

School set to alter makeup of York

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York County employers soon will be able to add another asset to the list they use to help recruit workers.

The York City School Board on Feb. 22 approved the application for the [York Academy Regional Charter School](#). The project is being spearheaded by [Metro-York](#), which is a program of [YorkCounts](#), a nonprofit coalition working to improve the county's quality of life. The coalition includes a host of local business leaders.

The school, which will be pursuing International Baccalaureate certification, was approved by the Central York and York Suburban school boards. The certification will provide a curriculum designed to develop the intellectual, personal, emotional and social skills to live, learn and work in a rapidly globalizing world, according to the IB Web site. Officials plan to open the facility for the 2011-12 school year.

One of the purposes of creating the charter school is to help reduce the poverty rate in the city by providing an educational alternative that is attractive to suburban families, said Susan Krebs, co-chair of the Metro-York Educational Opportunities Committee. The committee is in charge of the creation of the charter school. Krebs also is the chairwoman of the [Women's Giving Circle Of York County Community Foundation](#)

The organizers hope the school will draw new residents to the city, as well as new businesses, said Dennis Baughman, who co-chaired the educational opportunities committee with Krebs. Baughman also works as coordinator of the graduate program at Penn State York.

The location is expected to be next to the city's Northwest Triangle redevelopment project, where [Kinsley Construction Inc.](#) and Enterprise Homes are set to transform an 11-acre brownfield into a \$38 million mixed-use project.

Kinsley offered in October to rent the school about 40,000 square feet in the Smyser-Royer complex, a facility being renovated near Beaver and North streets in the Northwest Triangle redevelopment area.

"Although downtown York has a number of business operations, we do know the people who own them typically live outside the city. We're hoping that these people will start bringing their children to our school and eventually, because it'll be a great institution, decide they might want to live in the city," Baughman said. "Hopefully, in turn, we'll change the complexion of the city."

The school initially will offer kindergarten, first and second grades, with 75 students per grade. Another grade level will be added each year until it reaches 12th grade. At first, the facility will employ 20 people, but will employ 55 people by the time 12th grade is added, said Dan Fink, spokesman for YorkCounts.

Students attend charter schools for free, with their home districts paying a certain amount per student to the charter school. This amount covers the cost of educating the student, which averages \$8,000 per student in Pennsylvania, Krebs said. The state reimburses the home district between 35 and 42 percent of its payment to the charter school, she said.

Anticipated expenses for the facility's first year of operation are \$1.9 million, Krebs said. Revenue is expected to be \$2.3 million for the first year, leaving about \$400,000 in net income, which will be invested back into the school, she said.

YorkCounts has been working to implement this project for about two years, she said.

The school will be managed by a volunteer board of trustees. Other charter schools in the area are operated by management companies that charge large amounts to run the schools, Krebs said. As such, all funds collected by the board will go into the school, she said.

The organizers hope to enroll equal numbers of city and suburban students to learn together, and eventually live

closer to one another, she said. That could help reduce the poverty rate of York City School district, which is at 85 percent, based on students who are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunches. York Suburban's poverty rate is 10 percent, while Central York's is 20 percent, she said.

Nearly 45 students from York Suburban School District already attend a charter school or a cyber school, said Kate Orban, superintendent of schools for the district. Parents can elect to do that at anytime, and adding another charter school to the list of available options isn't likely to drastically increase that number, she said. York Suburban's school board approved the charter school because its members believe the IB curriculum to be academically sound, she said.

"You can see the impact at each grade level is not significant. It's not like you're going to be able to get rid of a classroom," Orban said. "The charter schools are a reality, and it does give parents an option. The charter school that was approved ... is really for a certain niche of students and family. They have to be highly motivated because it's extremely rigorous."

YorkCounts also hopes the program will encourage young families to stay in the city, instead of leaving when their children reach school age, Krebs said. This could gradually help to turn around the health of the city, she said.

"Our focus really is doing something for the city," she said. "We're hoping and we believe that it will be a draw to suburban parents. ... By combining these three districts we can get a really good mixed pool of students."

When the project is complete, it will be one of 13 International Baccalaureate schools in the country to offer education for kindergarten through 12th grade, said Steven Gohn, president of [Credit Bureau Of York Inc.](#), which does business as CBY Systems Inc. Gohn is a member of the school's board of trustees.

Gohn lives downtown, operates his business downtown and graduated from the York City School District.

"I think it's a recruiting draw, or at least another positive we can offer, whether it's an incoming employee or company," Gohn said. "It's good to know there's a world-class education being offered here in York."

The voluntary collaboration of three school districts is remarkable, and the resulting facility will help draw more people into York, said Tom Wolf, chairman and chief executive officer of York-based [The Wolf Organization Inc.](#), which does business as Wolf. The charter school also will help the company when recruiting employees, he said.

"It creates a new high-quality, high-caliber, high-expectation educational institution in the city of York," Wolf said. "It's great for York. It's great for anybody who wants to see York grow and prosper."