

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School Mission

Southwest Key Programs, Inc. is a private, non-profit agency that has positively impacted the lives of at-risk youth and their families for over 23 years. Southwest Key was founded in 1987 by Dr. Juan J. Sánchez with a specific goal: to improve the lives of disadvantaged youth and their families. Realizing the struggles that impoverished, minority children face, Southwest Key made a commitment to develop more effective educational programs for at-risk students and communities. As a result, Southwest Key Programs has devoted the past 14 years to developing and fine tuning educational plans, models, and curricula specifically targeted to meet the needs of traditionally overlooked youth and communities. Our plan is to create academic programming where failure is not an option and where students are given the framework through which they can achieve their dreams.

In response to the New York State Education Department's *Request for Proposals to Establish Charter Schools Authorized by Board Regents*, we are proposing to develop and implement a premier charter school that will eventually serve grades K – 12. The mission of the **Southwest Key Charter School** is to inspire students to have clear college aspirations along with the academic skills and work ethic necessary to achieve their goals and be successful; to afford students opportunities to develop strong leadership skills and exhibit a firm and continuing commitment to community services; and to provide rigorous curriculum to students at every grade level, giving them a strong foundation in math, science, and English Language Arts.

School's Key Design Elements

The Southwest Key Charter School will be an effective and engaging solution for creating higher quality educational opportunities for the students and families of Buffalo, New York. We are committed to implementing a charter school that will include school leadership and teachers committed to creating a culture of high academic expectations and doing whatever it takes to ensure that students learn. The school's unique design elements include the following:

- **All Students Will Succeed.** The school will set high, clearly defined expectations for the behavior and academic achievement of every student. These high expectations will be attainable because of the high quality and dedication of the teaching and support staff serving the students. Each student will graduate from the school with clear college and vocational aspirations and a specific plan for achieving these goals.
- **More Time for Student Learning is Key to Success.** The school will incorporate more instructional days throughout school year (up to 13 additional days per school year). All students will have a longer school day, a commitment of one Saturday per month for service learning (middle/high school), and a mandatory summer program.
- **Results are the Bottom Line.** The school will continuously monitor the progress of students using national and state tests, diagnostic and benchmark assessments, and other objective measures. Results will guide all facets of the school including governance and/or school accountability, instruction, intervention, placement of students, budgets, and staff

professional development.

- **Incorporation of Proven Effective Curriculum.** Instruction will be provided to all students using curriculum that has been proven highly effective with similar populations and demographics. Curriculum will be revised to align with New York State standards and tests.
- **High Quality Teaching Staff.** The school will hire the best, brightest, and highest quality of teachers who will be held to high expectations of professional performance. Teachers will be required to be available to students during evenings and weekends.

These organizational principles are modeled after YES Prep Public Schools, which has proven results in serving low income students and preparing them for success at a college or university.

Capacity to Launch, Oversee, and Govern School

Southwest Key Programs is confident in our capacity to effectively launch and oversee the creation of a high quality charter school in Buffalo, New York, and have developed a strategic plan to recruit a highly qualified local Board of Directors to govern this school. In preparation to ultimately operate high quality charter schools, Southwest Key has devoted the past few decades to building our capacity in the provision of high quality educational services to children. Southwest Key has more than 14 years of experience in the operation of several alternative education schools in Texas. These schools, known as Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEPs), incorporate a comprehensive curriculum focusing on grade level achievement and student mastery of the state required skills.

In 2008, the East Austin Academia Inc, a non-profit created by Southwest Key Programs, went through a rigorous application and review process to attain a charter from the Texas Education Agency. That application contained all of the school design, curriculum, instruction, and assessment elements similar to those that we are proposing to implement in Buffalo. East Austin Academia's charter application scored the highest in Texas that year and was unanimously approved by the members of the Texas State Board of Education. The charter ultimately established the East Austin College Prep Academy, which opened its doors in August 2009 as a premier college preparatory middle school. The school provides a high-quality, innovative educational experience for youth of an extremely impoverished, predominantly minority community in Austin, Texas. Community response to this school has been overwhelming with our school filled to capacity each year and a wait list for prospective students. Now in its second year of operation, the East Austin College Prep Academy is operating at full capacity with a student enrollment of 179 sixth and seventh grade students.

In addition to our work in Texas, Southwest Key has operated several youth support programs in Buffalo since 2006 in cooperation with the Erie County Department of Mental Health. Our work in this community over the past several years has allowed us to establish key partnerships with local resources that will support our school programming. We look forward to expanding upon our work in Buffalo to include a premier K-12 college preparatory school and are confident that our commitment to excellence and ability to deliver results will translate to our charter school endeavors in this region.

II. STUDENT POPULATION

A. Student Enrollment

The Southwest Key Charter School will ultimately serve grade levels K-12. Our elementary school will begin the 2012 – 2013 school year with kindergarten and 1st grades while our middle school will begin the same school year serving 6th grades. Each year thereafter, each campus will grow incrementally by one grade level until all remaining grade levels (grades K-12) are served. Provided below is a table describing our projected enrollment over the next 5 years. Please note that we anticipate the growth of our school up to the 12th grade may take more than 5 years.

