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**1. Mission Statement and Executive Summary (Three Pages)**

OUR MISSION STATEMENT: The Mission of Riverwalk Academy leads students to achieve through authentic Project-Based Learning experiences the knowledge and inquiry skills they need to succeed in life, college, and their future careers.

Riverwalk will mirror best practices found in school models similar to the New Tech Network started in 1995 in Napa Valley, California *(Appendix G2 Student Outcomes Report, New Tech 2013).*

To realize this mission we will:

* Encourage a stimulating environment, instilling positive ethical, moral, and civic values
* Prepare graduates for college/career readiness
* Engage scholars to achieve both “voice and choice” in their journey

The "gathering" of friends around a Project Table each morning will be an exciting and anticipated moment rather than the singular confinement of the isolation booth of a cobwebbed school desk. Problem solving, collaboration, critical thinking, communication and technology will so engage the minds of our students that learning will be pleasurable and rewarding.

RA begins classes in 2014 with grade levels K-5. The charter master growth plan includes a proposed increase of one grade each year until the full contingent of twelve grades is achieved in year 2023-’24. The RA application proposes 299 students in 2014- ’15. Full capacity will be reached in 2023-’24 with a proposed enrollment of 828 scholars. At that time, there will be three classes of 23 members each in grades K-9, and two classes each for grades 10, 11, and 12. A 1:23 ratio will be the norm.

RA will feature philosophies of education espoused by John Larmer and John Mergendoller in their book Education Leadership. PBL inculcates an educational program relevant and rigorous for students. PBL promotes seven standards of involvement between teachers (facilitators) and their students.

* **A Need to Know** - Oftentimes schoolwork is meaningless because there is no relevant “need to know taught.” Effective PBL always contains a need to know that connects students to the learning objective.
* **A Driving Question** - PBL contains a driving question that gives students a focus and challenge to begin working. With a relevant driving question, students become intrinsically motivated to begin working.
* **Student Voice and Choice** - PBL allows students to take more ownership in their education. They have a “voice” in what goes into the project, and a “choice” as to how they will achieve learning objectives.
* **International Work-Force Skills** - PBL fosters such as collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, communication, and the use of technology.
* **Inquiry and Innovation** - True PBL allows students to “follow a trail that begins with their own questions, leads to a search for resources and the discovery of answers, and ultimately leads to generating new questions, testing ideas and drawing their own conclusions.”
* **Feedback and Revision** - Students receive feedback throughout the project from the teacher and peers, causing students to go back and rethink and revise their project.
* **Publicly Presented Product** - By presenting the project publicly to an audience, the work becomes more meaningful.

To better serve the students of RA, a non-traditional school year will be incorporated by plans for an extended school day, key partner organizations, and an enhanced school culture. Each day will be from 8 am to 4 pm with a 3 pm close on Friday.

The Committee approached the following community and civic organizations:

* Brandy Piner, Director of Dual Enrollment, **York Technical College** welcomes Riverwalk Academy students 16 years and older to matriculate in college level courses.
* Crystal McClung, Volunteer Coordinator, **Habitat for Humanity** – the Board will encourage the staff and administration to “give back” to the community by cooperating with one or more of several available Habitat programs.
* Portia Hill, the Youth Coordinator at **A Place for Hope Center of Learning** stated, “We’re looking to expand and bring in new students, and would welcome children from your school.” Mary Hoppman, Executive Director states, “The mission of A Place for Hope Center for Learning is to foster change in the futures of at-risk children and youth by providing creative educational support, life-skills learning, and diverse cultural experience.”
* Crystal Ross, the Marketing Director at **YMCA of Rock Hill** indicated that all of her programs would be available to qualifying students of RA.

The obvious intent of the South Carolina legislature is to provide excellence in education by reaching students of lower socioeconomic status. The target geographic areas for RA, Rock Hill, Tega Cay, and Fort Mill, represent both lower and high socioeconomic classes. According to the latest census statistics, (http://www.city-data.com/city/Rock-Hill-South-Carolina.html) Rock Hill per-capita income at its lowest is under $15,000 and at its greatest achieves only 90% of the average income for the state. Other cities in our target area have greater incomes; however, the primary projected student base is in Rock Hill. Riverwalk Academy will aggressively appeal to the underserved populations within our communities, but will welcome students from any and all backgrounds.

RA will provide the underserved and underprivileged community of Rock Hill a viable and available option for its families. The Committee for RA has gathered **249** names and addresses of students in the Rock Hill area. These students and their parents are ready to become part of the RA community in the fall of 2014.

1. **Evidence of Need and Support (Five Pages)**

As a result of the Committee’s efforts in contacting parents and students in the communities the application proposes to serve, 249 students (K-5 students for 2014 enrollment) and over 300 parents expressed their support for Riverwalk Academy. They all indicated an interest in RA. Barring unseen developments, they plan to enroll their children in the fall of 2014.

**The Riverwalk Academy Planning Committee:**

**Name:** Brian Keith, Planning Committee Chairman (Ex-Officio Member of all Subcommittees, Business Committee Chair) **Address:** 2004 Rosehaven Lane, Rock Hill, SC 29732

**Education:** 1989 Berean University, Springfield, Mo.

**Qualifications:**

* Pastoral Ministry since 1984.
* Married 24 years two grown sons and grandson
* Team Leadership
* Financial Management
* Public and private school substitute instructor 6 years
* Working knowledge school administration.

**Name:** Femi Ogundipe, Committee Member **Address:** 508 S Cherry Rd, Rock Hill, SC 29732

**Education:** Imperial College, London

**Qualifications:**

* Oversees a Health and Wellness Clinic Weekly Outreach, Rock Hill, SC
* Project Manager at Fidelity National Information Services
* Gathered over 100 names of support for Riverwalk Academy
* Supporter of charter school initiative in Rock Hill and South Carolina

**Name:** Christopher Blackburn, Committee Member and Community Relations Chair **Address:** 1187 Barn Swallow Rd, RH, SC 29732 **Education:** Currently enrolled atYork Tech in Rock Hill

**Qualifications:**

* 12 years management
* Detention Officer York County Sheriff's Office 2 years
* Supervisory, Financial, and Human Resource experience
* Rock Hill parent of five children
* Children currently enrolled in SC Charter School system

**Name:** Alton Johnson, Committee Member **Address:** 346 Emma Wood Lane, Rock Hill, SC 29730 **Education:** 1991 Rock Hill High School

**Qualifications:**

* Resident Rock Hill 14 years
* Married 16 years
* Rock Hill parent of two
* Rock Hill schools and area sports supporter
* Employed at LLL Transport

**Name:** David A. Hensley, Committee Member and Facilities Chair **Address:** 1971 South Anderson Road, RH, SC 29730 **Education:** 1992 Rock Hill High School

1994 York Technical College with Associate of Arts in Science and Civil Engineering

**Qualifications:**

* Resident of Rock Hill 26 years
* Rock Hill parent of two enrolled in local schools
* Served two terms on a private school board
* Served as a teacher in the public school system
* Construction Industry Consultant
* CEO Large home building company

**Name:** Darla Michaw, Committee Member **Address:** 409 Brookfield Lane, Rock Hill, SC 29730

**Education:**

* 1989 Rock Hill High School
* 1989-1992 USC-Lancaster
* 1993 Lancaster School Of Practical Nursing
* 1996-1997 York Technical College

**Qualifications:**

* Married 19 years
* Parent of three
* Stay-at-Home Mom since July 2012.
* Licensed Practical Nurse 12 years Rock Hill Pediatrics, Carolina's Medical Center
* Resident of Rock Hill 28 years
* Rock Hill High School 1989
* Ready to devote time to the success of Riverwalk Academy

**Name:** Whitney ReinkenCommittee Member and Education Chair **Address:** 433 Guiness Place, Rock Hill, SC 29730

**Education:** 2007 from Fort Mill High School.

2012 Winthrop University, Bachelor of Science Elementary Education.

**Qualifications:** Certified teacher in South Carolina and North Carolina.

September 2012 Currently Kindergarten Teacher

2012-‘13 Received two awards based on students’ test scores

The above-qualified individuals will bring budgetary acumen and innovative education philosophies to benefit the students of Riverwalk. Most of all, this committee will project a determination to establish a viable school of choice in the Rock Hill community.

In 1982, a young man arrived from California in Fort Mill, SC. He went to work for a prosperous and burgeoning ministry, PTL. During Mr. Brian Keith’s time in SC, he met his bride in Rock Hill, married, and traveled to many areas of the US. In 2010, he accepted pastorate of his wife’s home church in Rock Hill. In his experience in working with youth, as a leader and pastor, he became aware of his sincere desire to benefit not only his parish youth, but also a wider scope of youth in the entire community. Though faithful to his calling as a pastor, Mr. Keith felt for years that he could lead a charter school to success. In 2013, Keith found an opportunity to make application for a charter school to be established in Rock Hill.

