

## ***PROGRAM NARRATIVE***

### ***Need and Vision***

The Academy for College and Career Exploration (ACCE), proposed by the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED) in partnership with the Sar Levitan Center at Johns Hopkins University, Institute for Policy Studies will offer an educational experience that will look and feel different from traditional Baltimore City high schools in many significant ways. First and foremost, our philosophy is focused on shaping the futures of our students. Designed as a small learning environment for a maximum of 400 students, ACCE will combine academic rigor, innovative curricula, small supportive structures, and effective, accountable leadership with extensive college and career exploration opportunities. ACCE's educational philosophy—*grounded in the careful and deliberate blending of high-quality, standards-based curricula with "real world" applications*—promotes the delivery of instruction that is individualized, competency-based and focused on helping students plan for and achieve successful roles in society.

Our vision is to create a flexible, safe and nurturing high school where young people are supported in an atmosphere of high expectations. They will be offered opportunities to explore a variety of career fields with growth potential in the Baltimore labor market and given the guidance needed to navigate an academic path leading them to success in their chosen field. Students will be exposed to innovative curricula to hone their competencies and a mosaic of workplace and community experiences throughout their matriculation. From this dynamic environment we expect to develop confident learners who can clearly articulate not only what they have learned but also how to apply

their competencies throughout life. We aim to instill a passion for learning in our students in the belief that they should feel empowered and responsible for their own learning. Students will leave ACCE ready to make healthy life choices and successfully cope with the demands of higher education, the workplace and society. Each student will leave ACCE with a transition plan leading them directly to postsecondary education, skill training and/or meaningful work.

Based on our more than 25 years of experience working directly with at-risk youth in both dropout prevention and recovery programs we know that 14 to 17 year olds have only a hazy, ill-defined picture of what they want to be “when they grow up”. In addition they are going through a sometimes painful transition from childhood to adulthood with concomitant physical, emotional and social challenges. At ACCE, our philosophy is grounded in the belief that every student can succeed and the school will be committed to support individual student needs for personal as well as academic growth. Students will have the opportunity to develop a high level of academic competency while exploring college and career options to not only help them make informed life decisions, but to better understand the relevance and importance of gaining content knowledge. Every student will have an individually tailored course of study utilizing research-based curricular materials, such as those developed by America’s Choice, Connected Math, Cognitive Tutor, infused within a framework emanating from the nationally recognized Diploma Plus initiative, piloted in MOED’s Career Academy, a dropout recovery program. Instructional delivery will be based on assessment information and each student’s demonstrated knowledge and competency attainment, not seat time. This individualized approach will allow for specially tailored offerings for those high

performing students who may elect to enroll in ACCE. Based on their proficiency levels they may move directly into the Intermediate Phase or even the Advanced phase of our program offering a direct trajectory to Johns Hopkins University and the Baltimore City Community College. We have already initiated discussions with the Nursing Academy and will pursue similar collaborations with the other innovation high schools, so that we may all share resources around the development of advanced placement coursework, including the possibility of pursuing on line offerings. Teachers carefully trained and supported in the use of all curriculum materials will facilitate student learning. In addition, every student will validate classroom learning in the field through carefully designed paid and unpaid work-based learning opportunities, internships and career training labs. ACCE will be a high quality “learn, earn and explore” educational experience that leads *all* students toward postsecondary enrollment, productive careers and responsible citizenship.

MOED, an agency of City government and proposed grantee in this initiative, has a proven track record in designing and delivering educational and employment and training programs that ensure Baltimore’s emerging and existing workforce has the skills necessary to meet the current and future needs of metro area employers. Both MOED and the business-led Baltimore Workforce Investment Board (BWIB), will fully integrate the school into their strategic vision and action plan for youth development in Baltimore. ACCE will benefit from MOED’s strong employer connections, business partnerships, community-based and strategic governmental alliances and 25 years of experience and demonstrated success in youth development.

MOED's principal partner, the Sar Levitan Center at the Johns Hopkins University Institute for Policy Studies will bring additional expertise in youth development research and educational innovations, providing technical assistance to MOED as it prepares to implement ACCE. For over 15 years, the Levitan Center's work has focused on designing and implementing dropout prevention strategies statewide and improving the educational and labor market prospects for disconnected youth. Through its nationally recognized publications and training seminars, policy makers and practitioners across the country have been provided with the information they need to effectively implement strategies that increase young people's learning and earning opportunities.

