

June 24, 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, MPA, SBL • [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
- b. *Media Contact:* Reverend Theodore Ward, • 22 Norwood • Albany, NY 12208 • Ph. No.: (cell) 518-496-8116 • Email: [tward@nycap.rr.com](mailto:tward@nycap.rr.com)
- c. *Founding Group.*

<b>Founding Member</b>	<b>Background/Expertise</b>	<b>Anticipated Role</b>
Pamela Y. Swanigan	Education Administration/ MPA/Public Finance, SBL, SDL Pending	Board of Trustee, Chair
Frank Sheldon	Business, Facilities & Financial Mgt.	Advisor, Charter School Business and Operations Management
Reverend Theodore Ward	Pastor Koinonia Christian Ministries, Community Outreach, Technology	Board of Trustee, Vice-Chair
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
Wesley Holloway	VP of Diversity, Economics, Statistics	Board of Trustees
Councilman Joseph Allen	Education Psychology, Former Schenectady City Councilman	Advisor, Special Projects
Shai Butler	Schenectady Parent, English, Educ. Administration and Policy Studies	Advisor, Special Projects
Shing Sun Chiu	Mandarin Chinese Instructor	Advisor, Special Projects
Sharon Stevens	Lifelong Resident of Schenectady, SCSD Parent, Community Outreach	Board of Trustees
Nichole G. Eschler, Ed. D	Curriculum Specialist, Capital Area School Development Association	Curriculum Specialist, Consultant
Sheli Smith, Ph.D	PAST Foundation	STEM Curriculum, Consultant
Hal Lawson, Ph. D	School, Family, Community Partnerships	Advisor, Parent Involvement Consultant, PLCs
Dirk Tillotson, Esq.	New York Charter School Incubator	Board Training, Finance and Operations, Governance

d. Names of Proposed Board of Trustees.

Pamela Swanigan	Chair, Board of Trustee, SBL, SDL, Education Admin.
Wesley Holloway	Board of Trustee Member, Business/Human Resource
Reverend Theodore Ward	Vice Chair, Board of Trustee, Community Relations
Timothy Taylor, ESQ	Attorney, Board of Trustee, Employment, Labor, Education Law
Dr. Peter Stoll	Board of Trustee, Educator, Technology, Non-Profit Partnerships
James Celestine	Treasurer, Board of Trustee, Economics/Finance
Sharon Stevens	Board of Trustee, Community Representative
Reneta Robinson	Secretary, Board of Trustee, Data Analyst, Realtor
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.

**II. 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>	78	78	78	78	78
<b>1</b>	<b>5-6</b>	78	78	78	78	78
<b>2</b>	<b>6-7</b>		78	78	78	78
<b>3</b>	<b>7-8</b>			70	70	70
<b>4</b>	<b>8-9</b>				63	63
<b>5</b>	<b>9-10</b>					57
<b>Total Students</b>		156	234	304	367	424

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 providing 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; and (3) an applied learning environment for students with problem-based learning capstone projects.

**Intensive Focus on Literacy:** Eximius will have an intense focus on sustained improvement of literacy skills for all students. Our balanced literacy program will be delivered using a Reader's and Writer's workshop instructional model, also referred to as the "Daily Five" in Journeys. The approach will emphasize the importance of student engagement and interaction between the reader and the text. It also provides differentiated instruction in reading and a focus on teaching reading strategies (e.g. making connections, creating mental images, making inferences/drawing conclusion, asking questions, determining what is important, synthesizing, and monitoring comprehension and meaning), all foundational skills critical to the successful 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner. We will adopt Harcourt McMillian Journeys as the reading textbook, which is aligned to the Common Core, and Earobics as a supplement, with Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment system. The Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention System (LLI) provides a small-group intervention program designed to assist teachers in providing powerful, daily, small-group instruction for the lowest achieving students in early grades.

**Intensive Focus on Math:** Math in Focus (MIF), a Singapore Approach is an instructional 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 1:30pm to 4:00pm on Wednesday for faculty to meet thirty-six half days a year for collaborative teamwork on student data analysis, 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. We will provide additional teacher supports by having a licensed teacher assistant in each classroom.

**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: (1) to be used as a tool to enhance learning across the curriculum; (2) to develop student technology skills to prepare them for our technology-based society; and (3) to implement powerful student information systems that can provide current data on student achievement to students, teachers, parents, administrators, and our 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 (e.g., 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.

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

**Assessment and Instructional Effectiveness:** In Eximius Academy data is at the “heart” of our assessment system and will drive our “*cycle of continuous instructional improvement*”. We will use data with fidelity to adapt instruction to meet the differing needs of our students. This process lays the groundwork for our teachers to learn from experience and evidence which in turn improves their own practice. We also believe that data is integral to creating our strong academic infrastructure. By embedding an effective use of data deeply into the culture of Eximius we will remain mission aligned, reach our goals and students will achieve academic success.