When Keith began to talk about his plan for a charter school, several parents and community leaders in his broad circle of acquaintances began to respond favorably. They too felt the charter opportunity in the SC was a chance to benefit a needy community in Rock Hill. As conversations progressed, investigation was made as to how a charter school is formed in South Carolina. It became clear to these community leaders that advise and input from professional sources would be helpful. Mary Carmichael, Executive Director of the Public Charter School Association of South Carolina, became an invaluable resource in Committee development. Kelly-Moser Consulting of SC, LandMark Consulting Group of California, and HelpCharters of Texas have contributed informative and creative insight as the Committee continues to develop plans for the success of Riverwalk Academy.

The Committee and interested parents, aware of the necessity to identify a student population began to go to the community in a grassroots effort to publicize the establishment of a new charter. Response was better than expected in the first of many concentrically formed circles of outreach. Next efforts were concentrated in underserved and low SES neighborhoods. Parents faced with the challenge of low performing and under resourced schools in their neighborhoods readily welcomed an innovative school of choice for their area.

Public meetings were held on March 22 and 24 at Faith Assembly, Rock Hill. All Nations Church conducted a public hearing on March 31. Additionally, a public hearing was held on April 23 in Rock Hill at the Baxter/Fort Mill Library with Committeemen and interested community leaders. Each of these meetings successfully engaged additional support from community parents, leaders and interested residents. As a result of the information delivered in the meetings and directives proposed during the deliberations, 249 prospective students were signed, a committee of seven members was formed and plans for a successful charter application were implemented.

In conversations with the community the following organizations responded favorably:

* Crystal McClung, Volunteer Coordinator, Habitat for Humanity – the Board will encourage the staff and administration to “give back” to the community by cooperating with one or more of several available Habitat programs.
* Portia Hill, the Youth Coordinator at A Place for Hope Center of Learning stated, “We’re looking to expand and bring in new students, and would welcome children from your school.” Mary Hoppman, Executive Director states, “The mission of A Place for Hope Center for Learning is to foster change in the futures of at-risk children and youth by providing creative educational support, life-skills learning, and diverse cultural experience.”
* Crystal Ross, the Marketing Director at YMCA of Rock Hill indicated that all of her programs would be available to qualifying students of RA.

1. **Enrollment (five pages)**

Riverwalk Academy will comply with applicable directives of State and Federal governing bodies, laws, and constitutional provisions. RA will not discriminate on the basis of disability, race, creed, color, gender, national origin, religion, ancestry, or need for special education services.

Riverwalk will serve children and families throughout the State of South Carolina.

There are no prerequisites or enrollment requirements other than proper registration and identification documents. The Academy will publicize the opening of the charter school, ensuring that families of students from all ethnicities, SES levels and academic back grounds are aware of the school choice option which Riverwalk provides.

Applications for enrollment will be made available no later than the first Tuesday of October of each year. Marketing efforts will directly advertise and actively recruit families to consider enrollment in Riverwalk Academy. Each student must be enrolled by a parent or guardian. Application must be made in person, by fax, by email or via US mail. The application form may be downloaded on Riverwalk website or picked up at the school location. A telephone request for a mailed application will be honored.

The deadline for submitting an application is 4 p.m., the second Thursday of December each year. Applications may continue to be received after the deadline. If the number of applications received before the application deadline does not meet or exceed capacity, then applications will be received and admission will be given on a first come, first serve basis. If the number of applications received before the December deadline exceeds the number of slots available, a lottery will be held.

If the number of applicants exceeds capacity prior to the application deadline, a lottery will be conducted on the second Monday in January. Participants in the lottery will be notified by phone or electronic communication. All attempts to contact families will be documented. Parents have 5 days to respond before the school will move to next student on the waiting list. The lottery will be conducted at a public meeting held in the school facility or in an appropriate place identified by the Academy.

The lottery will be conducted in the following manner:

1. a card with the name of an individual applicant will be sealed in an unmarked envelope;
2. each envelope will be placed in a transparent
3. sent, plastic bin sufficiently large enough to allow the envelopes to be thoroughly shuffled;
4. a representative of the community will draw and another community member will open each envelope, reading aloud the name of the applicant;
5. the name drawn and announced will be recorded on a ledger and on the card by individuals designated by the charter committee or administration in the future.

The procedure will continue until all envelopes have been drawn and all names announced and recorded. Results from the random selection process will be posted on the school website. The list will display students admitted into the school. All students not admitted in the lottery process will be placed on a waiting list in the order in which they were chosen in the lottery. As slots open during the school year, students will be admitted from the waiting list in the order of the lottery results. Any applications received during the year will be placed at the bottom of the waiting list.

If a question arises concerning enrollment procedures not covered by the lottery process, the school will follow the statement of South Carolina law, “If a charter school denies admission to a student for reasons other than the results of a lottery, the student may appeal the denial to the sponsoring district. The decision will be binding on the student and the charter school.”

Riverwalk will not limit or deny admission or show preference to any individual group. However, in accordance with Charter School law, the school may give enrollment priority to children of the Founding Committee and children of school employees (provided their enrollment does not constitute more than twenty (20) percent of the total enrollment of the charter school), and siblings of a pupil already enrolled.

1. **Educational Program (10 pages)**

Riverwalk Academy will provide an educational experience that will enable its students to meet academic standards set by the state of South Carolina. Riverwalk will also prepare South Carolina youth to become responsible citizens and lifelong learners. In order to capture the attention and positive response of our student population, highly skilled teachers will diligently employ an innovative school model.

Technology will initially attract students to the Riverwalk Academy. However, it will be the combination of technology, project-based learning, an integrated standards-based curriculum, and student teamwork that will transform them into top students. Quickly, they will see a purpose to what they are learning. Instead of abstract concepts, students will be working on real world problems and projects. Students in high school will be encouraged to continue their education. Most students will be given opportunity to earn at least 24 semester units of college credit by the time they graduate. Prospective graduates will understand what a post-secondary degree will do for them. Through internships at local businesses and field agencies, Riverwalk students will chose a more clearly defined career goal.

Riverwalk will encourage students to excel in the information-based 21st century technologically advanced society. The marriage of problem-based learning, student teamwork, and technology is a highly productive way for students to connect with their high school and be well-prepared for a multitude of post-secondary job and educational opportunities. This is best achieved when the school is small in size; the core curriculum is integrated and standards-based; current technology is used as an integral tool in the learning process; students work in small groups on authentic projects; and strategies are employed to encourage students to become life-long learners and responsible, competent, and self-motivated citizens with a strong sense of community. Additionally, an “educated person” in the 21st century is able to find appropriate information, synthesize, evaluate, and analyze that information for relevancy and accuracy, and report that information to a variety of audiences in several formats while working meaningfully with colleagues.

With one to one application of smart tablet technologies and round table team involvement, the innovative New Tech model will justify taxpayer support to demonstrate new opportunities for student achievement and outcomes.

In accordance with the South Carolina Charter School Act of 2005, Riverview Academy will serve the anticipated student population of the proposed charter school by (1) narrowing the achievement gap between students from higher and lower socioeconomic backgrounds, (2) assuring that all children will read on grade level by the end of third grade, and (3) cultivating in its students the abilities of team work, critical thinking, abstract reasoning and social interactions deemed by education and career experts to be the new survival skills in this unfolding millennium.

**Narrowing the Achievement Gap**

PASS test scores 2012 in the Rock Hill area reveal a significant achievement gap between students who receive free and reduced meals and those who are classified as “full pay.” (SCDE 2012).

Children who come from lower SES (socioeconomic status) as understood by their participation in free or reduced lunch programs, scored “met’ or “exemplary” on each of the PASS subjects at a rate significantly lower than the students who come from the higher SES. There is a disparity in test scores between the lower and higher SES students across subject areas and grade levels.

In all subjects (Writing, English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies), in every grade, the disparity in scoring between lower and higher SES students continued. There is a definite trend that Low SES can be a predictor of low standardized test scores in the PASS testing of South Carolina students. Fewer students from lower SES households pass South Carolina’s standardized assessment of academic achievement than do their peers. Students from higher SES families pass South Carolina’s standardized assessment of academic achievement at a significantly greater rate than students from lower SES households.