Grades	Proposed Projected Enrollment Table				
	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2017-2018
K	50	50	70	70	94
1 st	50	50	70	70	94
2 nd		50	70	70	94
3 rd			70	70	94
4 th				70	94
5 th					94
6 th	50	50	70	70	94
7 th		50	70	70	94
8 th			70	70	94
9 th				70	94
10 th					94
11 th					
12 th					
Ungraded					
Totals	150	250	490	630	1034

B. Target Populations

Target Population and Need in Targeted Area

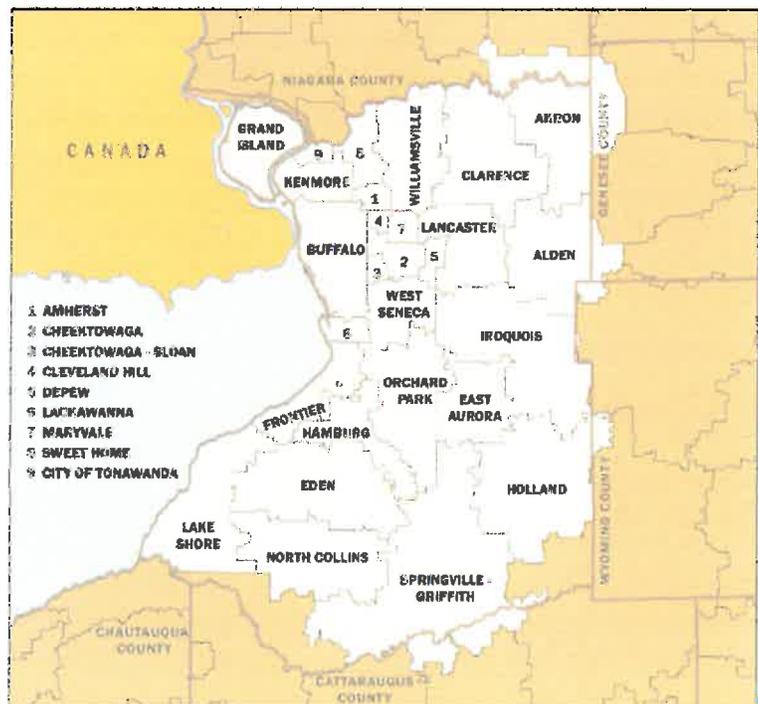
Southwest Key Programs is proposing to establish a premier charter school academy that will target children and youth from Buffalo and Lackawanna, New York. Located in western New York, Buffalo is the state's second-largest city with a total population of 273,335 (US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2005-2009). The city has shrunk in recent decades along with the mainstay industries that designated it the "Queen City" for much of the first half of the 20th Century: railroads, steel mills, grain-milling, and Great Lakes shipping. While its population

diminished, the city simultaneously grew more diverse and more economically challenged. Today, Buffalo is the third-poorest city in the United States with a poverty rate of 28.8 percent (U.S. Census 2000). Census figures find 37.2 percent of Buffalo’s population is African-American and that African-Americans in Buffalo had the highest rates of poverty of any of the city’s racial/ethnic groups: 33.1 percent (American Community Survey 2005).

Sadly, the Buffalo City School District is ranked last – 97 out of 97 – of the Districts located in Western New York State. New York State Assessments for 2009-10, which test the percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards, show achievement levels across all tested subjects, and across all grades, as ranging from 26 to 32 percent. The state average, meanwhile, ranges from 50 to 81 percent (NYSED, 2009-2010). In December 2010, six schools were added to the list of “Persistently Low Achieving” schools, bringing the Buffalo City School District total to thirteen, or nearly 21 percent of the District’s 62 schools. This evidence does not point to a District that is successfully educating the city’s youth.

Further proof can be seen in the District graduation rate where only 54 percent of students graduate from the Buffalo City School District compared to 76 percent state-wide (NYSED, 2007-2008). According to the Schott Foundation for Public Education’s 2010 report, Buffalo is one of the nation’s ten lowest-performing large districts for black males. The Foundation’s state report cards found that in 2007-2008, the graduation rate for black males in the City of Buffalo was 25 percent. For white males, it was a still-dismal 55 percent.

The City of Lackawanna is located just south of Buffalo and shares its designation as a “Rust Belt” community still coping with the economic impact of de-industrialization in the 1970’s and 1980’s and the accompanying loss of jobs and devastating blows to its tax base. The Lackawanna City School District is coping with challenges similar to those of Buffalo: only 68 percent graduate (the rate is just 57 percent for males). A much smaller District, Lackawanna’s four schools have all been designated Title 1. Results of the most recently available New York State Assessments (testing the percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards) are similar to those of Buffalo’s students, ranging from 26 percent to 54 percent across grades and subjects.



School Districts in Erie County



Given these disheartening statistics and given the fact that all families wish their children to have high quality educational opportunities, it is not surprising that every charter school in Western New York has a waiting list. The local education advocacy organization Buffalo ReformED states that there are over 2,000 children currently on waiting lists in Western New York. The agency also reports that:

“On average, Western New York charter schools have outperformed the Buffalo city school district by 15.4 percentage points in the Grade 3-8 English Language Arts testing program and 25.8 percentage points in the Grade 3-8 Mathematics testing program”¹.

Charter schools provide a valuable opportunity for families in Buffalo and Lackawanna to choose to send their children to schools where they are taught effectively and are empowered with the academic skills and work ethic necessary to achieve their goals. Our proposed school would provide another avenue to success for families faced with the painful prospect of sending their children to failing schools.

