter schools is disturbing to taxpayers, said Warren Bulette of the York County Taxpayers Council.

"It's ridiculous to add another charter school. Why not put (the programs) into a school we

already have?" Bulette said.

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