Table one shows the percentage of children from lower and higher SES backgrounds who scored “met” or “exemplary” by each subject and by each grade for the year 2012.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 1: South Carolina Percentage of Lower and Higher SES Students Scoring "Met" or "Exemplary" on PASS in 2012 by Subject and Grade Level** | | | | | |
|  | | | | |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Grade 3 | | **Grade 4** | |  |
| **Lower SES** | **Higher SES** | **Lower SES** | **Higher SES** |  |
| **Writing** | \*n/a | | \*n/a | |  |
| **ELA** | 72.6 | 91.8 | 69.7 | 90.9 |  |
| **Math** | 62.8 | 87.0 | 70.5 | 90.2 |  |
| **Science** | 48.1 | 79.4 | 64.7 | 87.6 |  |
| **Social Studies** | 65.3 | 88.4 | 73.9 | 91.4 |  |
| \*Only 5th and 8th graders took the Writing test in 2012. | | | | |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Grade 5 | | Grade 6 | |  |
| **Lower SES** | **Higher SES** | **Lower SES** | **Higher SES** |  |
| **Writing** | 64.7 | 86.8 | \*n/a | |  |
| **ELA** | 67.8 | 89.5 | 58.4 | 85.8 |  |
| **Math** | 67.4 | 89.0 | 64.5 | 86.6 |  |
| **Science** | 61.7 | 86.7 | 54.4 | 82.8 |  |
| **Social Studies** | 59.2 | 85.9 | 69.3 | 89.7 |  |
| \*Only 5th and 8th graders took the Writing test in 2012. | | | | |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **Grade 7** | | Grade 8 | |  |
| **Lower SES** | **Higher SES** | **Lower SES** | **Higher SES** |  |
| **Writing** | \*n/a | | 64.3 | 86.3 |  |
| **ELA** | 61.3 | 85.0 | 59.2 | 82.9 |  |
| **Math** | 61.4 | 86.2 | 57.7 | 82.1 |  |
| **Science** | 65.2 | 87.6 | 65.4 | 87.9 |  |
| **Social Studies** | 58.6 | 82.3 | 61.2 | 84.0 |  |
| \*Only 5th and 8th graders took the Writing test in 2012. | | | | |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Table 2 further illustrates the contrast and disparity in achievement of students in the lower SES vs. higher SES. The passing percentages for each classification and subject are illustrated in the graphs presented in Table 2.  **Table 2: York District 3 Percentage of Lower and Higher SES Students** | | | | | |
| **Scoring "Met" or "Exemplary" on PASS in 2012 by Subject and Grade Level** | | | | | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Grade 3 | | **Grade 4** | |  |
| **Lower SES** | **Higher SES** | **Lower SES** | **Higher SES** |  |
| **Writing** | \*n/a | | \*n/a | |  |
| **ELA** | 75.6 | 90.4 | 66.6 | 89.7 |  |
| **Math** | 67.3 | 87.6 | 69.4 | 90.1 |  |
| **Science** | 52.5 | 78.0 | 63.0 | 87.3 |  |
| **Social Studies** | 70.7 | 91.0 | 73.5 | 90.1 |  |
| \*Only 5th and 8th graders took the Writing test in 2012. | | | | |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Grade 5 | | Grade 6 | |  |
| **Lower SES** | **Higher SES** | **Lower SES** | **Higher SES** |  |
| **Writing** | 65.1 | 89.8 | \*n/a | |  |
| **ELA** | 68.9 | 89.0 | 62.4 | 87.5 |  |
| **Math** | 68.8 | 90.6 | 65.4 | 87.1 |  |
| **Science** | 62.6 | 87.4 | 59.7 | 86.3 |  |
| **Social Studies** | 65.7 | 88.5 | 72.4 | 90.1 |  |
| \*Only 5th and 8th graders took the Writing test in 2012. | | | | |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **Grade 7** | | Grade 8 | |  |
| **Lower SES** | **Higher SES** | **Lower SES** | **Higher SES** |  |
| **Writing** | \*n/a | | 66.4 | 90.6 |  |
| **ELA** | 63.0 | 88.1 | 61.0 | 88.2 |  |
| **Math** | 69.2 | 89.3 | 68.1 | 90.3 |  |
| **Science** | 71.1 | 92.1 | 70.4 | 92.3 |  |
| **Social Studies** | 65.8 | 86.8 | 66.5 | 93.1 |  |
| \*Only 5th and 8th graders took the Writing test in 2012. | | | | |  |

By the third grade, children in lower SES are significantly trailing their peers in all subjects and objective test scores. From the time the PASS is administered in the third grade, and continuing through the eighth grade testing periods, a 22.2% gap continues to separate the groups. The lower SES group does not materially close the disparity in the scores. The difference between the classes remains through graduation rates. All of this data suggests that economic status has a great statistical influence on PASS scores statewide (http://ed.sc.gov/data/pass/2012/show\_district\_pass.cfm?ID=4603).

The goal of Riverwalk Academy is to maintain the significance of innovation, and yet achieve the target of core curriculum and the state academic standards. Appendices “G.2.” Supporting Documents for the Described Educational Program, offers a detailed sequential grade summary of educational goals for every grade, K-12. The chart in Appendices G.2. is a summary of Common Core standards in Language Arts and Math and a summary of the current standards adopted by the State of South Carolina for Science and Social Studies. The summary of what will be covered, does not include all of the standards that will be taught; but does highlight some of the more important standards that will be covered at each grade level. It is anticipated that new standards will be adopted by the State of South Carolina periodically, and Riverwalk will continue to update its standards to align with these adopted academic standards. Riverwalk Academy will strive always to focus on student need, yet maintain a strong correlative connection with state and national standards.

At the introduction of each classroom exercise, the teacher will determine what standards adopted by SBE will be included in the course of study. The basic student academic standards adopted by the SBE will be checked off a list provided to each classroom teacher for the project under study. Instructor notes available to the Principal will include the ‘teaching to standard’ reports. Each project will be tested by the teacher/facilitator to determine what core values and standards are learned in the course of the PBL project.

The first analytical step requires that state standards be included and achieved through the progress of the project. Each student will speak to the relationships each project has to the basic academic standards. Innovative educational practices must always align themselves with South Carolina’s legislative core curriculum demands. Our minimum requirement of students is that they achieve outstanding scoring within the framework of state standardized testing.

Based on assessments of students in underserved zip codes of the state and more particularly Rock Hill, specific targeted goals can be clearly identified. We anticipate that 60% of Riverwalk student will depend on Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program (FRLP) (http://www.heraldonline.com/2010/10/27/2562249/rock-hill-school-closing-the-gap.html). Especially lacking in this particular SES segment are written, oral, and technological proficiency. In addition, FRLP students must improve in content literacy, critical thinking, collaborative skill, career preparation, ethics, and numeracy skills.

Mergendollar, Buck Institute for Education, states PBL is “a systematic teaching method that engages students in learning essential knowledge and life-enhancing skills through an extended, student-influenced inquiry process that is structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and task.” After design, **training** of educators and implementation of the PBL system proposed by leading educators from LandMark Consulting, HelpCharters, The Buck Institute, and Manor Institute, the proof of success remains in the results and comparisons in the core testing of students involved in PBL vs. those in traditional school models.

In Appendix G.2. Supporting Evidence, references offered show second grade students from low-SES schools attain “the same levels of achievement” as students from high-SES schools on standards-based social studies and content area literacy assessments. The long-term statistical gap between low-SES and high-SES scores in content area literacy was not evident.

Conclusion: The Project Based Learning approach will improve achievement regardless of SES backgrounds.

In a PBL related study, Detroit Public Schools demonstrated *“\*that a standards-based inquiry science curriculum can lead to standardized achievement test gains in historically underserved students.”* Two groups of seventh and eight grades were compared with the remaining students of the district population. The results from a high stakes standardized test produced significantly higher pass rates for the PBL cohort on a statewide test. Also, the PBL curriculum effort succeeds in \**reducing the gender-gap in achievement experienced by urban African American boys* (\*Appendix G.2. Supporting Evidence).

“Many schools hold the off “the good stuff” until 9th grade, but in fact, by **starting PBL as early as the elementary years, students start relating to the world they live in in a more relevant way.** Organizations such as New Tech Network and others who use PBL, usually starting in 9th grade, have much data showing the positive impact PBL has on those high school students. They have higher test scores, have a lower dropout rate, and higher college “stay putness” rate. Imagine what students who begin this type of curriculum years earlier will be able to accomplish by the time they reach high school! There are years of research available at the Buck Institute website that will validate the implementation of PBL, at whatever grade level. <http://www.bie.org/research/> **The most important take-away though, is that we need to introduce a curriculum that is engaging, relevant, and has years of research to back up its effectiveness. PBL is all that and more, which is why we are choosing to introduce it in the elementary grades.”** - **Dr. Rebecca Good**, S**uperintendent/CEO, Legacy Preparatory Charter Academy Dallas/Mesquite/Richardson** [**legacypreparatory.com**](http://www.legacypreparatory.com/)

At full implementation, Riverwalk will:

1. Be a small school of approximately 69 students per grade level K-12

2. PBL elements introduced in Kindergarten and continued through 12th grade

3. Encourage individual interests and responsibility through Project Based Learning

4. Accept students of all levels and graduate students at high levels

5. Foster a business like culture that values learning at high levels

6. Prepare all graduates for college and/or living wage careers

7. Close the achievement gap between students from lower and higher SES backgrounds.

Riverwalk will be a small school. A growing body of research indicates the advantages of small schools. Students at small high schools outperform those at large, comprehensive high schools on standardized tests, and in academic grades and transition to college. There is evidence small schools are even more crucial for underachieving or disadvantaged youth (http://www.forbes.com/2008/11/18/gates-foundation-schools-oped-cx\_dr\_1119ravitch.html).

