

January 16, 2012

New York State Education Department Charter School Office  
89 Washington Avenue, Room 471 EBA  
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Sir or Madam:

The Eximius Academy Charter School is submitting a Letter of Intent in response to New York State Education Department's Request for Proposals to Establish Charter Schools. Our response is presented below:

**I. Applicant Information**

*a. Lead Applicant.*

Pamela Y. Swanigan, School Business Leader (SBL) • [REDACTED]

*b. Media Contact.*

Pamela Y. Swanigan, School Business Leader (SBL) • [REDACTED]

• Ph No.: (cell) 518-322-6525; [REDACTED] • Email: [pswanigan@gmail.com](mailto:pswanigan@gmail.com)

*c. Founding Group.*

<b>Founding Member</b>	<b>Background/Expertise</b>	<b>Anticipated Role</b>
Pamela Y. Swanigan	Education Administration/ MPA/Public Finance	School Leader/Academic Experience
Tracy Farrell	Educator/Teacher/Administrator	Dir. of Curriculum & Instruction
Frank Sheldon	Business, Facilities & Financial Mgt.	Dir. of Fin. & Operations
Pastor Theodore Ward	Pastor, Koinonia Christian Ministries, Community Outreach	Advisor, Special Projects
Dr. Peter Stoll, Ph.D	Chief Compliance Officer, Technology in Education, English Teacher	Board of Trustee
James Celestine	Senior Investment Officer, Economics, Analyst, Researcher, Public Finance	Board of Trustees, Treasurer
Reneta Robinson	Public Administration, Data Analyst	Board of Trustees, Secretary
Timothy Taylor, Esq.	Employment, Labor and Education Law	Board of Trustees
Councilman Joseph Allen	Education Psychology, Former Schenectady City Councilman	Board of Trustees
Wesley Holloway	VP of Diversity, Economics	Board of Trustees
Dr. Hal Lawson	School, Family, Community Partnerships	Advisor, Comprehensive System of Learning Supports Consultant
Shai Butler	Schenectady Parent, English, Educ. Administration and Policy Studies	Advisor, Special Projects
Shing Sun Chiu	Information Technology, Mandarin Chinese Instructor	Advisor, Special Projects
Sharon Stevens	Schenectady Parent, Community Outreach	Board of Trustees

d. Names of Proposed Board of Trustees.

Wesley Holloway	Board of Trustee Member, Business/Human Resource
Timothy Taylor, ESQ	Attorney, Employee, Labor, Education Law
Dr. Peter Stoll	Board of Trustee, Technology, Non-Profit Partnerships
James Celestine	Treasurer, Economics/Finance
Sharon Stevens	Board of Trustee Member, Community Representative
Reneta Robinson	Secretary, Data Analysis
Councilman Joseph Allen	Board of Trustees, Community Representative
Vacant	Board of Trustee, Eximius Parent

e. Replication or Network Information. **Not Applicable**

f. Application History.

Eximius Academy Charter School submitted an application to SED in March 2011 and CSI in August 2011. Both were withdrawn.

**I. Proposed Charter School Information**

a. Proposed school name. **Eximius Academy Charter School**

b. Proposed school location. **Schenectady City School District**

c. Planned grades and enrollment in each of the years of the proposed charter term.

Grades	Ages	Number of Students				
		Year 1 2013-14	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17	Year 5 2017-18
<b>K</b>	<b>4-5</b>	100	75	75	75	75
<b>1</b>	<b>5-6</b>	75	100	75	75	75
<b>2</b>	<b>6-7</b>		75	100	75	75
<b>3</b>	<b>7-8</b>			75	100	75
<b>4</b>	<b>8-9</b>				68	90
<b>5</b>	<b>9-10</b>					62
<b>Total Students</b>		175	250	325	393	462

d. Proposed Management and/or Partner Organization(s). **Not applicable.**

e. Proposed school mission.

The mission of the Eximius Academy Charter School is to provide students in Schenectady City School District with an extraordinary kindergarten through fifth grade educational experience where students master New York State and National Common Core standards; a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) applied curriculum; and the social and developmental “*Habits of Mind*” of successful learners. Eximius educational foundation will engage and inspire our students to *internalize* the *attributes* of courage, confidence, reflective thinking, collaborative teamwork and personal accountability on their journey to become college and career ready citizens in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology-based global society.

f. School overview.

“Eximius,” which in Latin means “excellence, exceptional and extraordinary,” is committed to provide an exceptional educational experience for high performing and high achieving 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners by designing an innovative educational model rooted in the following key elements: *academic rigor; continuous use of data; strong school culture; and empowering family engagement.*

**Excellent Standards-Based and STEM Integrated Curriculum:** Eximius Academy will create an academically rigorous program founded on: (1) New York State and National Common Core career and college readiness standards; (2) a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) enriched curriculum; (3) an applied learning environment for students with problem-based learning practicum; and (4) an extended day program.