Outreach and Recruitment Plan

Having worked in low-income, predominantly minority communities for the past 23 years, our organization is well adept at implementing outreach and recruitment plans in communities that are traditionally less informed about educational options. As such, our outreach and recruitment plan for the Southwest Key Charter School will rely heavily upon a ‘grass roots’ approach and campaign to attract potential students. In order to fill our classrooms, we will distribute flyers and information brochures throughout the community where children and families congregate. This will include the distribution of information at local churches, community centers, libraries, parks, and at local community-wide events. We will also tap into our relationships with social service organizations and agencies to distribute information at their sites.

For the convenience of working parents, we will host informational sessions throughout the community on evenings and weekends where interested students and their parents can learn more about our school. We will also post information on our website, various social media forums, and in local newspapers. In efforts to attract students, our outreach materials will include information regarding the dynamic and engaging curriculum, activities, and resources that will be made available to them at the Southwest Key Charter School. Our goal is to inundate the Buffalo and Lackawanna communities with information about this premier charter school so that families are well informed about their options and alternatives in ensuring that that their children receive the highest quality education.

¹ (<http://www.buffaloreformed.org/graphics/WNY-Charter-Schools-Collective-Impact-Statement.pdf>)

Student Retention Plan

The Southwest Key Charter School will implement similar activities in retaining students who attend our school. Beginning in the Spring of each school year, information regarding enrollment for the upcoming school year will be posted on our website as well as through various social media. Current students will also be given information to take home to remind their parents about re-enrollment deadlines and information materials will be distributed community-wide. We will host student recruitment and retention nights, providing parents with information on the unique and innovative programming offered at the school. To further encourage re-enrollment, teachers will provide parents with information demonstrating their child's progression in core academic competencies since attending this school.

Incorporating New York State Charter School Act Requirements for Special Populations

As required by the 2010 revisions to the New York State Charter Schools Act, the Southwest Key Charter School will adhere to appropriate and responsible enrollment and retention targets for students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL), and students who are eligible for free- and reduced-priced lunch for new public charter schools created under the 2010 cap.

As required, the Southwest Key Charter School is committed to enrolling similar populations of Special Education, ELL/LEP, and low income students as the local school district. Currently approximately 8.45 percent of the City of Buffalo School District's student population and 5.47 percent of the City of Lackawanna School District's student population consists of ELL/LEP students.

III. SCHOOL DESIGN

Our overarching goal in attaining a charter from the New York State Education Department is to create a premier K- 12 college preparatory school. The vision of the proposed Southwest Key Charter School is to serve as a model elementary, middle, and high school that successfully prepares all students, regardless of economic background, for a rigorous high school curriculum, graduation, and ultimately success in college and career. Because of its pervasive atmosphere of high expectations, the school will inspire students to have clear college aspirations along with the academic skills and work ethic necessary to achieve their goals and be successful. Our goal is to give students opportunities to develop strong leadership skills and exhibit a firm and continuing commitment to community service. The school will provide a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, including a strong foundation in math and science for students pursuing a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) field. In addition to a balanced, comprehensive program, the school will also nurture visual and performing arts and showcase the tremendous talent of students whose skills are often overlooked. As previously stated, **we will create a school where failure is not an option and students are given the knowledge and tools to identify and achieve their dreams.** Provided below are details on how we plan to accomplish this goal of supporting the children of Buffalo, New York, in their academic success.

Alignment with the New York State Charter Schools Act

The school model for the proposed K-12 college preparatory school has been uniquely tailored to incorporate the requirements and priorities of the New York State Charter Schools Act. Specifically, our model is designed to accomplish the following objectives as indicated by this Act:

- Improve student learning and achievement;
- Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are at-risk of academic failure;
- Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators, and other school personnel;
- Provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system; and
- Provide a school that utilizes performance-based accountability systems by meeting measurable student achievement results.

By incorporating these objectives and working in partnership with the local community, we are confident that the proposed Southwest Key College Preparatory Academy will support Buffalo youth in reaching their full potential. Regardless of age, our school will provide these youth with an academically and personally empowering curriculum that will prepare them for college success and engage them in taking an active role in shaping the future of their community.

A. Increasing student achievement and decreasing student achievement gaps in reading/language arts and mathematics.

As demonstrated in *Section B: Target Population*, the student population and geographic area that we are proposing to serve consists of a cohort that has long been underserved academically – resulting in chronic academic underachievement. Through the chronic failure and continual pattern of low educational attainment, both Buffalo and Lackawanna have lost an entire generation of students – youth who have failed academically, dropped out of school, or never pursued a higher education.

Providing an academically high achieving K-12 charter school with a strong foundation in the STEM fields provides an opportunity to increase student achievement and ultimately decrease achievement gaps in reading/language arts and mathematics. Provided below are more details regarding the model, framework, and philosophy of our innovative school.

Replication of a High-Performing Model

The Southwest Key Charter School has been designed to replicate the YES Prep Public Schools, a

high-performing charter school model. YES Prep Public Schools is a free, open-enrollment public charter school system serving 2,600 students across five campuses in the Houston, Texas area. The YES student body is approximately 80 percent economically disadvantaged, 95 percent African American and Hispanic, 86 percent first generation college-bound, and most students enter at least one grade level behind in math and English.