In Project Based Learning, learning is contextual, creative, and shared. Students collaborate on projects that require critical thinking and communication. Many traditional schools isolate a student in a desk focusing on a structured textbook, which may or may not excite the natural curiosity necessary for the learning process. In the PBL model students gather around tables or in groups to discuss real-world topics. Students are challenged by a carefully prepared “driving question.” Because the “driving question” inspires answers that will have an impact on their real world, scholars must be more committed to discovery of “real world” solutions The PBL training model provides resources based on Andrew Miller’s study, “Craft the Driving Question”, and “How to Write Effective Driving Questions for Project Based Learning.” Once the question is posed, the students participate in research and ideas leading to the solution of the real-world contemporary problems posed by the driving question.

The full process of PBL is achieved by seven broad steps.

1. Plan meaningful problems
2. Divide students into small groups
3. Encourage teams to define the problem and pose questions for research
4. Invite participation through written materials, short lectures, case descriptions and relevant guests
5. Monitor teams to maintain focus
6. Model effective problem solving and critical thinking by encouraging more detailed thinking, questions and arguments
7. Allow teams to demonstrate their solutions by presentations, role playing, and application of the resolution in the real world

Riverwalk is committed to individualizing the educational process. In consultation with a counselor and/or teacher, each student will create an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP). The ILP will not replace an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Accommodating the varied needs of each student, the ILP will provide the best course of study for each student on his or her path to graduation.

No process can succeed without a plan for remediation. The needs of struggling learners through a response to intervention (RTI) must be addressed. The first step of identification of a need for tutorial assistance is the personal relationship between student and teacher. Instructional involvement invites ongoing observation and intervention to keep students on track. Some students will need diagnostic and remedial intervention. When a need for RTI is discovered, a team of professionals and parents will meet to review what interventions are appropriate.

Examples of interventions may include:

(1) Vision, hearing and speech screening with corrective actions for any deficits.

(2) Emotional counseling to include one-on-one or small group sessions.

(3) Academic RTI’s with a teacher, assistant, or volunteer,

(4) Tutoring, customized assignments,

(5) Identification of the student’s strongest modality of learning.

According to a study published by Education Week magazine, "Diplomas Count 2010", South Carolina's graduation rate is one of the lowest in the country, with fewer than 55% of students finishing high school. The study went on to estimate that 30,000 students would fail to graduate high school in 2010. Understanding the current graduation requirements and working toward achieving those numbers is a crucial step in assuring the youth of South Carolina move into their adult life with the proper education.

In order for a student to graduate from high school in South Carolina, the student must earn 24 credits in state-approved courses. Those credits must be distributed in a very specific manner among the core high school subjects. The SCDE requires credits to be attained in the following manner: English/language arts, 4.0 credits; mathematics, 4.0 credits; science, 3.0 credits; U.S. history and Constitution, 1.0 credit; economics, 0.5 of a credit; U.S. government, 0.5 of a credit; other social sciences, 1.0 credit; physical education or Junior ROTC: 1.0 credits; computer science (including keyboarding), 1.0 credit; foreign language or career technology education, 1.0 credit; and electives, 7.0 credits. In order to receive a credit, the student must pass the class with a 1.0 GPA or higher. To obtain a high school diploma, students must also demonstrate computer literacy and pass the South Carolina exit exam. As students take advantage of our AP courses, our collaborative relationship with York Technical College, pass their EOC exams, and show competence in core curriculum they will be prepared to enter college. Riverwalk reserves the right to modify or add to the examples included with this charter application in order to serve its students more effectively. The proposed school calendar and daily schedule for the 2014-’15 academic school year is found in E. School Calendar and Daily Schedule for the Academic Year.

1. **Goals and Objectives [five pages]**

Educators agree that the persistent achievement gap between students of lower and higher-SES must be closed. PBL has succeeded over the past two decades in narrowing the statistical differences by elevating the standardized testing scores of lower-SES students in comparison with students from the higher income group (http://www.bie.org/research/study/Boaler\_2002).

**Goal 1: Students at Riverwalk will demonstrate yearly academic progress expected for their grade level in reading as assessed with Smarter Balance (or other state approved assessment).**

**Objective 1.1** At least 79% of students enrolled at Riverwalk will receive a met or exemplary rating in reading in the first year of operation.

**Objective 1.2** At least 81% of students enrolled at Riverwalk will receive a met or exemplary rating in reading in the second year of operation.

**Objective 1.3** At least 83% of students enrolled at Riverwalk will receive a met or exemplary rating in reading in the third year of operation

**Objective 1.4** At least 85% of students enrolled at Riverwalk will receive a met or exemplary rating in reading in the fourth year of operation.

**Objective 1.5** At least 87% of students enrolled at Riverwalk will receive a met or exemplary rating in reading in the fifth year of operation.

**Objective 1.6** In years six through ten, the percent of students receiving a met or exemplary rating in reading will increase by one percent each year.

**Goal 2: Strategies on demonstrating yearly academic progress**

* Each project of PBL begins with six steps to a successful project. The first step is “Start with state standards.” Riverwalk strategy for ensuring that students reach their individual growth projections will be the effective marriage of Common Core and South Carolina standards with innovative methodology of PBL.
* MAP (or a similar assessment) will be administered to students at the beginning of each year, mid-year, and the end of the year. Test results from the beginning of the year will inform the educational program needs for each students. Mid-year test data will be used to modify individual instruction programs for any child who is not making expected progress. It is expected that 87% of students will be reaching their individual growth projections on MAP by or before the fifth year of operation.

**Goal 2: Riverwalk plans to narrow the achievement gap in all subject areas between lower and higher socioeconomic status (SES) students.**

**Objective 2.1:** Students attending for a minimum of 3 years will be tested in 5 subjects: Writing, ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies. The difference between students scoring “met” or “exemplary” from both lower and higher SES backgrounds should not be greater than 12 percentage points. Only students who have been attending minimum number of years will be included in determining the achievement gap percentage.

**Objective 2.2:** Students who have attended for a minimum of 6 years will be tested in 5 subjects: Writing, ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies. The difference between students scoring “met” or “exemplary” from both lower and higher SES backgrounds should not be greater than 8 percentage points. Only students who have been attending minimum number of years will be included in determining this longitudinal achievement gap percentage. **Table 1: Maximum Discrepancies in Achievement between Lower and Higher SES Students Enrolled at Riverwalk Compared to Actual Discrepancies in Achievement District Wide Measured in Percentage Points**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Table 1 |  |  |
| **\*2012 Average % Discrepancy District Wide of All Subjects Tested by PASS** | **Projected % Discrepancy Riverwalk after Three Years** | **Projected % Discrepancy Riverwalk after Six Years** |
| **Third** | 20.23 | 12 | 8 |
| **Fourth** | 21.18 | 12 | 8 |
| **Fifth** | 22.84 | 12 | 8 |
| **Sixth** | 22.78 | 12 | 8 |
| **Seventh** | 21.80 | 12 | 8 |
| **Eighth** | 24.42 | 12 | 8 |
| \*York District 3 Percentage of Lower and Higher SES Students 2012 PASS by Subject and grade level (http://ed.sc.gov/data/pass/2012/show\_district\_pass\_scores\_demo.cfm?ID=4603) | | | |

**Goal 2: Strategies for Narrowing the Achievement Gap Between Lower and Higher SES Students**

* The employment of the driving questions as explained in “Craft the Driving Question” will engender critical thinking, self-reliance, and increased self-confidence.
* Each student will be given an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) to provide the best course of study to graduation.. The ILP will not replace an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

**Goal 3: Students at Riverwalk will demonstrate yearly academic progress expected for their grade level in math as assessed with Smarter Balance (or other state approved assessment).**

**Objective 3.1** At least 80% of students enrolled at Riverwalk will receive a met or exemplary rating in reading in the first year of operation.

**Objective 3.2** At least 82% of students enrolled at Riverwalk will receive a met or exemplary rating in reading in the second year of operation.

**Objective 3.3** At least 84% of students enrolled at Riverwalk will receive a met or exemplary rating in reading in the third year of operation

**Objective 3.4** At least 86% of students enrolled at Riverwalk will receive a met or exemplary rating in reading in the fourth year of operation.

**Objective 3.5** At least 88% of students enrolled at Riverwalk will receive a met or exemplary rating in reading in the fifth year of operation.