### **Challenges Confronting Students and Staff**

ACCE will be designed to address the needs and expectations of Baltimore City high school students who try to cope with unique and varied educational, economic and social challenges on a daily basis. The bullets below reiterate some of the challenges cited by Baltimore City Public Schools:

- ***Large Percentages of Special Needs Students.*** Approximately 14.5% of students in these schools receive special education services
- ***High Levels of Poverty.*** Approximately 46% of the students in the nine neighborhood high schools receive free and reduced price meals
- ***Limited Exposure to Rigorous Coursework.*** Access to nationally-recognized rigorous coursework is extremely limited, with only two of the neighborhood schools offering Advanced Placement courses during the 2000-2001 school year

- ***Low Holding Power.*** A typical neighborhood high school freshmen class has about 700 students, while a typical senior class has only 200 students, which demonstrates the weak holding power of the traditional neighborhood high school.
- ***High Absenteeism.*** In the 1999-2000 school year, 64% of students in the neighborhood high schools were absent 20 days or more
- ***Low Expectations.*** Only 40% of graduating seniors at neighborhood high schools plan to attend a 2- or 4-year college, and less than 1/3 of seniors took the SAT college placement exam in 2000
- ***Low Test Scores.*** The average neighborhood high school student earned a combined SAT math and verbal score of 685 in 2001
- ***Large Need for Remediation.*** The Maryland SOAR report indicated that approximately 97% of students graduating from neighborhood high schools required math remediation from Baltimore City Community College, and a significant number of those entering BCCC required English remediation and reading remediation prior to beginning college level coursework

We recognize that a significant number of students will need to earn money to help support themselves and their families. This economic necessity often forces young people to make the short sighted decision to drop out of school or engage in anti-social behaviors that place them at long term risk. In many cases, neighborhood instability, substance abuse and violence are the norm rather than the exception. Far too many students of our anticipated student body will come from communities where education

may not be highly valued, few books are found in the home, health and mental health services are scant and few positive role models exist. Many families, fragmented and dysfunctional, are unable to offer support or encouragement to adolescents who are experiencing their own internal and external growing pains. As a result, many students start school ill-prepared, make poor academic progress and are achieving far below grade level as they approach high school. Peer pressure to leave school, join street gangs or engage in illegal activities is often hard to resist. The challenge that MOED, the Levitan Center and its other strategic partners accept is to create a safe, nurturing school environment that will counteract the pull of the street – and create positive peer groups that build self esteem, encourage learning, offer positive alternatives, hone decision making skills and develop leadership.

We are also aware that teachers and administrators face a different, but equally daunting, set of challenges. Teachers often have limited opportunities for instructional guidance and support from qualified mentor teachers, and too often lack the resources to adequately meet the needs of their students. Team planning time may have been scarce, and slow data collection feedback mechanisms have often prevented faculty and administrators from using “real time” student information to make program improvements.

### ***Vision for Teaching and Learning***

As we stated in the opening paragraphs, we envision a small learning community that is individualized, competency-based, grounded in real-world applications and focused on putting students on a positive trajectory toward careers and/or post secondary learning. Students will be continually interacting with caring adults. They will be exposed

to a variety of college and career pathways, and have access to a myriad of resources that can enhance learning (see “Partnerships” on page 40 for a fuller description of the resources each of our partners brings). Teachers will vary instruction according to students’ learning styles and allow students to progress at their own pace. Strategies to recognize and reinforce performance will be used to both encourage students to celebrate their achievements and to internalize a positive perception of their capacity to succeed. Our student-centered approach will create a family environment that addresses the whole student, with capable and skilled counseling at its core, emphasizing student involvement and ownership of “their” school.

During the summer before entering high school, baseline information will be collected on each enrolling student regarding academic performance, health and social history, work and life skills experiences. Based on that information, using a team approach, the student and his/her family, faculty and staff will jointly develop an individualized learning plan with a defined set of learning goals and expectations that builds on student interests to keep them fully engaged within a daily, 8-hour schedule that allows for flexible and responsive learning options. As a part of this model, students will be expected to complete college-level courses before graduation and they will be assessed according to the competencies they achieve rather than the accumulation of “clock hours” (Code of Maryland Regulations, Annotated Codes, Section 13A.03.02.03).

Recognizing that an individualized approach to education will require extensive staff development, we are committed and prepared to provide job-embedded, needs-based professional development for staff of the school. We do not believe that any curriculum, no matter how firm its research grounding, can or should stand alone. Using training

specialists from America's Choice, other curricula specialists and from staff at the Johns Hopkins University Urban School Partnership (see section on Partnerships), we will provide teachers and other staff members with the framework and tools to effectively facilitate learning. ACCE staff will know that they are valued, appreciated and expected to go above and beyond the call of duty to educate and inspire our young people. And, because we believe that program improvement should be driven by a reliable data system that reflects student progress toward program outcomes, we will develop and administer an ongoing data analysis strategy that will enable all the faculty and administrators of ACCE to make appropriate and on-going quality program improvements. Because student performance progress should be routinely accessible to students and their parents, a web based electronic tracking system will be designed allowing students to access and follow their ongoing academic progress toward graduation.

