

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mission Statement

The mission of the Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School is to develop and nurture informed global citizens and life-long learners by providing our students the academic, emotional and social skills essential for successful completion of the four year college of their choice. Through a rigorous and intensive academic program, with parents as partners, our students will adhere to a standard of academic excellence that will propel them to become constructive members of society.

Key Design Elements

As a school that will hold our students, staff and parents to the highest level of accountability, we will vigorously operate under a “No Excuses” philosophy which has been proven successful with most charter schools. Our three core design elements that will propel our students to high academic achievement are outstanding pedagogy, rigorous academic program and a structured and supportive school culture.

Outstanding Pedagogy

Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School is committed to hiring highly qualified, passionate and committed teachers who have experienced success in teaching in an urban school environment. We will support the growth of all of our teachers by providing quality and meaningful staff development prior to the start of the school year as well as weekly. Our teachers will be expected to be ‘reflective practitioners’ whose classroom instruction will be guided and driven by data on our student achievement.

Rigorous Academic Program

Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School will be an academically rigorous, standards based middle school, with a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Our students will be held to high academic achievement regardless of their language proficiency, special education status, or initial academic skills level. Our rigorous academic program will provide our scholars dramatically more time on instruction. Our students will receive ninety minutes of guided reading and writing, ninety minutes of math, one hour of social studies, and an hour of science. Additionally our students will be taught a foreign language beginning from the 5th grade.

Our New York State Standards aligned curriculum coupled with ongoing meaningful assessment analysis will work together to build a data-informed school culture. Data generated from initial and ongoing formative and summative assessments will be an integral means of analyzing our students’ strengths and weaknesses, thereby tailoring instruction to meet their individual needs.

We believe that our small, structured school environment with low teacher to student ratios will minimize academic risks because our educators will be better able to monitor our students’ needs and progress.

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Consistent with our mission of adhering to a standard of academic excellence for all scholars of Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School, our special education students will thrive in a full inclusion, collaborative team-teaching (CTT) design where the content area teacher works in conjunction with a certified special education teacher to implement instruction that is differentiated to meet the needs of each student.

We believe that the most effective way to prepare our English Language Learners students to succeed academically is through a structured English immersion program in which they are educated alongside their English-speaking peers with additional support from a certified ESL teacher. Our ELL students will be educated in a collaborative instructional setting comprised of ELL students and native speakers of English. Every staff member will receive staff development in utilizing The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model.

Structured and supportive school culture

Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School will provide a structured and supportive environment that will enable our students to foster the intrinsic **D.R.I.V.E** to succeed; **D**etermination, **R**esponsibility, **I**ntegrity, **V**ision and **E**xcellence in all endeavors. Our students will earn or lose 'DRIVE' dollars based on their adherence to these principles. They will be able to redeem their 'dollars' to purchase meaningful privileges at the end of each trimester and also at the end of the school year. Moreover, students will be recognized weekly during our morning gatherings.

Capacity of Founding Team

The Founding Team of Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School, driven by our mission, embodies the passion and commitment that fosters a culture of high expectations and personal growth for our staff, students and parents. Our multifaceted founding team possesses a wide array of expertise that include urban education, community and youth development, fiscal, legal, architectural, technological, behavioral and biological sciences. The team is comprised of parents and grandparents of students in East Ramapo School District, educators, community leaders, non profit representatives and business owners. The educators on the team have proven success in the education of English Language Learners and classified students within an urban middle school setting.

II. STUDENT POPULATION

A. Student Enrollment

Applicant Instructions: In the table provided, enter enrollment projections for the school, by year, for the first five years of operation.

Grades	Projected Enrollment Table				
	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2017-2018
K					
1st					
2nd					
3rd					
4th					
5th	80	80	80	80	80
6th		80	80	80	80
7th			75	75	75
8th				70	70
9th					
10th					
11th					
12th					
Ungraded					
Totals	80	160	235	305	305

B. Target Populations

Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School will serve grades 5 through 8 in the East Ramapo Central School Community. East Ramapo is a vibrant community that is economically, racially and culturally diverse. East Ramapo school population breaks down into 59% Black/African Americans, 22% Latino/Hispanic, 11% White and 8% Asian with 65% of the students in the district receiving free and or reduced lunch. ESL students make up 14% of our student population. Additionally, 25% of our population consists of classified special education students. Statistically these factors contribute to low academic performance as evidenced by the following ELA and Math data.