**Objective 3.6** In years six through ten, the percent of students receiving a met or exemplary rating in reading will increase by one percent each year. The sampling will be limited to children who are have been enrolled for more than a full year.

**Goal 3: Strategies on demonstrating yearly academic progress**

* Each project of PBL begins with six steps to a successful project. The first step is “Start with state standards.” Riverwalk strategy for ensuring that students reach their individual growth projections will be the effective marriage of Common Core and South Carolina standards with innovative methodology of PBL.
* MAP (or a similar assessment) will be administered to students at the beginning of each year, mid-year, and the end of the year. Test results from the beginning of the year will inform the educational program needs for each students. Mid-year test data will be used to modify individual instruction programs for any child who is not making expected progress. It is expected that 88% of students will be reaching their individual growth projections on MAP by or before the fifth year of operation.

**Goal 4: Riverwalk will emphasize Character, leadership and service. A strong intentional school culture of respect and responsibility will result in fewer disciplinary infractions.**

**Objective 4.1:** By the end of the first year and every year thereafter, 85% of students will demonstrate increased leadership skills as measured in a rubric through their participation in a service project.

**Objective 4.2:** By the end of the first year and every year thereafter, less than 25% of the students will receive discipline referrals and/or character infraction reports. After three years, the rate of referral should be reduced to no more than 10%.

**Goal 4 Strategies:** Each year students grades 5-12, will be required to participate in at least one service project. Students will then submit a written summary of the project results. Faculty and family members will be encouraged to be involved with the projects as well. Discipline referrals and character infraction reports will be analyzed and reported to the School Board. The School Board will be charged with determining how to improve this component of Riverwalk Academy. To strengthen our relationship with parents and stakeholders, school community meetings will be scheduled regularly.

**Goal 5: Riverwalk will meet or exceed the average membership attendance rate in all grades.**

**Objective 5.1:** By the end of the first year, Riverwalk will meet or exceed 93% the average membership attendance in all grades.

**Objective 5.2:** By the end of 2016 year, the average membership attendance should achieve 95%

**Objective 5.3:** By the end of 2017 year and every year thereafter, the average membership attendance should achieve 96%.

**Goal 5 Strategies meet or exceed the average membership attendance rate in all grades.**

* Attendance is crucial for student achievement. For this reason, attendance will be monitored by teachers, administrators, and the administrative clerk. Interventions by teachers will be the first line of defense if an attendance problem is identified.
* The objective of all interventions will be to resolve any issues that may be causing non-attendance. Attendance and interventions will be documented and tracked to keep attendance improving as each student moves grade to grade. If attendance percentages as a school do not improve according to the goals, administration and faculty will work together to resolve the problem.

Assessment results and baseline comparisons will be sent to the sponsor as an annual report. Achievement of goals and needed improvements, along with a plan to remediate these needs will be reported. Best efforts will be made to ensure that each student will achieve a “met” or “exemplary” score on Smarter Balance or other state approved end of year testing. In reference to our goals and strategies listed above, the annual report to our sponsor will include progress toward goals and success of implemented strategies. Conclusions from Smarter Balance and other benchmark testing data, achievement reports, and results from parent surveys will be included in an annual report to the sponsor.

1. **Evaluating Pupil Performance (Five Pages)**

**Standardized Assessments**

In addition to the internal assessment tools all Riverwalk teachers use, instructors will also use standardized assessments to diagnose areas of academic strengths and weaknesses for each individual student.

At this time Riverwalk has decided to use the following assessments:

**Measures of Academic Progress (MAP).** MAP assessment will be administered to students in grades one through twelve at the beginning, middle, and end of each year. The results of this test will enable teachers to identify each student’s baseline of achievement and progress over the course of the academic year. More important, the testing will allow for adjustments in the instructional plan for individual students as needed.

MAP assessments will enable teachers and parents to identify each child’s strengths, as well as specific strands of improvement the teacher and student need to address. MAP will allow a child’s reading proficiency to be tracked throughout the entire of the student’s attendance at Riverwalk. Strategic assessment will be instrumental in helping Riverwalk achieve its goal of all students reading on grade level or above. Another useful aspect is the creation of a student’s ‘Lexile’ or reading level. A student’s Lexile accurately compares a student to his/her same age peers and creates a suggested list of books that are commonly available at most libraries to allow school personnel and parents to find books that are appropriate for each student..

**Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS).** Riverwalk students in grades three through eight will also take the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS). Scores on the PASS will reveal how well Riverwalk students are learning the South Carolina state standards using the Riverwalk technology and PBL based model. The PASS will also allow comparisons to be taken with other schools in the district and the state. From year to year, SCDE may make changes in the PASS assessments. Riverwalk will be ready to make any adjustments necessary as PASS may require.

**End of Course Exams:**

The Education Accountability Act of 1998 requires the development of end-of-course examinations in gateway or benchmark courses. This endeavor is called the End-of-Course-Examination Program (EOCEP). The examinations, which determine 20 percent of the students’ final grade in each gateway or benchmark course, currently include Algebra 1/Math for the Technologies 2, English 1, Physical Science, and Biology 1/Applied Biology 2.

**Merit’s language arts and math software programs** correlate to the South Carolina curriculum standards and can help students prepare for the State assessments. The content and format of Merit’s programs can help students develop and strengthen their test-taking skills as well as their reading, writing and math skills.

Merit reading software has been proven -- through rigorous, scientifically based research -- to increase both student reading comprehension and standardized test scores. Merit research study findings reveal that education software is an effective tool to improve test scores and academic performance.

**Other South Carolina Mandatory Assessments by Grade Level:**

**Second Grade:** All students must be screened for the possible gifted and talented identification.

**Second Year of High School:** The High School Assessment Program (HSAP) is required for a high school diploma. Students must earn a passing score on both the ELA and mathematics portions of HSAP. Students first take HSAP during the spring of their second year of high school (typically tenth graders and those repeating the ninth grade). If necessary, students will then have two chances per year and one final chance the summer after twelfth grade to earn passing scores.

While these assessments have been selected to ensure that sufficient data is available, it is likely that Riverwalk will need to change or add to the assessments it conducts over the years as the SC DOE changes the required assessments for all schools in South Carolina and as additional assessments become available. The assessments selected for use in the future will be selected to ensure that teachers, parents, and administrators have the needed data available to assist students in making significant academic progress each year.

The school will use an inquiry approach to collect, analyze, triangulate and manage information, activities and outcomes to support achievement of goals and objectives.  This will include quantitative and qualitative data sources.  Student assessment data will be managed collaboratively among the principal and teachers.

Quantitative data collection to measure achievement of state and federal accountability standards will include PASS scores (or another state adopted assessment system), and MAP benchmark assessments (or a comparable assessment system).

The principal and/or his or her designee will conduct formative and summative teacher observations to ensure best instructional practices in the classroom and that all lesson plans are in alignment with state and federal accountability standards and Riverwalk's goals and objectives.  A summary of these observations will be used to provide instructors with specific suggestions, recommendations and advisement to improve their lesson plans and promote alignment with the SMART Goals and Objectives.

The quantitative information will be aggregated into longitudinal data tables to allow educators to monitor trends in student performance. The qualitative information will be aggregated into similar and dissimilar categories to allow teachers and administrators to identify relevant data that will be triangulated with the quantitative student achievement scores. This will provide a valid and reliable means for targeting the strengths and weaknesses in instruction, as well as the level of alignment between instruction and the goals and objectives. Furthermore, the triangulation of these data sets will specifically reveal students who are falling below the achievement goals and support the development of intervention strategies and procedures needed to close the achievement gap.

Riverwalk will complete an annual report that will be filed with the Sponsoring District each year. The report will include many areas, but specifically it will include all of the required state assessment results (PASS, EOC, etc.). Riverwalk will receive a state report card each year that will be shared with the public.

In the event that a student falls below achievement goals, Riverwalk will employ a 3-Tier model Response-to-Intervention (RTI) process*.* Riverwalk will provide teacher retraining, additional professional specialists, psychologists and counselors to assist at any level in the process. The administration will evaluate the RTI response, strengthening 3-Tier and providing any appropriate or additional staffing changes.

**A summary of the 3-Tier Process:**

**Tier 1:** Curriculum imparted by highly qualified teaching professionals coupled with school-wide progress monitoring characterizes Tier 1. Teachers address problem areas in small groups to aid student acquisition of appropriate skills. Tier 1 amounts to little more than quality teaching.

**Tier 2:** When a student falls below grade level expectations in Tier 1, a short term, research-based learning intervention is prescribed to re-mediate academic problems. Parents are contacted and informed of progress their child has made as a result of the remediation. Tier 2 consists of a team-based approach to helping students succeed.

**Tier 3:** At tier 3, students have not responded to previous efforts. Remediation specialists tailor more intense interventions to individual students at this level. By this time, quite a bit of data has been gathered. All information is charted and reviewed to determine whether a comprehensive evaluation is necessary. If Intelligent Quotient (IQ) testing, achievement testing, behavioral assessments, and other valid tests are suggested and reveal some type of disability, special education services will be offered.

