

## SECTION II NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### Statement of Need

#### A. Why is there a need for this type of school?

The City of Harrisburg is incorporated as the capital of the US Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The City of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania is served by the Harrisburg School District. The school district shares the same lines of demarcation with the city of Harrisburg. The school district provides education for the city's youth beginning with kindergarten through twelfth grade. A decade long restructuring plan was aimed at making the district a model for urban public schools. Unfortunately, the district has been hobbled by mass layoffs of professional personnel, site closures, inadequate programming, failed fundraising efforts, frequent turnover of leadership, and ongoing fiscal dilemmas. Additionally, the district has been saddled for years with management fiascos, poor test scores and mounting debt. Summer 2007 witnessed twenty-five percent of the city students enrolled in educational programs offered by the Harrisburg School District as remediation (Patton, 2007).

According to the Pittsburgh (PA) Business Times (2010), Harrisburg City School District was ranked 495th out of 498 Pennsylvania school districts in 2010. The ranking was based on three years of student academic performance on the PSSAs for math, reading, writing and two years of science. At the current rate of improvement, with all externalities remaining impossibly constant, it would take the Harrisburg School District almost 250 years to reach the ranks of the middle fifty percent of the state's school districts. In 2009, the academic achievement of the students in the district was in the bottom percentile of all Pennsylvania school districts (Morning Call,

2010). According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, in 2010, the district sits in Corrective Action II 8th Year (PDE, 2010). The status of the Harrisburg School District is in such flux and turbulence that parents have fraudulently enrolled their students in neighboring suburban school districts in an attempt to avert the potential pitfalls (Brenckle, 2010).

As a result of such abysmal achievement, 67% of Harrisburg City School District graduates required costly remediation in mathematics and or reading before they were prepared to take college level courses in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education or Pennsylvania community colleges (Scribd.com, 2010).

The arrangement between the Harrisburg School District and the Archie Preparatory Academy Charter School can potentially facilitate a savings to the Harrisburg School District as well as offer additional educational offerings to families who favor a choice when considering the education of their children.

#### Dropout Factory

In 2007, Johns Hopkins University researcher, Robert Balfanz, published a report for the Associated Press that identified 1,700 schools nationwide that are considered *dropout factories* (Zuckerbrod, 2007). The study of 13,562 high schools nationwide found that almost 2,000 schools failed to graduate sixty percent or more of their students in a traditional four-year time span. Balfanz (2006) states that schools labeled as such have “weak promoting power”.

Characteristically, many of these school districts are in urban areas having high population and poverty rates, high unemployment rates, and a high percentage of minority and second language students. Beyond the Harrisburg City School District being labeled a drop-out factory in the Johns Hopkins study, the school district had a higher than average rate of teacher turnover as

well as an unacceptable number of teachers who were assigned to teach courses that they are unqualified to teach (Jacob, 2007; Lankford, 2002; Peske, 2006; Tillman, 2008). The existence of these status and alterable variables limits the school district in its capacity to function and nurture the positive relationships necessary to support the academic and social growth of America's most at-risk student population.

The cascading effects stemming from a chronically deficient educational system continues to result in staggering rates of minority subgroup unemployment, higher rates of crime and the burdensome cost of incarceration and rehabilitation. Further, billions of dollars in unrealized tax revenue and lost wages will create a circularity of poverty and commercial abandonment for generations to come.

As of the 2010-2011 school year, the city of Harrisburg maintains one public charter school as an alternative to the city's public school system; the Sylvan Heights Science Charter School. The dearth of educational options places the students, families, and economic vitality of Harrisburg and Dauphin County in great peril.

#### B. Appropriateness of the charter school model

The charter school model is an appropriate consideration because charter schools are not caught in the existing architecture of traditionalism where the nation's public schools have witnessed minimal growth in practice over the last century. Moreover, the charter school embodies the competitive spirit of the United States. The charter school, in attempt to create an admirably successful educational opportunity, inspires public school systems to work harder, more efficiently, and become more innovative in their policy and practice.

Charter schools use innovative research based applications as a transformative tool rather than simply a tool of efficiency. There is a wealth of research that indicates charter schools provide cost effective reform strategies that result in higher standardized test scores, higher attendance rates, and lower rates of disciplinary action, increased community engagement and cohesion between stakeholders. Public charter schools have grown to their present level as a reflection of the demand for better schools.

## 2. School Demographics

### A. Three year enrollment projection

The Archie Preparatory Academy Charter School intends to serve grades Kindergarten through twelve (K-12) or age four to twenty-one (4-21), thus creating an innovatively comprehensive educational network that spans the educational career of the student.

[insert Table 1]

### B. Describe the community or region where the school will be located.

The Archie Preparatory Academy Charter School will be located in the city of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The City of Harrisburg is incorporated as the capital of the US Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The City of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania is served by the Harrisburg School District. The school district shares the same lines of demarcation with the city of Harrisburg.

The Archie Preparatory Academy Charter School conducted a period of intense investigation where data was triangulated utilizing geographic placement and neighborhood demographic, financial considerations, and the assessment and performance of specific sites and student capacity.

C. Why was this location selected?

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania was selected as the location for the Archie Preparatory Academy Charter School because of the educational needs of the city of Harrisburg and the Harrisburg School District. Moreover, the charter school design, in its present form, is designed to serve a primarily urban and minority student population.

Because the proposed charter school will be positioned in a geographic location comprised of a two-thirds urban minority population, high unemployment rates, and depressed economic development, the Archie Preparatory Academic Charter School is limited in its capacity to serve a suburban or rural population.

D. Describe any unique demographic characteristics of the student population to be served, including racial and ethnic composition or primary languages spoken.

According to 2010 Census data, subgroup data specific to the racial composition of the residents of Harrisburg is:

White	37.2%
Black/African American	51.5%
Asian	2.1%
Other	4.7
2+ race identifiers	4.0
Hispanic/Latino (of any race)	14.2%

3. District Relations/Evidence of Support

A. What efforts have been made to notify the district(s) from which your charter school would draw students?

The Archie Preparatory Academy Charter School has submitted a letter of intent to the Harrisburg School District Superintendent and the Board of School Directors.

B. What efforts will be implemented to maintain a collaborative relationship with the school district?

The Board of Directors and administrative body will welcome the creation of a communication process with the administrative body of the school district for the purposes of information exchange, transitions, curriculum implementation, special education, supplemental instructional programming as well as any initiative or effort that maintains the professional relationship between the Archie Preparatory Academy Charter School and the school district.

C. Convey the scope of community backing for the proposed charter school and its founding coalition.

The Archie Preparatory Academy Charter School has utilized petitions as a means to document and communicate support for the proposed charter school.

[insert Appendix B]