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In the table below, the 2008-09 New York State ELA and Math scores for 5th through 8th grades for East Ramapo and surrounding school districts are compared:

% Meeting Or Exceeding Standards	East Ramapo	Clarkstown	Haverstraw-Stony Point	Nanuet	Nyack	Ramapo Central
5th Math	77	96	81	92	86	90
5th ELA	70	93	76	91	86	85
6th Math	74	94	80	92	81	95
6th ELA	74	91	68	81	80	86
7th Math	80	94	87	94	80	94
7th ELA	70	91	71	85	81	79
8th Math	55	93	71	88	73	86
8th ELA	48	84	68	76	74	71

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/ela-math/>

In essence, East Ramapo has had the lowest percentage of fifth through eighth graders who met or exceeded the NYS standards in ELA and Math for public schools in Rockland County. This has transcended into the district bearing the distinction of having the lowest high school graduation rate in Rockland County. The graduation rates for the districts in the county as reported by the 2008-2009 New York State Report card are shown below:

School District	Graduation Rate
East Ramapo	70%
Clarkstown	93%
Haverstraw-Stony Point	77%
Nanuet	92%
Nyack	86%
Ramapo Central	90%

The two populations that data supports that are at increased risk of academic failure are special education and ELL students. Our school's program is specifically tailored to support these two populations while providing a challenging and enriching curriculum. All other at-risk students will benefit from our collaborative team teaching model as well.

Rockland Academy is open to all students of New York State of eligible school age and will not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, religion, disability or English language

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proficiency. Rockland Academy will comply with admissions preferences to certain individuals consistent with the New York State Charter Schools Act. Preference will be given to students residing in the East Ramapo Central School District. Further, we will reserve seats for students designated as Special Education or English Language Learners in proportion equal to the East Ramapo Central School District's average for students with these designations and we will aggressively recruit to ensure we meet this goal.

As preference is given to those students residing in East Ramapo School District much of our recruitment will be done in this area. Since we are beginning with fifth grade, we will recruit at community and after school programs such as The Kurtz Community Center, Rockland Afterschool Program and Kombit Neglakay, an organization that serves the Haitian community. This will be done to ensure we have a significant pool of grade level appropriate applicants for the school during the 2012 – 2013 school year.

Rockland Academy will ensure that all recruitment materials contain specific language that promotes our services to the Special Education and ELL populations. We will notify the related service providers who serve the students of East Ramapo of our available special education services. We will reach out to The Huntington Learning Center and Kumon Learning Center. We will also advertise our ESL services in community centers, churches, and stores frequented by non-English speaking immigrants and neighborhoods that are inhabited by the same immigrants. Rockland Academy will also reach out to community centers, mental health clinics, foster care agencies, food pantries and other social services agencies in Rockland County, to give them information about our school and its services for special education and ELL students. We will encourage them to share this information with the parents of the special needs students they serve.

Outreach Plan

- **Informational Sessions:** During the recruitment period, open houses will be held weekly in the morning and evenings. These meetings will be open to all interested families who will be provided with opportunities to complete applications. During the school year, informational sessions, conducted in English, Creole and Spanish will be available weekly. In the event that our facility is not available for occupancy during our information sessions, we will conduct these sessions at the Kurtz Community Center in Spring Valley. Additionally, bilingual staff members will be on hand to provide information to families.
- **Website:** Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School will create and maintain a website to disseminate information about our school as well as upcoming informational sessions.
- **Community Outreach:** Rockland Academy will seek and develop relationships with organizations that serve families of appropriately-aged children within the community, including those that service students with disabilities and English Language Learners. These organizations include, but are not limited to Kumon Learning Center, Kurtz community Center, Kombit Neglakay, local day care centers, afterschool programs, local recreation centers, preschools, Head Start programs, community boards, community-

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based organizations (health-based organizations, WIC Centers, etc.) and public libraries in the East Ramapo school district. In addition to mailings announcing our recruitment period, Rockland Academy School staff will also make presentations to different houses of worship in our community. This information will include school brochures and the dates of upcoming information sessions, as well as key features of our academic program.

- **Flyers:** Informative flyers on charter schools will be created in English, Spanish and Creole and will be distributed to apartment complexes, churches, community centers and local businesses.
- **Door-to Door Outreach:** We will conduct door to door connections to homes including all of the apartment complexes in the East Ramapo Central School District in order to inform families about public school choice.
- **Local Spanish and Creole Cable Talk shows:** Members of our founding team have already been guests on local cable talk shows discussing our goals of creating a charter school tailored to meet the needs of our underserved population.

Retaining our students

In order to have and maintain a high student retention rate, we will ensure that our parents feel highly confident that the needs of their children are being met. In order to evaluate feedback from our parents, Parent Surveys will be completed at the end of each quarter. To reiterate the importance of our parents’ input in the school’s decision making process, we will retain at least one voting slot on our Board for our parents. We will also establish our Parent Teacher Association chapter. Through constant and open communication, orientation of parents to the goals and methods of Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School, welcoming integration of parents into the life of the school, as well as representation of a parent Trustee, we will seek to understand and respond to the needs of the parent community. This partnership will consequently result in a high student retention rate.