Ideally, only five to eight percent of students reaching Tier 3 will receive special education eligibility. Tier 3 aides in identifying disabilities by gathering data. The other two Tiers assist students in avoiding special education placement, thereby improving educational outcomes. Further, Tier 3 interventions can be offered to special education students as a means of improving academic skills acquisition for students already identified as at-risk.

1. **Serving Students with Special Needs (Three Pages)**

Riverwalk will fully comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Riverwalk will adopt the State of South Carolina District procedures for identifying students with special needs, developing individualized education programs, and providing needed services. Under Section 504 and Title II, students with disabilities enrolled in public schools, including charter schools, are entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The Section 504 regulation includes several substantive and procedural requirements regarding the provision of FAPE. Among these requirements, a student with a disability must receive appropriate regular or special education and related aids and services. The requirement is designed so that the individual educational needs of the disabled student are met as adequately as the needs of non-disabled students and will be met by Riverwalk. At Riverwalk, an IEP will be developed in accordance with standard practices for children with disabilities. The IEP team will determine appropriate services to be provided for students to include transition services, assistive technology services, and related supports. The student’s IEP will reflect all the elements required by IDEA. Evaluation procedures will be administered in accordance with federal regulations to determine whether a student is disabled and the nature and extent of the special education and related services that the student needs. The use of this term means procedures are used selectively with an individual student and does not include basic tests administered to or procedures used with all students in a school, grade, or class. Prior to conducting any school-initiated evaluation, Riverwalk will request parental/guardian permission for the proposed action through written notification. The notification will include the following information: reasons for the requested evaluation and the name of the person who initiated the process; proposed evaluation procedures; statement that after obtaining parent permission for evaluation, the evaluation will be completed and that the parents/guardian will be informed of the evaluation schedule; description of the areas that are being assessed; description of how the findings of the evaluation will be used; statement that the parents will be informed of the results of the evaluation; description of all procedural safeguards available; statement of the parent’s right to refuse permission for the evaluation, with the understanding that the Riverwalk or other agency can request an official hearing to present its reasons and try to obtain approval to conduct the evaluation; explanation of other rights pertaining to the evaluation process; list of the sources whereby parents may obtain free/low cost legal services; declaration that the student will not be placed in special education without the knowledge and written approval of the parent; and statement of any other factors relevant to the proposed action. After obtaining parent/guardian permission for evaluation or following a decision through the official hearing (subject only to State Educational Agency appeal), the evaluation must be completed. Following the evaluation, Riverwalk will notify the parents/guardian that the evaluation has been completed. The notice shall include the following, with the exception of the items specified which are pertinent to both permission for evaluation and placement; results of the evaluation and the educational implications; statement of the parents’/guardian(s)’ rights to attend a meeting of the IEP team; a statement of the parents’/guardian’s right of refusal of permission for placement; an explanation of other rights pertaining to the placement process; and a full description of all procedural safeguards available. Riverwalk will make decisions that identify the types of services a child will need and will consider staffing implications for delivering those services. Any teachers hired or contracted to meet the needs of exceptional children must meet qualifications that are in alignment with the SC Charter Schools Act, the ESEA, and changes to IDEA in 2004 requiring that special education teachers meet the “highly qualified” standards of NCLB. Riverwalk teachers of exceptional children must meet the following minimum criteria: (1) minimum of a Bachelor’s degree; (2) content knowledge demonstrated by achieving a passing score on state approved certification examinations, and (3) valid SC Teaching Certificate in the area of disability. Special education teachers needing additional certification to better assist students with special needs will be given one year to take coursework necessary to gain this certification. While they are becoming certified in necessary areas, Riverwalk will contract with other agencies in order to provide the range of necessary services for any and all children with special needs.

**8. Student Discipline, Suspension, and Expulsion (2 pages)**

Riverwalk Academy will adopt the Rock Hill School District Three of York County *Policy for Student Rights and Responsibilities* (Policy JI) with any modifications deemed necessary for Riverwalk.

With regard to the following policies and practices:

* Riverwalk will not permit corporeal punishment of a student.
* Riverwalk will comply with S.C. Code Ann. § 59-63-235, which provides for the expulsion of any student who brings a firearm to school.
* Riverwalk will comply with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (20 U.S.C. § 1232).
* Riverwalk will comply with Rock Hill District Three of York County Suspension of Students (Policy Code JKD and JKD-R), Expulsion of Students (Policy Code JKE and JKE-R) and Student Discipline (Policy JK) with any modifications deemed necessary for Riverwalk.
* A student handbook regarding policies of student conduct, rights, and responsibilities will be given to parents and students at the beginning of each school year.
* Appeals of both suspensions and expulsions will only be made to the Riverwalk Board,.

Appendix H contains copies of the adopted policies of Riverwalk Academy concerning Student Rights and Responsibilities, Suspension of Students, Expulsion of Students and Discipline of Students. The documents following comprise the basis for the adopted policies of the Riverwalk Academy in the matters listed.

* Rock Hill School District Three of York County *Policy for Student Rights and Responsibilities* (Policy JI)
* Rock Hill District Three of York County Suspension of Students (Policy Code JKD and JKD-R)
* Rock Hill District Three of York County Expulsion of Students (Policy Code JKE and JKE-R)
* Rock Hill District Three of York County Student Discipline (Policy JK)

Riverwalk will be adopting policies Rock Hill District Three of York County for year 1, but will reserve the right to modify or rewrite to specifically meet the needs of the local student population. The Riverwalk board assures that any policy adopted will comply with all South Carolina applicable laws and regulations.

**9. Governance and Operation (five pages)**

The RA Board of Directors (also called Members) will be elected annually and will be managed in accordance with the requirements of the South Carolina Charter School Act. During the planning stage, the applicants convened a charter school committee, consisting of teachers, parents, and community members with various background experiences from different constituent districts to govern the charter school through the application process. The Riverwalk Committee will act as governing board until such time as a duly elected board shall be chosen. The RA Board of Directors will consist of seven to nine members as detailed in the bylaws.

In December of 2014 a nominating committee will be appointed by the Riverwalk Committee. In January 2015, the Nominating Committee will present the slate of candidates to the Charter Planning Committee for approval. Individuals nominated will be contacted to ensure their willingness to serve. All employees of the charter school and all parents or guardians of students enrolled in the school are eligible to and will be encouraged to participate in the election. Names of nominated individuals who have indicated their willingness to serve on the school’s governing board will be placed on a form to be sent home with every student in the school and given to every school employee on August 29, 2014. Employees will be given one vote. Parents or guardians of a student shall have one vote for each student enrolled in the charter school (Section 59-40-50 of the Charter School Act of 1996).

The deadline for voting will clearly be stated on the ballot form. Ballots must be returned by September 28, 2014. Ballots will be counted and those elected to the board will be notified within ten (10) days.

**Transition from Planning Committee to First Elected** Board of Directors

At the October meeting, members of both the Charter Planning Committee and the newly elected Board will be present, and authority will be transferred to the newly elected Board. At the first board meeting of newly elected directors, the Board of Directors will elect officers. This Board will serve until June 30, 2016.

**Subsequent Boards and Elections**

All subsequent Board Members will serve two (2) year terms. The process for all subsequent elections to the Board is as follows. At the January meeting of the Board, a nominating committee will be appointed by the Board Chairperson in accordance with the RA Bylaws. At the July Board meeting the slate of nominees will be presented to the Board for approval. On August 18th, or the last business day prior to August 18th, ballots are issued to the voters. By September 28th at 5 P.M., or the last business day prior to September 28th, ballots must be returned to be counted. The Board of Directors is ultimately responsible and has the governing authority for the execution of all board responsibilities. The Board of Directors for Riverwalk Academy will govern in accordance with the Charter School Act of 1996. The board will meet for at least ten public board meetings a year. The board’s focus is student achievement, to ensure compliance, and sound fiscal management. The governing board assumes the following responsibilities:

1. employing teachers and non-teaching employees;
2. developing pay scales, performance criteria, and policies for its employees;
3. deciding other matters related to the operation of the charter school, including budgeting,; and ensuring that the charter school will adhere to the same health, safety, civil rights, and disability rights requirements as are applied to public schools operating in the same school district.

**Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)**

The governing board and the staff of RA will comply with the Freedom of Information Act to ensure transparency in all of our documentation and board actions. The RA Board of Directors will consult legal counsel in any instance in which a Freedom of Information Act requirement appears to conflict with a FERPA requirement. Any subcommittee meetings scheduled will also give notice as required, and must make reasonable and timely efforts to give notice of their meetings.

Riverwalk Academy board members will receive the required annual training. RA will continue to connect with the community and its leaders to recruit the most qualified board members to serve the children of the school.