The YES Prep Public Schools have proven results in increasing student achievement and decreasing student achievement gaps for low income students and preparing them for success at a college or university. YES has been ranked as the best public school in Houston by *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report* and the *Houston Chronicle*. On the state-mandated Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test, from 2005-2006, YES sixth-grade students scored significantly higher than students in the Houston Independent Schools District (HISD) and students state-wide: in reading, 95% of YES students passed compared to 82% from HISD and 91% state-wide. For the mathematics TAKS, 91% of YES students passed, compared to 64% of HISD students and 80% of students state-wide. And for the eighth consecutive year, 100 percent of YES Prep's graduating seniors have been accepted into four-year colleges, including Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Rice and Stanford. YES Prep combines a highly successful model along with high standards for student achievement and parental involvement.

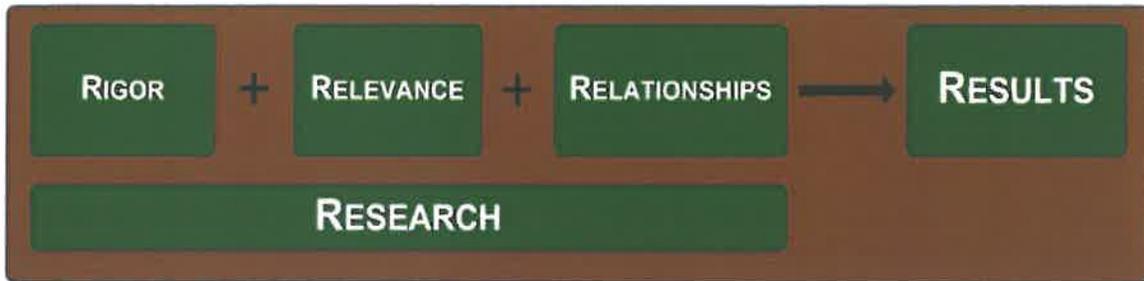
Standards for success at YES Prep that will be incorporated into the Southwest Key Charter School include the following:

- ✓ Parents, students, and teachers sign a contract that states they will do *Whatever It Takes* to succeed
- ✓ Students dedicate one Saturday each month to service learning projects (middle/ high school grades)
- ✓ Teachers are available for students to contact them during the evenings and weekends with questions
- ✓ Students participate in longer school days, educational field trips, summer school, and college research trips/summer internship opportunities (middle/high school)

Like YES Prep, our goal is to support underserved and minority youth in successfully completing middle and high school and preparing them for a flourishing college career.

Framework

The framework for Southwest Key Charter School is based on the three Rs of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation model for transforming high schools—rigor, relevance, and relationships—with the addition of two important Rs—research and results.



The Southwest Key College Prep Academy will base its organizational structure, curriculum, and instruction on either rigorous scientific research ("gold standard" research set by the U.S. Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences) or solid best practice research. For example, the school leaders will work with the Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts at UT Austin, a national leader in adolescent literacy, to incorporate valid and reliable diagnostic assessments and proven intervention tools to improve literacy for struggling readers.

In addition, the Southwest Key Charter School will ensure that their entire program is rigorous and made relevant by the inclusion of project-based learning as well as exposure to industry and the arts through close partnerships with the business and fine arts community. A robust advisory system will provide each student with daily access to a knowledgeable advisor, and a mentor program will give students contact with community mentors in fields of interest.

The entire focus of this model is RESULTS—teacher, administrator, and student performance results that will lead to academic excellence on a consistent basis, but more importantly, college readiness and success for graduates of this program.

Philosophy

The Southwest Key Charter School's educational philosophy is grounded in effective schools research. That research supports the premise that all children can learn and the school controls the factors necessary to assure student mastery of core curriculum². The Southwest Key Charter School recognizes that children have an extraordinary capacity to learn and will realize their highest levels of achievement in a school community that adheres to the following:

- **Strong School Leadership** - an effective organizational and academic leader that creates a safe school environment conducive to learning and success.
- **Increased Instructional Time, particularly in Math and English Language Arts** - the study of math and English Language Arts for 90 minutes each per day to ensure that students are on grade level and poised to tackle rigorous preparatory curriculum.
- **Aligned Curriculum** - a content rich, standards-based curriculum that is aligned with New York state standards

² Lezotte, Lawrence W., "Revolutionary and Evolutionary: The Effective Schools Movement," <http://www.effectiveschools.com/downloads/RevEv.pdf>.

- **A Balanced Instructional Approach** - direct instruction that is balanced with opportunities for hands-on and project-based learning.
- **Ongoing Assessment** - diagnostic and formative assessment throughout the school year for instructional planning, intervention, and placement of students.
- **Immediate Intervention for Struggling Students** – identification of struggling students and appropriate interventions in a timely manner.
- **Focused Professional Development** - job-embedded teacher professional development that is focused intensely on student and teacher needs identified through assessments which help teachers prepare more challenging and thought-provoking lessons and projects.