**Intensive Focus on Literacy:** Eximius will have an intense focus on sustained improvement of literacy skills for all students. They will develop and demonstrate strong reading, writing, thinking, speaking, and presentation skills representative of a successful 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner. Eximius students will demonstrate comprehension and critical interpretation of multiple forms of information, especially informational text, critical in the STEM subject areas.

**Intensive Focus on Math:** Math in Focus (MIF), a Singapore Approach is an instruction model centered on problem solving, with multiple models that help students visualize and understand math concepts. MIF is aligned to the Common Core. It is a carefully paced instruction focusing on teaching fewer math topics per year to a level of mastery. Additionally, consistent use of visual models and manipulatives bridge the concrete and the abstract. MIF also emphasizes skills that are uniquely human: such as visualization, looking for patterns, and communication.

**Exceptional Teacher Capacity:** Eximius teachers will be highly qualified and highly effective upon hiring. We provide a deep and rich teacher professional development program which will support continuous growth of all Eximius teachers. We have carved out a weekly schedule from 1:00pm to 4:00pm for faculty to meet thirty-six half days a year for collaborative teamwork on curriculum and instruction. In addition, thirty-seven full professional development days during the first summer, of which, five have been slated for STEM curriculum design and development in consultation with the PAST Foundation. A requirement for employment with Eximius is that all lead teachers either hold, or earn within three year of employment, a Curriculum and Instruction graduate master's degree, or a Master Math Teacher Certification or a Masters in one of the STEM subjects.

**Technology Literacy:** Technology will be integrated into everyday learning at Eximius. Eximius will integrate 21<sup>st</sup> century technology to supplement and support our core instructional and STEM infused program and student learning. Technology will play an essential role in the academic program in the following ways:

- to be used as a tool to enhance learning across the curriculum;
- to develop student technology skills to prepare them for our technology-based society; and
- to implement powerful student information systems that can provide current data on student achievement to students, teacher, parent, administrators, and board of trustees.

**More time to Learn:** Eximius Academy will *increase instructional time* with a longer school year, 190 days and a longer school day, from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm. *Eximius Extended Day Program* from 4:00pm to 5:30pm will provide more opportunities for students to receive academic and behavioral supports critical to student's academic success, thereby mitigating those conditions often associated with other sub-optimal results (i.e. attendance and behavior problems). *Lego® Robotics<sup>1</sup>* will offer new opportunities for developing engineering skills through our extended day learning program. Robotics is a hands-on program designed to introduce students to a beginning engineering curriculum.

**Assessment and Instructional Effectiveness:** In Eximius, data is at the "heart" of our assessment system. We will apply data to inform a "cycle of continuous instructional

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<sup>1</sup> <http://education.lego.com/> On-line website, accessed on August 5, 2011.

*improvement efforts*” taken on by our faculty as they adapt instruction to meet the differing needs of our students. Assessments we will use include: Dial3 readiness screening for kindergarten students, Diebles for diagnostic screening of our first grade students, AIMSweb Literacy and Behavior components, for benchmarking in the fall, Fountas and Pinnell, Terra Nova, STEM Problem-based Capstone projects, teacher prepared rubrics, and textbook quizzes.

**Two Instructor Model:** Eximius will develop effective teaching practices by providing the necessary teacher supports. The two instructors per classroom model will allow increased individual attention and daily small group and differentiated instruction.

**Strong School Culture:** Eximius will provide a nurturing school environment that promotes mutual respect among students, administrators, faculty, and staff.

**Student Advisory Program:** Eximius will create an Advisory program for our students to provide a built in peer group for our students, and an adult assigned for their tenure at the Eximius. We believe the need to develop trusting relationships is critical.

**Single-Gender Classrooms:** Eximius will implement single-gender classrooms in grades three through five. We believe organizing in this manner will allow our teachers and administrators the space and time they need to build capacity and put in place a strong STEM curriculum, learn the benefits and instructional strategies that single gender classrooms can offer our students when learning STEM subjects, and to ensure balanced classrooms in year three.

**Empowering Family Engagement:** We value our Schenectady parents as critical partners in educating our students. Our parents will become highly effective partners through the comprehensive supports provided in three ways: (1) The Eximius Baby Institute (modeled after the Harlem Children’s Zone Program); (2) Eximius Parent Advisory Council; and (3) strong, effective, and sustainable community partnerships to build strong advocacy and referral resources for our families.