Attracting, Serving and Retaining Students with Disabilities

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, our school district has the unusual distinction of having about 25 % of students with an individualized education program (IEP). Additionally, the 2008-2009 New York State District Report Card indicated that the following student groups did not meet Annual Yearly Progress in English Language Arts and Mathematics:

Student Group	English Language Arts	Mathematics
Black or African American	√	
Student with Disabilities	√	√
Limited English Proficiency	√	

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According to the 2008-2009 New York State Report card the high school graduation rate for students with disabilities and ELL students are as follows:

Sub Groups	High school Graduation Rate
Student with Disabilities	49%
Limited English Proficiency	44%

Rockland Academy’s academic program was designed to meet the needs of the students of East Ramapo. We anticipate that most of our students will start the school year with skills in ELA and Math that are two or three grade levels behind. Our immediate goal will be to provide the appropriate intervention and remediation for these students. Furthermore, as a result of the high percentage of classified students, we anticipate a comparable number, at least 25%, in our school.

Consequently, the cornerstone of our academic design will be the co- teaching approach in an inclusive classroom. Classified students whose IEPs stipulate that they can receive instruction in a collaborative classroom will receive instruction alongside their regular education peers. There will be a special education teacher providing instruction with the content area teacher. The Collaborative Team Teaching model will promote differentiated instruction so that all children are challenged and remediated on the appropriate level in each core subject area. After all, students with disabilities are expected to meet the same high academic standards as their peers without disabilities in general education classrooms. We will attract and recruit students with disabilities in ratios that are comparable or greater than the East Ramapo Central School District by implementing the following strategies:

Local Cable TV, Local Newspapers – We will utilize the local media to disseminate information about our school’s special education program into the community. We have already begun the process of publicizing our proposed special education design on local cable shows.

Informational Sessions – Informational sessions will be held at community centers throughout the East Ramapo community with organizations that serve the special education population such as the Special Education Parent Teachers Association, Abbott House, a foster care agency, Pomona Mental Health Clinic, Lakeside Family and Children Services, Rockland County shelters as well as children’s mental health professionals from the community. We will also conduct individual meetings with parents who request the opportunity to discuss how our school can meet their child’s individual needs.

Students with Special Needs

Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School believes that all students, regardless of disability can attain academic success through a highly structured environment with clear

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expectations and multi-layered supports. Therefore, we will ensure that all students receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) appropriate to meet their needs. We will comply with all special education requirements in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its implementing regulations, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1974, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, all civil rights enforced by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and any additional regulations required by the state of New York. The school will not discriminate in admission and enrollment practices against students having or suspected of having disabilities.

For our classified students, we will follow a collaborative team teaching model in inclusive classrooms with whole-group instruction as well as small-group instruction delivered by the special education teacher in collaboration with the content area teacher. After enrollment, we will request from parents and from East Ramapo's CSE team a copy of the student's IEP or 504 plans to identify which services are mandated. The Principal, a social worker and special education coordinator will make up our Student Support team that will meet weekly and will work collaboratively to ensure that the academic needs of our classified students are met. They will monitor our classified students' progress in terms of their targeted goals and will tailor intervention plans to address students' lack of progress. East Ramapo's CSE team with input from our Student Support team will be responsible for designing, reviewing and modifying all IEPs.

We plan to ask East Ramapo School District to provide related service providers to fulfill the mandates on our students IEPs for Speech/Language services, counseling, occupational therapy, physical therapy, special education transportation and individual paraprofessionals as well as other related services that may be mandated on an IEP. The East Ramapo School District currently provides these related services providers to East Ramapo students attending area private schools.

Additionally, our Special Education coordinator will provide on - going staff development to all of our teachers to equip them with the skills necessary to address the diverse needs of our special education students.

Attracting, Serving and Retaining English Language Learners

Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School will educate, support, challenge and train all students for academic success. This includes students who are English Language Learners. Our ELL students will not be excluded categorically from curricular and extra-curricular activities because of their inability to speak and understand English. Based on demographic characteristics of East Ramapo School District, we anticipate that our English Language Learners (ELL) students will make up at least 14% of our total population.

Nearly fifty percent of the parents in the East Ramapo School District are first generation immigrants who migrated primarily from Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and

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Eastern Europe, for available opportunities in the United States. Many are undocumented and have no formal education. Many are migrant workers. Hence, they work multiple jobs to make ends meet as well as to remit money to families back home. The migration of these families to the school district represents the genesis of the changes and challenges that the district has encountered.