B. Increasing high school graduation rates and focus on serving at-risk high school student populations.

Innovative Features to Support High School Graduation Rates

To ensure that students are supported throughout their academic years as well as to increase high school graduation rates, the Southwest Key Charter School incorporates the following innovative features:

- A longer school day
- An average of two hours of homework every night (middle and high school grades)
- Extended time during the day for English language arts and math (90 minute blocks for each subject per day)
- One Saturday each month devoted to community service, which is integrated into the academic curriculum (middle and high school grades)
- A three-week summer session for ALL students
- Frequent field lessons, including career/work-related experiences, which are an integral part of the curriculum
- Required extracurricular clubs and sports as a part of the school day to broaden students' experiences (middle and high school grades)
- Teachers and other staff who are "on call" for students beyond the normal school day, up to 9:00 p.m. at night and on weekends
- Extensive eighth grade and senior year research projects and presentations required for graduation which embody college preparation
- Continuous monitoring of student learning that includes the administration of appropriate benchmark or diagnostic assessments
- Multiple opportunities for parental involvement in all aspects of the school
- Performance-based faculty and staff evaluation tied directly to student achievement results
- The integration of technology into instruction at all grade levels
- A robust visual and performing arts curriculum that allows students to display individual and group talent to the community

- A model health program to combat increasing obesity and juvenile diabetes plaguing many youth today

The aforementioned innovative features are modeled after Houston’s YES Prep Public Schools which have proven results in serving low income students and preparing them for success at a college or university.

The sections below explain the teaching methods and strategies/techniques that will be used by the school to meet the needs of students, including special education and limited English proficient students. These teaching methods and strategies/techniques, coupled with the longer school day and year and teachers “on call” for students beyond the normal school day, will ultimately prepare all students to meet the state’s graduation requirements.

Teaching Methods

As was stated in a report last year from the Texas Governor's Business Council, "[T]eachers matter. There may be no better or simpler proof of this than the study of prominent researcher Eric Hanushek, which showed that if a student had an effective teacher, as opposed to an average teacher, for only five years in a row, the increased learning would be sufficient to close entirely the average gap between low and middle income students during that relatively short amount of time. Teachers do indeed matter³."

The Southwest Key Charter School will employ as its basic teaching approach the 3-Tier Model advocated by the Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts. This approach, derived from a medical model of primary, secondary and tertiary treatment for patients, can and should apply to all subjects—not just reading. The model transforms a teacher's framework so that a teacher focuses on teaching each student to master the subject, not teaching the subject and hoping students absorb it. Tier One is the core academic program in each subject area that is grounded in scientifically-based research accompanied by continuous progress monitoring. For students not succeeding at that level, Tier Two intervention is applied. This includes additional time for small group, differentiated instruction that is planned according to progress monitoring data. Students who still do not progress with Tier Two intervention are assigned to Tier Three intensive intervention, which includes more explicit additional instruction in smaller groups or one-on-one for an extended time period.

The 3-Tier Model



³ "Excellence in the Classroom," Governor's Business Council, December 2006.

Classroom teaching methods at the Southwest Key Charter School will be balanced with direct instruction supplemented with hands-on learning and projects that apply to the students' world. Examples of other instructional methods include:

- ✓ Cooperative learning
- ✓ Individual coaching
- ✓ Discovery learning, such as the 5E Science Model
- ✓ Educational field lessons
- ✓ Peer tutoring
- ✓ Computer-assisted learning

These instructional methods are grounded in generally-accepted research findings. The school will also employ additional research-based methods and strategies specifically designed to increase student capacities in the areas of reading, math and science.

Low Teacher to Student Ratio

The teacher to student ratio at the Southwest Key Charter School will never exceed 1 to 24. We project that the first class of elementary and middle school aged students at Southwest Key Charter School will enjoy a teacher to student ratio of about 1 to 16. The school will employ a full-time Counselor as well as English/Language Arts , math, science, social studies and Spanish teachers. Part-time visual arts, performing arts, special education, and physical education/health teachers will complete our instructional staff. In addition, a full-time technology coordinator/teacher will be hired. Our proposed smaller ratios will allow teachers and students to maintain a close and supportive relationship and permit teachers to meet the needs of students after school and on weekends.

Serving At-Risk Student Populations

The Southwest Key Charter School is dedicated to fulfilling its mission with respect to every student, including those with additional educational and language acquisition needs. Each student will have an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) that our learning specialists, in conjunction with teachers, Principal, and Superintendent will specifically design to ensure that every student benefits from a tailor made plan to allow them to achieve academic success.

For students who are performing below grade level, a combination of instructional techniques has been proven effective in raising academic achievement. Teachers will be given great flexibility to employ multiple teaching methods to determine which work with their students, individually and collectively, to achieve the desired results. Most importantly, teachers will have extended time to work with students. Middle and high school students who come to the Southwest Key Charter School behind in any subject will be required to attend until they are on track with their peers.

Strategies for Special Education Students

Consistent with the school's vision that all students attending Southwest Key Charter School will be prepared academically to graduate from high school and attend and succeed in college, special education students enrolled in the school will be included in the regular academic program with the support necessary to reach the high level of achievement set forth in each student's ILP.

The Southwest Key Charter School will hire special education staff and will develop a staffing plan consistent with the needs of our student population. The school's use of the 3-Tier Model as the basic teaching approach is an effective strategy with special education students. In fact, in the most recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), there is mention of a process generally recognized as Response to Intervention (RTI), which is a similar three-tiered approach to intervening with special education students. With RTI, as with the 3-Tier Model, students receive a research-based classroom instruction, teachers monitor student progress frequently, tier two and tier three interventions are applied (as appropriate), and individual modifications are made and services provided to meet the needs of students.

Special education students will also be provided study and organizational skills instruction along with other students in the school to improve their time management, organizational skills, memory work, note-taking, and listening skills.