The Board of Directors of the South Carolina Public Charter School District will be the sponsor of Riverwalk Academy. All school staff will be employed by the RA governing board and will report to the Director. All service providers, consultants, and vendors will be contracted by the RA Board of Directors. The Director may be tasked to coordinate the contracts that directly affect day-to-day operations of the school at the discretion of the governing board. The Director will report to the Board on all contract matters.

The administration of RA is responsible, within the guidelines established by board policy, for the direction and coordination of students and staff in their efforts to reach educational goals adopted by the board. The board is devoted to and legally charged with the responsibility for providing an instructional program for the students it serves. The school will be organized to accomplish this purpose through an elected board and professional staff members who are employed by the school.

The board will rely on its chief executive officer, the Director, to provide professional administrative leadership. The Director is responsible for executing the professional staff responsibilities through the design of an administrative organization that will meet the needs of the school and most efficiently and effectively use its resources. The school will be subject to board policies that are implemented through the Director. The function of administration is to plan for, control, coordinate, supervise and direct the school in accordance with the purposes, policies, plans, procedures and programs authorized by the board.

Riverwalk Academy assumes the liability for the activities of the charter school and agrees to hold harmless the school district, its servants, agents, and employees from any and all liability, damage, expense, causes of actions, suits, claims, or judgments arising from injury to persons or property or otherwise that arises out of the act, failure to act, or negligence of the charter school, its agents and employees, in connection with or arising out of the activity of the charter school.

**10. Parent and Community Involvement (Two pages)**

Everyone involved including Parents, Educators and Community Members are vital parts of the governance and operation of Riverwalk. The administration will actively market and publicize to the entire community. Marketing strategies will include local radio and newspaper advertisements, public service announcements, phone banking, postings in local libraries, postcards to families with children, distribute flyers, and encourage the full spectrum of the population to learn more about Riverwalk Academy. All public advertisements will be scheduled to coordinate with registration application with a minimum release of thirty days prior to enrollment and/or lottery. Additionally, civic organizations, children’s hospitals, daycare centers, churches, businesses, have been contacted to ensure the widest possible information distribution.

From the broad base of community involvement, Riverwalk will have opportunity to actively promote a student body that is similar to the statistical proportion of the areas served. With 90% participating in the free and reduced lunch program, our publicity will be focused on the areas of greatest incidences of free and reduced program. In fact, Parents and Community Members will be actively promoted to serve on the board of directors. The bylaws state that Parents and Employees will participate in the annual election of board members. Stakeholders will be regularly informed concerning schools progress.

It is anticipated that workshop activities will be employed to engage parents. Additionally, Riverwalk has reached out to York Technical College to obtain collaboration for the enrichment of student’s education. Parental opportunities will allow parents to volunteer service on committees, help with class projects, student enrichment programs, field trips, and other activities to make Riverwalk’s mission successful.

The teachers of Riverwalk through the connectivity allowed in the economy of size will have an inordinate amount of leadership in the academy. Development of close student/teacher relationships will allow the philosophies of the school to be guided and implemented by the school’s professional staff.

The majority of the Committee is composed of parents of school-aged children who can be enrolled in RA. On April 23, 2013, Committee members met for their final meeting before the application deadline. Requirements for a newly established corporation were met. Officers were elected, bylaws were adopted, and the application draft was reviewed. Questions and comments from the floor were taken, and the application was approved by the Committee.

Additionally, it was reiterated that all employees of the charter school and all parents or guardians of students enrolled in the school are eligible to participate in the annual board election. Names of nominated individuals to serve on the school’s governing board will be placed on a form to be sent home with each student and every school employee before August 30, 2014. Employees, Parents or guardians of a student will have one vote for each student enrolled in the charter school (Section 59-40-50 of the Charter School Act of 1996).

Riverwalk Academy will cooperate with several highly involved community organizations. Among these partnerships are **York Technical College, A Place for Hope Center of Learning, and the YMCA.** Brandy Piner, Director of Dual Enrollment, **York Technical College**, will welcome Riverwalk Academy students 16 years and older to matriculate in college level courses. Portia Hill, the Youth Coordinator at **A Place for Hope Center of Learning** is involved in welcoming RA students and families. Crystal Ross, the Marketing Director at **YMCA of Rock Hill** indicated that all of her programs would be available to qualifying students of RA. Riverwalk will continue to partner with the community for the betterment of both the school and the populations it will serve.

**11. Budget (Three Pages)**

Riverwalk Academy’s proposed budget (M. Five-Year Budget) reflects the schools commitment to effectively invest appropriate funding directly into the classrooms. The academy’s budgetary philosophy is to fund the teacher and student in the classroom and all budget items will be judged by what improvement and excellence will be added to the student’s educational experience. The following tabular description demonstrates Riverwalk’s best effort to reflect the proposed budgets and incomes which will enable us to invest funds from the Fiscal Year 2015 budget directly into the classroom:

* 23:1 Teacher to Admin ratio
* 8% cash reserve on hand of $243,112.22
* $137,575.07 Operational Reserves
* $61,346.94 Board discretionary reserves

We anticipate the Charter School Program (CSP) Grant in FY-14 and FY-15 and evidence that these funds will be received is based on the award percentage rate provided by SCDE.

Our annual audit is a statutory requirement; accordingly, we will comply with all aspects of this mandate. We have reviewed the Single Audit Guide in detail, to include current Highlights, Technical Notes, Audit Requirements, and appropriate information in the Compliance Supplement; consequently, we are knowledgeable of the compliance requirements and suggested audit procedures. The Board of Directors (BOD) will engage an auditor no later than 120 days prior to the close of the fiscal year by soliciting three bids from independent Certified Public Accountant (CPA) firms and selecting the firm that (a) has prior charter school auditing experience and (b) best meets our needs. The annual audit will encompass our financial and administrative operations and will be conducted in compliance with law. The audit report will meet the state requirements and the BOD will receive, review, and approve the Annual Audit prior to required submission to the South Carolina Public Charter School District and required state agencies.

Riverwalk Academy will adhere to accounting, reporting, and auditing procedures and requirements of our sponsor, which are those for all public schools operating in South Carolina; accordingly, we will remain fiscally solvent, adhere to general accepted accounting practices, have no material breaches, address financial concerns, and follow the South Carolina pupil accounting system by designing, developing, and implementing a comprehensive Internal Fiscal Control System:

* Establishing financial policies and corresponding financial procedures to properly account for all revenue and expenses as directed in the *Financial Accounting Handbook* and the *Funding Manual*.
* Establishing policies to adhere to the reporting policies, procedures, and regulations of the *South Carolina Pupil Accounting Manual* and the *South Carolina Student Accountability Manual*.
* Ensuring that all accounting, reporting, and auditing procedures and requirements will comply with the published specifications of the Office of District Auditing and Field Services contained in the (a) *Single Audit Guide*, (b) *Financial Accounting Handbook*, and (c) *Funding Manual*.
* Defining and adhering to Generally Accepted Standards of Fiscal Management.
* Developing and approving an annual operating budget for the upcoming fiscal year no later than June 30th of the preceding fiscal year.
* Maintaining appropriate records on a by-transaction basis thereby establishing our financial management system as “audit ready” at the conclusion of any given transaction.
* Making required reports (on-call, monthly, quarterly, annually) to the BOD and external appropriate agents and agencies. Reports will be maintained and filed according to district, state, and federal requirements.
* Identifying, reporting, and dealing with material breaches and financial concerns through corrective and preventative action protocols.

At this time, Riverwalk does not have any liens, litigation history, or any sanctions from any local, state or federal regulatory agencies. Furthermore, we do not have any debt or any other outstanding financial obligations. Pending approval of this charter application, Riverwalk Academy does not have any financial concerns at this time.

We have identified four areas in which professional operational assistance will be provided: (a) marketing services, (b) school model support, (c) fiscal services, and (d) professional development. HelpCharters, LLC of Texas – in cooperation with LandMark Consulting Group of California and Kelly-Moser Consulting of South Carolina – is providing charter school services to Riverwalk Academy. HelpCharters is a charter school service provider with no management or administrative authority over the schools served.

12. **Employees (Five Pages)**

**Administrative Staff**

It is proposed that the administrative staff at Riverwalk will include positions for: Director/Principal, Assistant Principal, Business Manager, and Guidance Counselor.

The Director/Principal will be hired by the school board and will report directly to the board on all matters. The Director/Principal will manage the day-to-day operations of the school and will have board-delegated authority in staff related matters. Furthermore, the Director is responsible for hiring, firing and administration of employee discipline. The board will limit its ratification of contracts to the sole purpose of budget reconciliation and financial constraints. The Board will also hear appeals of teacher dismissals

The Assistant Principal answers directly to the Principal, as does the Guidance Counselor, the Business Manager, Librarian/Technology Director, and all staff teachers. The Business Manager will oversee the Assistant Clerk. Educational Aides will answer to the classroom teacher where they are assigned. The Business Manager position is still under consideration and may be reconsidered pending charter approval.