We believe the key to attracting and recruiting ELL students is promoting our school in Spring Valley, the hub for the ELL residents; specifically in the churches and the stores. Spring Valley, a village in the East Ramapo Central School community is described as a 'busy crossroads' in the middle of Rockland County and as a 'cultural intersection' of Haitians, Ecuadorians and people from other Latin American countries. Approximately, 66 percent of the village residents speak a language other than English at home. Our founding team has already held discussions with the church leaders of places of worship that conduct services in Spanish and Creole as well as local Creole and Spanish cable programs to provide information to the community on how our school will meet the needs of our ESL students.

Our parents will be asked to complete a home language survey as a part of the enrollment process. In addition, all students will be required to complete an English diagnostic exam during student orientation. The data gathered from the survey and diagnostic exam will determine whether students will need to take a formal diagnostic exam, the Language Assessment and Battery-Revised, (LAB-R) which will assess whether their level of English proficiency hinders their academic progress. When proficiency levels are established, the appropriate support will be determined for each student goals. Each year thereafter, the students will take the NYSESLAT to measure the gains in language proficiency. If a student scores at Proficient level, the student will no longer be regarded as ELL. If the student scores at Beginning, Intermediate or Advanced level, he or she is eligible to continue to receive LEP services.

Our ELL students will be educated in a collaborative instructional setting comprised of ELL students and native speakers of English with a certified ELL teacher and a content area specialty teacher utilizing the sheltered instructional model in which language and content are integrated. SIOP is an effective approach for teaching content to English Language Learners in strategic ways that make the subject matter comprehensible while promoting the students' English language development. SIOP lessons promote a high level of student engagement as it takes into consideration the students' cultural backgrounds and learning styles. Additionally, we will hire an ESL coordinator whose responsibilities will include identifying and providing appropriate placement and monitoring of our ELL students' progress. We will also hire bilingual staff who are fluent in the home languages of our ELL students. Moreover, all of our staff will receive continuous staff development on the SIOP Model and on cultural awareness and sensitivity in order to familiarize themselves with our ELL population. Furthermore, Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School will include parents of our ELL students in their children's academic planning by providing translation services, when necessary, during parent and educator meetings, and provide all written communications in the family's native language.

When a student's NYSESLAT scores indicate they are proficient in English, the student will exit the program. However, if we determine that the student still requires additional language acquisition support, we will continue to provide this support in the general education setting.

Attracting, serving and retaining our Free and Reduced Lunch Eligible students

2008-2009 data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicated that 65 percent of the Students in East Ramapo received free or reduced lunch and the high school graduation rate for these students as reported on the 2008-2009 New York State Report Card was 71 percent. To attract free and reduced lunch eligible students, we will actively promote our school throughout all of the low income apartment complexes and the trailer parks communities in the East Ramapo community. After all our school is specifically designed to meet the needs of our at risk student population. The key to our students' high achievement will be:

More time on task coupled with rigorous academics with intense focus on core subjects

All students at Rockland Academy will focus intensively on English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. Our mission is to prepare students for every academic pursuit, and so an intensive focus on the core subjects is the key. We expect that many students who enter Rockland Academy will be at least two grade levels behind in the core disciplines of literacy and mathematics. We therefore anticipate that our students will need more time to learn skills and content assumed to have been learned in previous grades as well as an opportunity to acquire grade level appropriate skills and content to prevent additional academic deficits. We will provide our students ninety minutes of ELA and Math daily and sixty minutes of instruction daily in Science and Social Studies. Additionally our 8th graders will be required to complete a full year of Regents level Math and Science courses. Our students will have approximately 36% more instruction time in school as compared to current instruction time in East Ramapo and other surrounding districts.

Continuous formative and summative assessments

A wide battery of initial assessments will be administered to our students at the start of the school year. This will facilitate addressing our students' strengths and weaknesses from the onset. Additionally, there will be systematic formative and summative assessments administered throughout the school year. Staff development will be provided to support our educators in areas such as data analysis, differentiated instruction and the utilization of data to drive instruction. Derived data from our assessments will be analyzed on a weekly basis by faculty to drive instructional practices, staff development, curriculum review process, interventions and enrichment strategies.

Low Student-Teacher Ratio

We believe that small class sizes minimize academic risks because educators are better able to monitor students' activities and progress in class. Small class sizes boost student skills and achievement, increase the graduation rates and help to establish meaningful and supportive relationships with instructors and peers. Our collaborative teaching model with the special education teacher providing instruction with the content area teacher will facilitate a low student to teacher ratio of approximately 13:1. Compelling evidence demonstrates that reducing class size, particularly for middle school children, has a positive effect on student achievement overall and an especially significant impact on the education of disadvantaged children. Teachers are able to focus more on instruction and less on classroom discipline. Additionally research shows that students who had been placed in classes with low student to teacher ratios in the early grades continue to outperform others right through high school, with higher graduation rates, higher grade point averages, and a greater likelihood to be headed towards college.

