



Charter school leaders: School would tie city, county children

A York County regional charter school aims to bridge the divide between city and county children.

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A proposed charter school would foster relationships between children in the city and the county, school leaders said at a meeting Saturday with York County Community Against Racism.

The York Academy Regional Charter School would be a joint effort between York City, Central and York Suburban school districts. The school would tie city and suburban children because they would grow up together, said Sue Krebs, co-chairwoman of the YorkCounts group proposing the school.

Some have questioned if parents of children in higher-performing districts such as Central and York Suburban would move their children into the city-based charter school. Krebs said there's a lot children can get from the school, including a rigorous academic International Baccalaureate program and cultural diversity.

"If you don't get in on this now, in a few years you will be really sorry," Krebs said.

The charter school still needs approval from the

three districts.

All the school boards will likely vote on it by mid- to late February, said Dennis Baughman, co-chairman of the YorkCounts committee that proposed the school.

Charter schools are tuition-free alternatives to traditional public schools. They are funded with taxes that follow children from their home public school districts.

Members of York County Community Against Racism who spoke at the meeting supported the idea. Don Hake, chairman of YCCAR, said it would be glad to work with the school.

If approved, the school would open in August 2011 for kindergarten, first- and second-grade students. A new grade level would be created each year thereafter.

Mike Smith, leader of the local Guardian Angels, an anti-crime group, asked how students would be selected to take part in the program.

Initially, the plan was to take 50 percent of the students from the city and open the remains slots to other districts, Baughman said. But that isn't allowed under the state's charter school law, he said.

Instead, students from the city, Central and York Suburban would be given first priority for admission, Baughman said. Once a student is admitted to the program, that child would not

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need to re-enroll, and any siblings would be given priority, he said.

If not enough students from the three districts fill classrooms, then children from other districts would be able to apply.

But Baughman said he doesn't believe there's going to be a shortage of students.

"We believe we have enough interest to say, 'This is going to fly,'" he said.

Working together

The York City School Board and city council are drafting a written agreement on how to handle tax revenue and certain expenditures, said Renee Nelson, a city council member who used to be on the school board.

The city and school board are discussing the real estate transfer tax, which the school district has been collecting in full, Nelson said. The city is entitled to half of it. In return, the district pays for crossing guards, traditionally a city expense, and does not collect some other taxes it is entitled to receive.

On Friday, the school board and council, along with their respective business managers, met to discuss the issue, Nelson said. The goal is to get a written agreement. The side have been operating with a verbal agreement, something Nelson said is not a good business practice.

In addition, the two government entities talked about possibly working together to make joint purchases on items such as office supplies because it would save money, Nelson said.

"It's only sensible and logical to work together," she said.

Nelson and council member Henry Nixon met Saturday with York County Community Against Racism because they are new members of council.

Online

The York Regional Charter School is being modeled, in part, after a successful Lehigh County program, the Lehigh Valley Academy. Learn more about that school at lvacademy.org. The school is a mix of urban and suburban students, and it has posted high state test scores.

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