**Strong School Culture:** Eximius will provide a nurturing school environment that promotes mutual respect among students, administrators, faculty, and staff. We will also provide the Positive Action Character Education Program, a nationally recognized, evidence-based program that improves academics, behavior, and character which will facilitate the development of trusting relationships among students, teachers and parents.

**Empowering Family Engagement:** We will use a two-generational strategy by targeting both children and parents when designing our Parent Involvement (PI) program. As a family-supportive community model, our PI program will include the *education of the family*. Our parents will become highly effective partners through the following comprehensive supports we provide: (1) Joyce Epstein’s parent involvement framework and the Eximius Baby Institute (modeled after the Harlem Children’s Zone Program) will create empowered parents; (2) Eximius Parent Advisory Council, will train our parents in school governance; and (3) strong, effective, and sustainable community partnerships to build strong advocacy and referral resources to help parents build strong families.

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

The target community for Eximius is the Schenectady City School District (SCSD), which resides in 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). The Schenectady City School District (SCSD), as of 2010-11, served 9,703 students and has a free and reduced lunch rate of 65%. Schenectady’s student body is now 35% African American, 15% Hispanic, and 15% Asian, and 34% white. Since the 1980’s, when Schenectady had a 13% minority student population, it has become a more diverse community. 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 between November 2008 and April 2009, four Schenectady High school students, all African American teenage girls committed suicide; two in the span of one week in February 2009.

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.

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

Eximius will focus concerted effort to attract, recruit and retain all students, especially ELL/LEP, SwD and those students eligible for FRPL. We will gain their trust and confidence by reaching out to families of special populations and demonstrate our commitment to serve these students with our supportive academic model that has staffing (e.g. SPED Coordinator, RtI Coordinator, multi-lingual faculty and LEP Coordinator), programs and interventions in place to effectively welcome students and meet their needs. We have identified and will market Eximius to the neighborhoods in Schenectady where a predominance of low-income and non-English speaking families reside and to advocacy organizations and groups who support students with special needs. Eximius will meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets of SwD, ELL and FRPL students as prescribed under New York Education Law § 2852 (9)(b)(i).

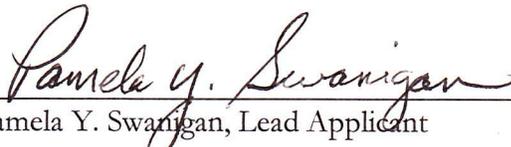
### IV. Public Outreach and Community Support

Eximius Community Outreach Team developed and initiated a thorough plan of action to ensure that the residents in the City of Schenectady have been continually informed of our efforts to open a new charter school and we have sought their input and comments from the very beginning. We began **in 2010** by *cultivating grassroots support* with the following activities and events.

- Petition Drive – June through August, in Central Park and Hamilton Hill/Vale neighborhoods
- Public Forum – September 14<sup>th</sup> at the Bethel Baptist Church Friendship House
- Petition Drive/Meet & Greet – June 18-20<sup>th</sup> Juneteenth Celebration in Schenectady Central Park (see news article in attachment)
- Introduction Letters to Parents – August 2<sup>nd</sup>, mailed out 400 letters to parents
- Introduction Letters to Community Organization/Churches – August 10<sup>th</sup>

**In 2011**, we continued to e-mail and telephone the parents on the distribution lists of over 300 supporters we compiled as a result of our initial outreach efforts to keep them update on our application progress. The major activities included: Hosted Meet & Greet – May 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at Carver Community Center; Surveyed parents at the Carver Community Child Care Center; and Launched Eximius Academy Charter School Facebook page. Of 51 parents surveyed, 91% supported our efforts.

**In 2012**, we reached out to request comments from the community by hosting *Small Community Meet & Greet Sessions* in different venues. We sent our Press Release, and flyers announcing our Town Hall meeting to the Schenectady City School District, all nine public libraries, sixteen churches, nine child care centers, Albany Broadcasting B95.5 FM, Community Calendar and we were interviewed on their “News, Views, and Interview” show on April 10<sup>th</sup>. The Schenectady Municipal Housing Authority posted our press release in their monthly newsletter, with circulation of 400 families from Lincoln Heights, Schonowee Village, Ten Eyck, Steinmetz Homes and Yates Village. We also hosted a Family Fun Day at Yates Village Community Center. The reception was overwhelmingly positive with all parents supporting the school and providing comments. The only need requested not previously considered was an afterschool program which extended to 7:00pm, rather than 5:00pm. We have begun discussions with Hamilton Hill Art Center to partner with them and apply for the Advantage After School Program grant through NYS Office for Children and Family, and other grant opportunities to assist us in offering the Eximius Extended Day program until 7:00pm. Finally, over the past two years we have collected interest from over two hundred parents through petition signatures, applications, and a waiting list.

  
Pamela Y. Swanigan, Lead Applicant



Date