Strategies for Bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL) Students

The Southwest Key Charter School will meet the needs of bilingual/ESL students with the extended time for reading/English language arts (90 minutes per day). In addition, students making a transition into English will receive individual tutoring during the time for extracurricular clubs and athletics and on Saturday. These students will also have the opportunity to enhance their Spanish speaking, reading and writing in Spanish class.

The Southwest Key Charter School will tap the English Language Learner resources of the Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts and its Center for Research and Educational Achievement and Teaching of English Language Learners (CREATE), which receives funding from the U. S. Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences. CREATE researches methods of effective instruction with English language learners in grades 4 – 8. Dr. Sylvia Linan-Thompson, a director at the center, and investigators from five other institutions are conducting a multi-year study to determine the efficacy and feasibility of using certain instructional methods with English language learners in 7th grade. methods include:

- The use of video and purposeful discussion to build concepts
- The use of writing to build comprehension and vocabulary
- Summarizing by using questioning to build comprehension
- Structured paired grouping arrangements

The Southwest Key Charter School will be poised to employ methods that are proven effective and volunteer to serve as a pilot site for on-going research in this area. Further, our students'

English proficiency will be constantly assessed through their work and progress within their coursework, weekly assessments, and tutorials and will provide us the necessary information to target areas for student improvement and immediately implement support as needed. Our goal is to have every English Language Learner student gain proficiency status on their New York State Testing assessments in order to fulfill state requirements for graduation.

C. Focusing on academic achievement of middle school student populations and preparation for transition to high school (if applicable).

The Southwest Key Charter School we are proposing will create an elementary school (K–5th grades), middle school (6th – 8th grades), and ultimately a high school (9th – 12th grades). We anticipate that our school will be located in southern Buffalo or Northern Lackawanna, both regions of high academic need. In stark contrast to the current public school districts in the area, which perform academically at levels well below schools statewide, the Southwest Key Charter School will focus on college preparation beginning at the earliest levels of education, continuing through middle school, and finally through high school graduation.

A recent publication by the National Middle School Association states that "[T]horoughly preparing all American students to succeed in a demanding and evolving global economy makes the transformation of middle level education an imperative. Thriving in the 21st century requires more than a basic understanding of reading, writing, and mathematics. It requires the ability to apply sophisticated skills in a variety of settings, solve complex problems individually and collectively, and learn throughout a lifetime. Unless we take action now to change these patterns, millions of young adolescents will be unable to compete in the world they will encounter in high school and beyond. For example, while middle level students steadily improved their mathematics performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the past decade, only 29 percent of U.S. eighth graders demonstrated competence with challenging subject matter, and one-fifth of those students scored below the basic level. In addition, while U.S. eighth graders improved their math and science scores on international assessments from 1995 to 2003, they still compared poorly to students from other nations. One-fourth of eighth graders lack fundamental reading skills, according to NAEP. Eighty percent of U.S. eighth graders say they plan to obtain a bachelor's degree or higher, but many do not have access to rigorous classes that provide the stepping stones to higher education. Even when poorly prepared students gain admission to college, they typically need so much remediation that they fail to progress⁴."

According to the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, nationally, the percentage of all students who left high school with the skills and qualifications necessary to attend college increased from 25% in 1991 to 34% in 2002. However, for many minority students, the picture remains bleak. There remains a large difference among racial and ethnic groups in the

⁴ "Success in the Middle: A Policymaker's Guide to Achieving Quality Middle Level Education," National Middle School Association, May 2006, <<http://www.nmsa.org/Advocacy/PolicyGuide/tabid/784/Default.aspx>>.

percentage of students who leave high school eligible for college admission. About 40% of white students, 23 percent of African-American students, and 20% of Hispanic students who started public high school graduated college-ready in 2002⁵.

Findings from a 2005 ACT and Education Trust Policy Report indicate that a critical aspect of educational planning—a key element in closing the gap between college-ready white and minority students—involves students taking a curriculum that prepares them for college. Students who take a challenging curriculum, beginning in the middle school, tend to perform better academically in high school and are better prepared for college than those who take less rigorous courses.³

Middle School Preparation for Transition to High School

The Southwest Key Charter School is committed to providing a premier college preparatory curriculum and experiences that will support students in excelling academically. To prepare our middle school student populations for their transition into high school, the middle school campus will provide a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, including a strong foundation in math and science for students pursuing a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) field. This demanding course load is designed to appropriately prepare our students for high school and, ultimately, college level coursework.

Curricula and Scope and Sequence

The Southwest Key Charter School will purchase a curriculum scope and sequence in English language arts, math, science, and social studies for grades K-12 which present a methodical plan for teaching all core academic requirements and assessments mandated by New York state law. The student expectations for both regular and special education students are identified as well as those student expectations in grades kindergarten through twelve that are tested on the reading and math portions of the SAT.

Based upon our current experiences working with middle school students, the following is a sample summary of the scope and sequence and approaches for presenting the material for the core academic classes of English language arts, math, science and social studies for middle school grades.

English Language Arts

Students will receive 7.5 hours of reading/English language arts instruction weekly (90 minutes per day). The curriculum scope and sequence will cover vocabulary development, reading comprehension, grammar, spelling, writing, inquiry/research, text structures/literary concepts, literary response, knowledge of culture, critical listening, interpretation, analysis, evaluation, presentations, and production.