Remediation

Students who are identified as being below grade level in ELA and Math from our initial assessment will be provided with ongoing intervention during the school day as well as after school. Also our students who score less than 80% in any assessment will be mandated to attend our intervention sessions. The remediation opportunities mainly include after school intervention sessions but students who still require additional support must attend further academic support sessions during the scheduled Saturday intervention classes.

Meaningful professional development

Teachers must attend 3 weeks of intensive staff development sessions offered before the commencement of the school year. Additionally, all staff will be engaged in staff development/collaboration on Fridays from 3:30 pm to 5:00 pm. These sessions will be geared to analyzing students' data, students' learning styles, how to provide academic interventions and other topics related to student and teacher performance.

“No Excuses” School Culture

The underlying philosophy of Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School is based on our ‘no ‘excuses’ belief where every student regardless of their socio economics status or any other disadvantages will be held to a high academic and social standard. We will work relentlessly to instill in our students the academic and social skills necessary for academic success so that they too will be able to claim ‘the American Dream’.

III. SCHOOL DESIGN

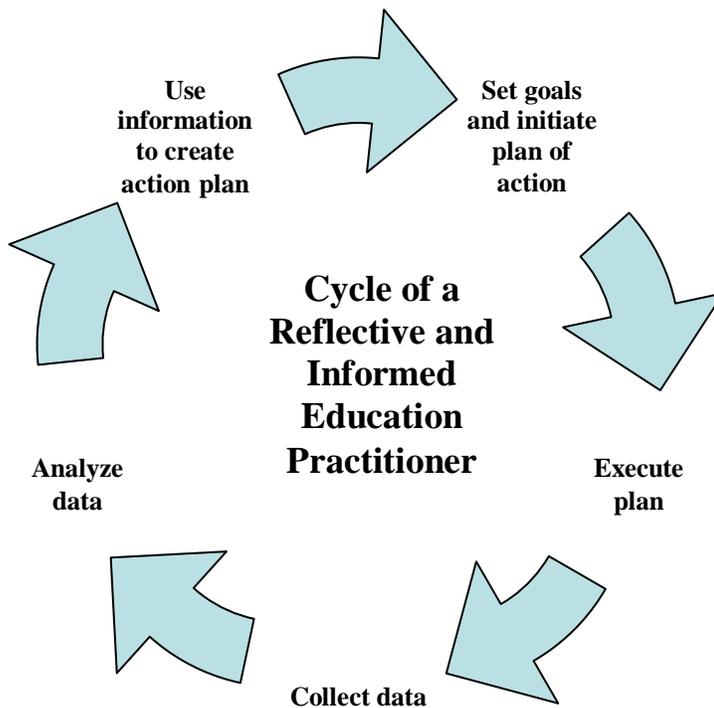
Many of the most successful charter schools often study each other's effective practices for replication. The founding team of Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School discovered several consistent themes at the highest performing charter schools. We have visited and studied many of the high performing charter schools in New York and New Jersey such as Kipp Academy, Democracy Prep and North Star Academy. All of the schools share the belief that every student can learn if they are supported in a school with a college preparatory mission. This is accomplished through an inspirational, tenacious school team that demands high standards from all in the academic community. Each of these schools is relentless in its pursuit of high academic achievement and they each deliver a clear message to their students: no excuses for failing to try your best, no excuses for fighting with other students, and no excuses for dressing inappropriately.

High student achievement is realized through more time on instruction, high standards, rigorous academics with intense focus on core subjects, frequent assessments with in-depth data collection and analysis and a school culture that promotes discipline and hard work. In addition to modeling those elements from many of these successful schools, we will maintain continuous contact with these and other innovative high performing schools across the country in order to share and observe best practices and to keep pace with effective instruction.

Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School similarly has incorporated some elements of the instructional and cultural practices from the high performing charter schools serving middle and high school students into our program. As the first charter school in Rockland County, we will ultimately raise the academic standards for all public schools, not only in our district but in the entire county by demonstrating that with high accountability for everyone directly or indirectly involved in our school community, our students can meet and exceed local, state and national standards.

Our school will start from the 5th grade. Middle schools play a crucial role in forming the attitudes, values and habits of mind in the lives of young people, as they undergo rapid, profound, physical, emotional and social changes. We will offer an educational environment that stresses relevant curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory as well as provide multiple learning and teaching approaches with ongoing assessment, evaluation and intervention programs that promote quality learning. Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School will provide all of these elements coupled with a structured and nurturing environment.