At least one member of the administrative staff will hold current South Carolina certification in administration or have at least one year of experience in the field of school-based administration. For all staff positions, see Appendix Q. Sample Job Descriptions.

The teaching positions for year one are as follows: 3 teachers kindergarten (each K teacher will have a paraprofessional) and 2 teachers per grade for 1-5 with a total of 13 classroom teachers

K-5 teachers employed by the school year 2014-15 will possess HQT designation as defined by the HQT requirements of the SC DOE. Core subject teachers are required to be Highly Qualified (HQ). An HQ teacher (HQT) will provide the following minimum qualifications set by the SC DOE:

1. a bachelor’s degree or higher (2) full State certification, (3)and demonstration of content competency.

A teacher who needs to be a HQT may receive help from the administration to qualify for a HQ designation. Required data will be given to the SC DOE as requested or necessary.

Care will be taken to examine all credentials of new hires so that we may obtain HQT for core subject instruction. The SC charter law allows flexibility in hiring its teachers. We reserve the right to hire non-certified teachers as necessary not to exceed 25% of the faculty.

Riverwalk will maintain an effective recruitment program designed to attract, secure, and maintain the most qualified persons for all positions. Riverwalk will advertise for employees using some or all of the following marketing strategies:

* Internal and external searches
* Advertisements on the school website
* Advertisements in local, state and regional newspapers
* Advertisements on teacher association websites
* Advertisements on state and national public charter school websites
* Advertisements in bulletins of local churches and community organizations
* Advertisements in online classifieds
* Interviews with students enrolled in teacher education programs
* Special activities and events for prospective applicants
* Social networking platforms

The Director or his/her designee will oversee the design and creation of print and online media used to recruit qualified candidates. The job vacancy advertisement will be based on the actual job description and/or criteria to be used in selecting the most qualified person for the position.

It shall be the policy of the Board of Directors for the Principal/Director to recruit and hire professional teaching personnel on the basis of qualifications and merit. The Director shall construct and implement procedures for employing teachers and other employees. The Board acknowledges the right of the Director/Principal to hire or dismiss employees at will.

The Board recognizes that the implementation of policies designed to provide quality educational programs is highly dependent upon the full and effective utilization of qualified individuals regardless of race, color, religion, sexual orientation, handicap, marital status, national origin, creed, political affiliation, ancestry, sex or age; except where sex or age is a bona-fide occupational qualification. A criminal record history check on all new employees will be conducted through the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) upon their recommendations for employment.

The final decision regarding employment at Riverwalk shall be made by the Director/Principal.

Regularly programmed staff development is an integral part of the Riverwalk’s structure and culture to maintain continuity and consistency. The school's Director/Principal will plan for the provision of professional development:

(1) To rationalize the importance of the workshop model for student learning;

(2) To model lessons to demonstrate the power of the Workshop Model for student engagement and learning;

(3) To develop expertise in delivery of the components of the Readers' and Writers' workshop;

(4) To organize model or lab site classrooms for teachers to visit;

(5) To provide materials and resources to support best practices; and

(6) To facilitate meetings to develop curriculum maps and teacher planning.

Professional development at the Riverwalk’s will be designed and delivered in a manner consistent with the National Staff Development Council's *Standards for Staff Development* (as revised in 2001), including:

This professional development will begin during the spring and summer of 2014 and will continue throughout the school year and beyond. The activities and supports may take the form of workshops, classroom modeling and demonstration, development of "model classrooms" and teacher inter-visitation within the school and to other schools.

Financial Support for ongoing professional development is currently budgeted and will be budgeted for each operational year.

The SAFE-T/ADEPT teacher evaluation process is currently being considered for adoption by the School. A final decision on teacher evaluation will be made during the planning year after all evaluation options have been considered.

An Employee Handbook will be published and distributed by August of each year. The Handbook will be revised each year to reflect any policy changes. Any interim changes will be publicized in writing and distributed to all employees in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.

South Carolina is an employment at-will jurisdiction. At-will employment allows both employer and employee the right to terminate employment at any time without cause or reason. Unless employers terminate their employees for discriminatory reasons or perform large layoffs, employers are generally under no legal obligation to provide notice of termination. Riverwalk will provide at-will contracts to all employees. Upon the dismissal of an employee, an appeal may be made to the BOD within 10 days of notification of termination.

**13.** **Insurance Coverage (Two Pages)**

Riverwalk will arrange for all necessary and applicable insurance policies for the school. Where applicable, the South Carolina Public Charter School will be named as an additional insured.

The school’s administrators and Board of Directors will be appropriately bonded. The levels of insurance and bonding will remain in effect throughout the term of the charter, unless changed by a charter amendment.

For planning purposes, Riverwalk has obtained an estimate from Insurance People, a licensed insurance company in South Carolina. The estimate is presented in Appendix S.

**Worker’s Compensation Insurance** The Riverwalk Committee has obtained an estimated annual premium for worker’s compensation. The Worker’s Compensation Premium Estimate is $5,317 It includes an Employers Liability of $500/$500/$500.

**Liability Insurance** The Riverwalk Committee has obtained an estimated cost for liability insurance. These policies are designed to match or exceed the minimum limits required by the South Carolina Tort Claims Act S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-120 (Supp. 2002). The General Liability Premium Estimate is $4,878.

**Property Insurance** The Riverwalk Committee has obtained an estimated annual premium for property insurance. The estimate insures $385,000 worth of building contents with a $1,000 deductible. The Property Premium Estimate is $578.

**Indemnity Insurance** The Riverwalk Committee has obtained an estimated annual premium for indemnity insurance.

The estimate reads: Named Insured includes the insured Organization (School Entity), its School Board, School Committee, Board of Trustees, Board of Governors or similar governing body, elected or appointed members of the Board of Education, Board of Trustees, School Directors, School Committee, Board of Governors or similar governing body, Employees, Student Teachers, School Volunteers, and Students while serving in a supervised internship program sponsored by the “educational institution.”

**Automobile Insurance** Riverwalk Committee has obtained an estimated annual premium for automobile insurance. The estimate insures up to $1,000,000 for hired and non-owned automobiles. The Auto Premium Estimate is $181.

**Other Insurance** The Committee has obtained an estimated annual premium for umbrella insurance, which has a $1,000,000 limit of liability. The Umbrella Premium Estimate is $2,387.

1. **Transportation (One Page)**

**Transportation Needs** Transportation will not be a barrier to attendance at Riverwalk Academy; accordingly, we have appropriated funds in our budget for contingency transportation requirements. Riverwalk is currently investigating all transportation options.

**School Bus** If, in the future, the BOD decides the school will provide transportation by school bus, a plan will be developed that complies with the state requirements for drivers and training and the state safety requirements for school buses.

**Contracted Services** The Riverwalk Committee has not, at this time, contracted with the York County School District or a third party for transportation services.

**Special Needs Students** Our special needs students will be given access to a free and appropriate public education and related educational services – including transportation. Federal Public Law 94-142 and Chapter 33 of Code of Law of South Carolina 1976: Title 59 (Sections 59-33-10 through 59-33-110) will govern. As mandated, our students with special needs will be provided transportation as necessary. The student’s IEP (Individualized Education Plan) will specify any special circumstances (equipment, supervision, vehicle type, etc.) that will be provided to meet the student’s needs.

**15. Facilities  (One Page)**

Riverwalk has formed a Facilities Committee to research and identify a physical space in the Rock Hill area that is racially and socioeconomically diverse.

We are in the process of locating a building that will be available for our use in 2014. A proposal to provide funding for the Riverwalk Acadmey property and buildings has been made available from HighMark Development, LLC. The proposed building will be approximately 15,000 square feet of available occupancy including a kitchen, classrooms, common areas, and administrative offices.

The property should be available for remodeling to meet requirements for the school and the South Carolina School Facility Planning and Construction Guide; including all codes and regulations required for public charter schools by the Office of School Facilities.

The Facilities Committee and a public school facilities consultant, have begun to investigate numerous possibilities and has identified a plan and a timeline for obtaining a suitable facility for Riverwalk Academy.

The lease agreement must be signed by January 2014, with the building available for remodeling by April 2014. Any construction and remodeling is to be completed by July 1, 2014. An Assurance of Facility Completion by the Office of School Facilities will be met by March 1, 2014. Furniture, fixtures, and equipment to be procured, delivered and installed by July 15, 2014. Teachers will be on the premises by August 1, 2014. June 15, 2014 is the deadline for all inspections must be completed. A Certificate of Occupancy will be obtained by July 29, 2014.

**16. School Management Contracts (One Page)**

Riverwalk Committee at this time has neither plans nor proposals to engage the services of an Education Management Organization (EMO).