⁵ Greene, Jay P. and Marcus A. Winters, "Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates: 1991 - 2002," Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, Education Working Paper No. 8, February 2005 <http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_08.htm>.

Study of novels is required in seventh and eighth grade where students read, discuss, analyze, and annotate novels to promote an understanding of the literature and world cultures. Writing instruction requires students to write multiple drafts of papers using organizational devices, such as graphic organizers and outlines, and peer and teacher/adult editing. In addition, the school will utilize "writing across the curriculum" in science and social studies to reinforce skills such as reading comprehension, writing, and speaking. English language arts and social studies curricula will be coordinated to reinforce content within each subject. Students will also learn to interpret literature through visual and performing arts.

Math

Students will receive 7.5 hours of math instruction weekly (90 minutes per day). The math curriculum is designed to provide students with the foundational math skills necessary to succeed in advanced math in high school and prepare them for higher-level math required in certain university degree programs. The curriculum scope and sequence will cover rational numbers, patterns, algebraic thinking, coordinate geometry, geometry and spatial reasoning, predictions, measurement, probability and statistics, equivalent forms, proportional relationships, central tendency, and logical reasoning.

All students will take Algebra in eighth grade in preparation for four years of math in high school, culminating with Calculus. Technology will be integrated into the math program with students using common computer software, the Internet, and scientific and graphing calculators. Math and science curricula will be coordinated to reinforce content in each subject.

Science

The science curriculum will emphasize learning the processes—observing, sequencing, measuring, classifying, describing, experimenting, inferring, predicting—necessary to understand the scientific method. These processes are learned by hands-on experimentation and investigation, culminating in lab write-ups and reports about the process and observations. The curriculum scope and sequence will cover force and motion, energy, structure and function in living systems, genetics, components of the solar system, physical and chemical properties, organisms, matter and atoms, and characteristics of the universe. Experiential and instructional field lessons will be used frequently to apply hands-on application of the processes and skills learned in the classroom.

In addition to curriculum and instruction, middle school aged children will receive continuous support from our teachers, staff, and administration throughout their stay at our school. Each student will be supported in developing an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP), which will be frequently reviewed and updated to ensure that students are continuously meeting their academic goals. To further support our middle school aged students, the Southwest Key Charter School will host a three-week summer session immediately prior to the commencement of each school year. This session will allow staff to fully assess students and prepare individualized portfolios that target instructional areas of concern. In all subjects,

continuous monitoring of learning for each student will allow us to provide immediate intervention in areas needing improvement. Technology will be utilized to support these ongoing assessments as well as to provide guidance to teachers. This will allow teachers to focus classroom learning where it is most needed, helping them become more effective and efficient educators. As a result, we anticipate that students will be supported in reaching, and ultimately exceeding, their current grade level in a more expedient manner.

The most important advantage that we will be providing our students in their transition from middle school to high school is that we will be promoting successful students to our own high school to continue their college preparation. As such, students will be familiar and comfortable with the academic environment, culture, and student responsibilities they incur, ultimately facilitating their transition.

D. Utilizing a variety of high-quality assessments to measure understanding and critical application of concepts.

Southwest Key understands the importance of data collection and analysis in measuring and improving student learning. We have planned a comprehensive assessment program to ensure that all students are on track academically, all teachers are instructing students using the most effective methods, and the curriculum and instructional materials are of the highest quality to produce the desired achievement levels. We will use both external and internal standards-based assessments to measure student performance, analyze data closely, and convert results into specific measurable action plans that support strong academic achievement for every student. All core components are assessed in a comprehensive and dynamic system.

Middle School Assessments

Southwest Key will utilize a variety of high-quality assessments to student comprehension of core concepts. Students will be assessed annually using assessments that measure student competencies in New York State core standards. Student academic competencies will also be tested when they participate in the statewide system of assessment and accountability.

All incoming sixth-graders will take a benchmark assessment in each core area upon entering the school to establish a baseline of achievement for each student. That information, along with any available prior performance data, will be used to create an academic growth plan for every student. Assessments, which will be aligned with New York State core academic standards, will be administered to the same students at the end of their sixth grade year and each year thereafter to measure growth over time. In addition, all sixth graders will be screened at the beginning of the school in Reading and Language Arts to assess their reading fluency and comprehension skills. Progress monitoring instruments will be used to monitor the development of fluency and comprehension in struggling readers.

Other important assessment instruments that will be used by the school to monitor the academic performance of students are six-week achievement tests in each subject at every

grade level. The tests, developed by the subject area teachers at each grade level, will be important tools to identify students who are struggling to guide re-teaching and tutoring.

Elementary School Assessments

Prior to the start of the school year, we will conduct a diagnostic assessment of each elementary school student using age-appropriate and grade-appropriate standardized assessment tools. For English Language Arts, we will use early literacy and time writing assessments. The results from such diagnostics will allow us to have a clear picture of current student mastery, and inform ongoing lesson plan development and individual student academic action plans. These diagnostics will also allow a benchmark against which all future academic growth can be measured.

E. Increasing implementation of local instructional improvement systems to assess and inform instructional practice, decision-making, and effectiveness.