The Reflective and Informed Practitioner Model (Data Driven School Culture)



The leading philosophy of Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School is strongly founded on the reflective and informed practitioner cycle. Every decision made at every level in our school will be both cyclical and continuous and will be derived through a process that begins with goal setting. From setting goals that are aligned with our mission statement, we will then initiate and execute plans. As reflective and informed practitioners, our next step will be to gather and analyze data so we can make informed decisions on improving our students' performance. Data will be the key to our continuous improvement. Each plan that is put in place will be measured by the use of some form of data so that we may gain insight and focus for the goals we set. We expect that by processing all decisions through this cycle will reveal the strengths and weaknesses in our system and thereby provide us with unambiguous directions. The four types of data we will collect and analyze and utilize as indicators of our school's success and progress include:

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Achievement Data – We believe this is the most vital data to focus on. This includes data on formative and summative assessment.

Demographic Data – This provides an insight into trends that are noticed in our students' population such as attendance, school suspensions, attrition rate, enrollment for ESL and Special Education students as well as parental involvement.

Program Data – This will provide pertinent information about programs in our school such as our advisory, music, sports or any other extra curricular program that can indirectly impact our student achievement goals. This data will indicate if these programs are impacting our student achievement goals in a positive manner.

Perception Data – This will measure the perception of our school through the eyes of our students, parents, teachers as well as the community at large.

- a. Increase student achievement and decrease student achievement gaps in reading/language arts and mathematics;

We have incorporated the key design elements that have been proven successful for high performing schools with populations similar to East Ramapo's into our school. The following important elements are designed to increase student achievement and decrease the achievement gap in reading/language arts and mathematics:

All of our students will be assessed in Math, Reading and Writing before the first day of school. This will help to evaluate individual students' reading, writing and numeracy levels. Based on the analysis of this data, intervention plans will be immediately and aggressively implemented for those students who have been identified as performing below grade level. We have purposely structured our school's program to address the needs of all students; especially those performing below grade level.

More Time on Task

We believe that in order for students to meet the ambitious goals we have set out for them, they need more time for instruction, practice, and interventions within the school day and school year. As such, we will begin our school day at 7:25 a.m. with a morning gathering where our school pledge will be recited, expectations communicated and positive behaviors reinforced, putting students in the right frame of mind for academic rigor. Our school day will end at 5:00 p.m. to accommodate the daily ninety minutes blocks in reading, writing as well as mathematics. We have also incorporated a 55 minute block for academic intervention and enrichment. Students will also receive additional intervention during our scheduled Saturday sessions. We have extended our school year to 190 instructional days; two weeks longer than the academic year in the East Ramapo School District.

Intense Focus Literacy and Math

Our literacy program will intensely focus on developing skills in reading fluency, phonics, grammar, decoding and comprehension as well as provide students opportunities to apply those skills in speaking and writing. We will implement a balanced literacy program that includes guided reading/writing instruction and the integration of reading, writing, listening and speaking throughout the disciplines. Our students will be instructed in how to become competent, independent and critical readers, listeners and writers. The development of their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills will be fostered using a variety of literary genres.

Our math programs will employ engaging and meaningful real world connected activities for our students that will foster strong numeracy skills. Our students will be provided with ninety minutes of daily math instructions to develop higher order critical thinking skills and to become proficient in the skills of mathematics. They will learn to communicate and reason mathematically and become proficient problem solvers by using appropriate strategies.

- b. Increase high school graduation rates and focus on serving at-risk high school student populations (including re-enrolled drop-outs and those below grade level);

We believe that the preparation for high school graduation and subsequently college graduation begin in middle school. Our students will develop the vital academic skills that will enable to master the requirements for high school graduation. Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School will provide our students the academic skills and the self discipline that will have meaningful life long effects. Additionally, we will partner with local colleges/university to develop within our students the sense of belonging on the campus of a higher education institution. They will also become familiar with college admissions requirements, availability of financial aid and scholarships. We will facilitate mentoring and collaboration between our students and local college students. We believe that exposing our middle school students to colleges will undoubtedly result in increased high school graduation rates and subsequently increased successful college completion rates. Our planning team is expressing an interest in ultimately extending our middle school to a high school in order to continue to provide the academic rigor, the discipline and structure with its 'no excuses' philosophy which will ensure an increase in the high school graduation rates and propel them to successful completion of the college of their choice.

- c. Focus on academic achievement of middle school student populations and preparation for transition to high school (if applicable);

We will institute the following strategies and methods designed to focus on academic achievement for our middle school population and to prepare them for successful transition to high school:

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Differentiated instruction – Our teachers will tailor their instruction to meet the individual needs of our students and provide rigorous instruction to students at all levels. We understand that our students are unique as learners in terms of background experience, culture, language, interests, readiness to learn, modes of learning, speed of learning and in a variety of other ways. Our ongoing and frequent assessments will serve as checks for students' understanding throughout the learning process.

Looping

The complexity and enormity of changes young adolescents experience during the middle school years are profound. Providing them with a learning environment that fosters the development of meaningful relationships is imperative to helping them navigate successfully through this time. The educational practice of teachers and young adolescents looping provides a stable learning environment that supports students' developmental changes and responds to their individual needs. Researchers stress that using looping in the middle school environment provides an opportunity to support meaningful relationships and learning¹ because it enables teachers and students to develop long-term relationships where both parties are deeply invested in overall student achievement and growth.