**g. Briefly describe the school’s target population and the community that the school intends to serve.**

The target community for Eximius is Schenectady City School District, the ninth largest city in New York. It is the birthplace of both General Electric and ALCO, and was once known as the “City that Lights and Hauls the World.” Today, Schenectady has a poverty rate of 29% and according to the 2010 census data its population has increased by 6.9% since 2000 (i.e. 66,135). Its social and economic conditions parallel the trends of disinvestment and dislocation that characterize older, industrial cities in the northeast U.S., including the loss of manufacturing jobs, demographics transitions and the consequent increase in the number of low-income residents. Much of the city has been designated as a Weed & Seed community by the U.S. Department of Justice. This designation is reserved by high crime, low-income communities.

The Schenectady City School District (SCSD), as of 2009-10, served 9,687 students and has a free and reduced lunch rate of 69.2%. Schenectady’s student body is now 35% African American, 15% Hispanic, and 14% Asian, and 36% white. In 1980, the minority student rate was 13%. In addition, according to the United Way of the Greater Capital Region’s Community Profile, youth in Schenectady are at the highest risk compared to every other county in the Capital Region (i.e., Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schoharie). This profile lists four risk indicators: (1) teen pregnancy; (2) indicated cases of child abuse and neglect; (3) foster care admissions; and (4) juvenile delinquency intakes. Schenectady County has the highest rates for all these indicators. Moreover, the domestic violence rate in Schenectady is double that of any of the other four counties. It also has the highest suspension rate (nearly twice the state rate), the lowest standardized test scores, the lowest high school cohort graduation rate, “Persistently Dangerous” schools designation, and two years ago, six African American teen girls committed suicide in this city.

Our target population is the student who lives in the City of Schenectady's Hamilton Hill/Vale neighborhood, a distressed urban community in census tracts 209, 210.02, 211.02, and 214, with poverty, unemployment and dropout rates three times higher than national figures. Hamilton Hill/Vale accounted for 64% of all crimes and 84% of all violent crimes in Schenectady County. (U.S. Census 2000) Therefore, given the economic conditions of nearly two-thirds of the families from these two neighborhoods, one of our strategies will be to focus our recruitment efforts here to attract students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FARPL).

## **II. Enrollment and retention of students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the free and reduced price lunch program.**

Schenectady City School District has an enrollment of 9,687 students of which 858 or 8.86% are Students with Disabilities (SWD), 325 or 3.36% are Limited English Proficient (LEP) and 5,963 or 69.2% received Free and Reduced Priced Lunch (FRPL) during FY 2009-10. (NYS School Report Card, 2010) Eximius intends to meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets of SWD, ELL and FRPL students as prescribed under New York Education Law § 2852 (9)(b)(i).

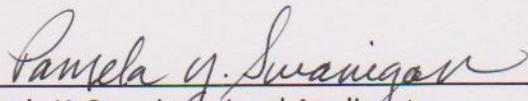
We began our marketing and outreach efforts by walking the Hamilton Hill/Vale neighborhood and speaking directly to potential parents during the summer of 2010, at which time we obtained well over 300 petitions of support from the community, of which over 190 are parents with school aged children. We will continue to do so until such time that we have full enrollment and a healthy wait list. Strategies we will continue to deploy to attract, recruit, and retain our students are the following: *Continue Cultivating Grassroots Support; Small Community Meet & Greet Sessions; Door-to-Door Recruitment Campaign; Direct Mail Campaign; Marketing and Advertising; Open House; Advocacy Group Education and Outreach; Build Trust within the Community through Identified Community Leaders; Conduct a Home Language Survey; and Provide Marketing and Recruitment Materials in Native Language.*

## **III. Public Outreach and Community Support**

The public outreach conducted to date to solicit community input regarding opening Eximius Academy Charter School in the Schenectady City School District has been the following:

- Petition Drive – June through August, 2010 in Hamilton Hill/Vale neighborhoods
- Public Forum – September 14, 2010, at the Bethel Baptist Church Friendship House
- Petition Drive/Meet & Greet – June 18-20, 2010, Juneteenth Celebration in Schenectady Central Park
- Hosted Meet & Greet – May 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at Carver Community Center
- Introduction Letters to Parent – August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010, mailed out 400 letters to parents
- Introduction Letters to Community Organization/Churches – August 10, 2010
- Launched Eximius Facebook Page to begin a continuous dialogue with community on our efforts to open a charter school in Schenectady and to solicit their input.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Eximius-Academy-Charter-School/329201910431737>

  
Pamela Y. Swanigan, Lead Applicant

1/16/2012

Date