The Southwest Key Charter School will utilize and increase the implementation of local instructional improvement systems to guide instructional practice and decision making in regards to the school. School administrators and teachers will evaluate the instructional programs that have been implemented on two variables: 1) the degree to which they have been successfully implemented and 2) the degree to which they have impacted student performance. In addition, the school will conduct a cost-benefit analysis to assess the cost effectiveness of each program in use. The results of these evaluations/analyses will drive the agenda for the two-week campus professional development that takes place prior to the beginning of school. This data will allow staff to make more informed decisions about refining units and lessons, guide program and instruction improvement, and implement effective teaching strategies for the coming school year.

F. Partnering with low-performing, local public schools to share best practices.

As a large, non-profit agency with more than 52 programs in 6 states nationwide, Southwest Key Programs has a long history of developing collaborative partnerships in the communities and schools in which we work. As experts in the field of juvenile justice, we are often asked to share best practices and methodologies. Having been committed to educating at-risk populations for the past 14 years, coupled with our experiences in the operation of our East Austin College Prep Academy in Austin, Texas, Southwest Key looks forward to partnering with local low-performing public schools to share best practices. Further, we would be willing to share information on methodologies and practices that have proven effective with students of similar demographic backgrounds. Our goal is to develop a partnership that will enhance the education of students from our Academy as well as students attending local public schools.

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

Southwest Key Programs has a 23 year history of successfully overcoming a wide range of start-up challenges in opening schools, programs, and business ventures nationwide. Southwest Key's Executive Management team consists of high level professionals with expertise and leadership skills in overcoming start-up challenges and opening programs and schools in a timely manner. Upon opening the East Austin College Prep Academy in 2009, Southwest Key faced a multitude of challenges, including opposition from the local school district, delays in the construction of the proposed school, and securing funding to open and sustain charter school operations. We also faced challenges traditionally associated with the start-up of a school such as hiring school staff and administration, ensuring that the school was connected to the most modern technologies, etc. Finally, we faced the educational challenges that our student population brought with them as a majority of the youth were well below grade level in core academic subjects.

Led by our Chief Executive Officer, our Executive Management team developed strategic plans and techniques to overcome these challenges. Key leaders from each department including Education, Human Resources, Accounting/Finance, Internet Technology, Community-Based Programs, and Operations were recruited and assigned tasks and responsibilities to support the timely start-up of this school. In turn, our executive leaders worked within their departments to develop plans to accomplish key objectives related to the school's start up. As a result, we were able to successfully open the doors to the East Austin College Prep Academy in a timely and efficient manner. While we continue to face routine challenges in the operation of this charter school, the expertise and teamwork approach utilized by our Executive Management empowers us to consistently overcome barriers and to succeed.

We will utilize our leadership team, experience, and infrastructure to support the start up of the Southwest Key Charter School. We will further rely upon our existing and proven systems and programs to guide and facilitate the start up of this school. We are confident that our experiences, coupled with the effective leadership of our management team, will allow support our efforts in a smooth start-up for the Southwest Key Charter School.

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

As previously indicated, Southwest Key has operated several youth support programs in Buffalo since 2006 in cooperation with the Erie County Department of Mental Health. Our work in this community over the past several years has allowed us to establish key partnerships with local resources and individuals including the following:

- Paul Endress – Erie County Department of Mental Health
- Assemblyman Mark Schroeder

- Marie Sly – Coordinator for the Children & Youth Services
- Peg Overdorf – Director of the Valley Community Center
- The Honorable Paul Buchanan – Family Court Judge and Former President of the Buffalo Public School Board

We are confident that these relationships will translate to our academic programming as we research community-based resources to support our students.

We are also very eager and look forward to the opportunity to establish a relationship with the Buffalo City School District and the Lackawanna City School District. Dr. Juan Sanchez, CEO of Southwest Key Programs, has committed to reaching out to the leaders of each of these school districts in efforts to initiate communications, discuss opportunities for cooperative learning relationships, and ultimately gain their support as we move forward with our charter school endeavors. We will also turn to other charter schools in the area to solicit advice and recommendations on how we can develop meaningful relationships with local school districts.

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

The proposed Southwest Key Charter School will provide access to viable education alternatives for areas of the City of Buffalo and the City of Lackawanna, which have very limited options for those students and families seeking improved educational opportunities without having the financial means to choose private schools. School districts for both of these cities have low graduation rates and their students score lower than state average on New York State Assessments in all subjects and in all grades. However, in the region in which we propose to establish our school (Southern Buffalo and Northern Lackawanna), there is a dearth of educational choices for families in the form of free charter schools. Just one charter school exists in all of the Lackawanna City School District – the Global Concepts School, serving K – 7. In the southern portion of Buffalo, charter schools are similarly limited. In fact, there is just one charter school in our targeted area – the South Buffalo Charter School, serving K – 8.

Our proposed Southwest Key Charter School provides a creative and flexible alternative to the established educational system in this economically and educationally-challenged region of the state. We will provide a high quality educational experience and expanded learning opportunities for communities that do not have nearby options that diverge from their district's chronically low-performing schools. Students will have the opportunity to attend a school that is dedicated to successfully motivating and preparing them to succeed in not only graduating from high school, but also matriculating to college. Our agency has a history of providing innovative education models for youth and families that have been poorly-served by traditional school systems. With its goal to successfully prepare all students for improved academic achievement, graduation, and matriculation to college we are confident that the Southwest Key Charter School will have a significant positive impact on the academic success and school graduation rates for the targeted New York communities.