High School Coursework in Middle School

Our 8th graders will take advanced coursework which will enable them to take the Regents examinations in Integrated Algebra and Living Environment. This will put them on track for an Advanced Regents High School Diploma.

Advisory Class

We will establish a daily Advisory period for our students. Advisory offers support by providing every student an adult who knows them well and who can offer advocacy and support in difficult social and academic situations. This is especially true for students who have few close adult relationships outside school or are at risk of dropping out. The students will be able to connect with the advisory teacher and engage in discussions about his or her progress and standing in the school. Advocates of advisory programs see a direct link between a student's emotional and social experience and academic achievement. Advisory promotes self-esteem. It provides peer recognition in an accepting environment, offsetting peer pressure and negative responses from peers in other areas. Students in advisory programs are less likely to drop out and have a lower incidence of substance abuse.² The advisory teacher will be the primary contact person for parents, increasing their involvement, which has been linked to student achievement at all levels of schooling. By having a more in-depth relationship with teachers, parents are more informed about their child's academic needs and successes and can better support them.

¹ Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; George & Lounsbury, 2000; Jackson & Davis, 2000; National Middle School Association, 2003; Nichols & Nichols, 2002; Simel, 1998; Westerfield, 2009

² Middle Web and the National Middle School Association, Landreville, C

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Having the advisor as the contact person also increases the overall level of accountability in the school: each teacher is directly responsible for certain students, and each student is directly responsible to a particular teacher.

- d. Utilize a variety of high-quality assessments to measure understanding and critical application of concepts;

Before the start of the school year, as soon as students are enrolled, they will be thoroughly assessed to identify their academic deficits in Reading, Writing and Math. Based on derived data, we will from the onset design instruction to meet the needs of every student. Rockland Academy is committed to meeting the needs of every student, including those at risk of academic failure. Ongoing comprehensive assessment, standardized diagnostic tests, formative and summative assessments, progress reports, and student class work will all be used to determine a student's at-risk status and specific learning needs. Students identified as being at risk will receive individualized academic interventions and support, based on information gleaned from testing data and through consultations with students, teachers and parents.

In addition to the initial assessments, there will be

- National Normed Assessments- We will administer national normed referenced tests such as the Terra Nova which will measure our students' achievement in terms of national comparison, to measure growth over time. These tests allow us to gauge how our students compare with students who are similarly situated across the country. They also provide diagnostic data regarding our students' strengths and weaknesses relative to the New York State standards and inform us about their skills that require reinforcement. It is our goal to make our students competitive, not just with the students in the district or the state, but with their peers nationally. Rockland Academy will administer the nationally-normed assessments at the beginning of the student's first year at the school in order to obtain immediate information on how each student is performing on each skill assessed and then in the Spring of each subsequent year to identify which skills students have mastered and what additional intervention is needed. This will measure the individual progress of our students as well as gauge the effectiveness of our curriculum.
- State Assessments- Students at Rockland Academy will be held to the same standards as other students in the state and therefore will follow the schedule for New York State assessments. These assessments help us to identify individual students at risk, understand individual student mastery on state standards, and gauge school progress over time and measure performance as compared to school goals. This will help us to determine if our students are progressing in relation to their peers in the state. It is our goal to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies for all sub-groups of students in the school. Our internally created benchmark assessments, which guide instructional pacing, will be modeled after the state tests. The results from state assessments from the previous year will be used to determine which standards require more

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teaching time, different instructional methods or resources for the same grade level.

- Formative Assessments – Rockland Academy’s educators will provide on-going formative assessments and observations to each of our students in the forms of exit tickets, self and peer assessments, presentations, and ‘DO NOW’s’. Our teachers will use formative assessment to increase instructional effectiveness, improve individual student learning, adjust instruction as needed and provide student feedback throughout the teaching and learning process. Research has shown that feedback may be particularly helpful to lower achieving students because it emphasizes that students can improve as a result of effort rather than be doomed to low achievement due to some presumed lack of innate ability. Formative assessment helps support the expectation that all children can learn to high levels and counteracts the cycle in which students attribute poor performance to lack of ability and therefore become discouraged and unwilling to invest in further learning (Ames, 1992; Vispoel & Austin, 1995).

- Standards Based Quarterly Exams- Our school year will be divided into quarters. Students will take exams at the end of each quarter in Math, English Language Arts, Science, Social Studies and Foreign Language. These quarterly exams are designed to measure our students’ mastery of skills and gauge their progress levels. The final exam is comprehensive in nature and is designed to determine if our students are prepared to move on to the next grade.

- Weekly Teacher Generated Tests- Although Rockland Academy will adopt school wide assessments, educators will use data generated from their weekly tests to also help set instructional tone and determine which students require additional assistance and support. During the weekly professional development periods, educators will be required to develop weekly assessments generated from the curriculum. Saxon, Wordly Wise, and FOSS all have assessments built into the curriculum. We will use those assessments as a guide to test our students’ mastery of content taught and to ensure we are following the curriculum closely enough to create the desired academic outcomes for our students. This will provide immediate feedback regarding students who need instant remediation on content that was taught during the week.

- Homework- Our teachers will assign homework as immediate assessments to gauge understanding of material taught from day to day. We will alter instruction within the classroom based on information obtained from homework completion and accuracy.

- e. Increase implementation of local instructional improvement systems to assess and inform instructional practice, decision-making, and effectiveness;

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The Reflective and Informed Education Practitioner Cycle represents the process we will initiate to assess and inform us of the efficacy of our instructional practice, decision making and about the overall progress of our school. This will be the engine that will drive our data driven school culture. Our teachers will work collaboratively with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction to analyze student achievement data and make adjustments to instruction as needed. Not only will we analyze our student achievement data but also data on all other aspects of our school such as attendance rate, parental involvement etc.

- f. Partner with low-performing, local public schools to share best practices;

Members of Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School founding team have already met with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of the East Ramapo Central School District. Both district officials have offered support, encouragement and the opportunity to work together to share best practices and improve student outcomes. We are enthusiastic about this collaboration because we believe that every student in the district, from our charter school or from the traditional public school, deserves to be provided with the best quality education. We will share best practices and collaborate with low performing schools within the county to ensure that all students are placed on the path to success.

- g. Demonstrate the ability to overcome start-up challenges to open a successful school through management and leadership techniques;

Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School has assembled a strong, diverse team of committed individuals who have strategically designed our charter school to meet the needs of out at risk population in the East Ramapo Central School District. Our planning team and our proposed Board of Trustees have experiences in urban education, budgeting, community outreach, accounting principles, special education and ESL. Additionally, they have established strong ties with existing successful charter schools to which they can turn for advice and guidance.

Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School will be led by the Principal who will be responsible for all aspects of the school's operations and who will report directly to the Board. The Principal's responsibilities will include leadership of the entire school administrative team, full execution of the school's mission, and management of all external functions, including Board relations, regulatory reporting, financial operations, and fundraising. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction (DCI) will be the primary instructional leader of the school, overseeing the implementation of the various curricula and assessments, working with faculty to use assessment data to inform and drive instruction, observing faculty, providing faculty with feedback, and overseeing professional development. The Director of Finance and Operations will oversee administrative, financial and logistical operations and will directly manage the Office Manager. We believe that having three administrators (Principal, DCI, and DFO) will ensure the school opens and functions smoothly, and that all of the requisite operations and compliance issues are handled efficiently and appropriately. Both positions (DCI and DFO) will report directly to the Principal.

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We have already put systems in place geared to overcoming start up challenges. Plans have been drafted for staff recruitment, student recruitment, marketing, facility and for other integral facets of opening a successful school.

- h. Demonstrate the support of the school district of location and the intent to establish an ongoing relationship with such district; and

Our founding team has met with the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent on several occasions to discuss the prospects of our charter school being established in the East Ramapo Central School District. The School Board also expressed great interest in partnering with our founding team to employ some of Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School’s design elements into the district schools. Members of our founding team have also spoken extensively with the President of the Board of Education and individual members of the Board of Education about our school utilizing space within one of the school buildings.

- i. Provide access to viable education alternatives to students in regions where there are a lack of alternatives.

The table below compares the 2008-09 New York State grades 5 through grades 8, ELA and Math scores for East Ramapo with the surrounding school districts in the Rockland County:

% Meeting Standard	East Ramapo	Clarkstown	Haverstraw-Stony Point	Nanuet	Nyack	Ramapo Central
5th Math	67	92	81	92	86	90
5th ELA	59	91	76	91	86	85
6th Math	67	90	80	92	81	95
6th ELA	59	82	68	81	80	86
7th Math	61	93	87	94	80	94
7th ELA	61	85	71	85	81	79
8th Math	40	85	71	88	73	86
8th ELA	40	76	68	76	74	71

Source: <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/ela-math/>

Essentially the children in grades 5 through 8 in the East Ramapo Central School District have been left behind. We believe that every child regardless of race, economic status, classification or geography should be given the opportunity to attend a high performing and academically rigorous public school. We have tailored the design of our school to specifically meet the needs of the students in the East Ramapo Central School District because we believe that with high quality education, our students will be able to achieve academic success. As the first charter school in Rockland County, Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School will be the only access to a viable public education alternative for our at risk population.