In summary, we believe that our proposed innovation high school is directly aligned with the principles espoused in respected research studies – high expectations for all students, curricula that support rigorous academic studies, work-based learning, well trained and enthusiastic teachers working together, students actively engaged, supportive staff of caring adults, college based student mentors, intensive guidance networked to wrap around services, extra tutoring help to meet high level competencies, student awareness of their own progress and achievements, and data analysis for continuous program improvement.

**A.            *DESIGN PRINCIPLES***

The Academy for College and Career Exploration (ACCE) will look and feel different from traditional Baltimore City high schools in many significant ways. It will incorporate academic rigor, small supportive structures, and effective, accountable instruction and leadership through an innovative school design based on research and effective practice. ACCE is well aware that its student body will be made up of young adults going through significant physical, social and emotional changes as they move through the phases of youth development at an individual pace. Therefore, each one of our proposed school strategies is designed to support student needs for personal recognition and constructive growth.

- The school day will be longer, 9-5 to simulate the work world, to permit more flexible, high interest programming and to keep young people constructively engaged for more of their waking hours.
- The school year will be organized as a year round program: trimesters (to permit more flexible schedule choices and afford key points to systematically review progress and regroup as needed) supplemented by strongly encouraged participation in a 6-8 week summer component for enrichment, credit recovery, tutoring and paid work experience.
- Instruction and assessment will be competency based. That means that each student will be expected to attain a predetermined level of competency in each subject area in order to progress to the next level. That progression will be based on the skills and content knowledge gained and demonstrated rather than traditional seat time spent in class.

- A range of teaching and learning methodologies will be used for specific skill development strategies including intensive literacy, writing and numeracy workshops to ramp up the basic skills needed for success in high school and project based learning to help make learning come alive for the students.
- In addition to the testing requirements, an important part of the assessment process will be student portfolios in which students will be expected to display their mastery of content knowledge and skills.
- Students will have individual schedules based on their skill levels and content knowledge and students will not be required to be in same level of courses across all subject areas.
- Student involvement in governance, mediation teams and school improvement will be actively encouraged since the student body constitutes the major stakeholders in this venture.

The instructional design provides for a three-phase approach: the preparatory phase for students starting at or below high school grade level in reading and math; the intermediate phase for students making satisfactory progress normally associated with upper high school work; and the advanced phase for students ready for more independent adult-like experiences in the work world and on college campuses—a more forward looking concept of the traditional 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Entering high performing students, upon assessment of their competency levels, may enter directly into the intermediate or advanced phases of the program where they will have access to advanced placement curricula and college level work.

More specific information follows:

**Preparatory Phase** – Our experience has taught us that success in the first year of high school is critical to student achievement and continued student enrollment. Therefore ACCE will focus on intensive literacy and writing instruction provided daily in two-hour blocks of time and math instruction provided daily in one and a half hour blocks. The goal is to ensure that all students have a strong foundation in literacy (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) and mathematics. Even though the early emphasis in this prep phase will be on these foundation skills, ACCE will introduce science and social studies content using engaging materials geared to the competency levels of the students, and presented in interactive teaching styles. Upon completion of the Preparatory Phase, the students will be able to demonstrate the content and competencies associated with completion of English I and II, Algebra I, Geometry, US History, American Government, Biology, Chemistry and a specially designed Seminar for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Careers, introducing study skills, computer literacy and career exploration. Because of our proposed extended day schedule, we plan for our students to have a full range of physical education activities as well as exposure to enrichment in music and art. In addition, the 25 Book Campaign will be an annual school-wide initiative to promote literacy and joy of reading.

Literacy and math courses will be provided for each student daily, literacy in a two-hour block and math in a 90-minute block. The English I and II curricula will be infused with the research based and highly successful Ramp up to Literacy I and II materials developed by America's Choice. Instructional groups will be small, and teachers will have had advance training and on-going training in the use of these

materials. In Year I, one of the English teachers will be trained to teach more advanced English students as well as Ramp up and will also be trained as a coach for the other literacy teachers. Students will experience a daily workshop consisting of short independent reading blocks in which they select material of their choice from a classroom library; a reading instruction block in which the teacher uses a variety of approaches (one-on-one with students, small and larger group instruction, guided reading groups using read aloud /think aloud learning blocks so that students may hear a good reader think out loud and grapple with difficult text and learn to talk about and think about books); and daily writing workshops to help students practice expressing themselves and learn how to communicate ideas effectively.

Several complementary math curricula will be utilized. All students and their math teachers will have exposure to the America's Choice "Foundations of Advanced Mathematics", based on the highly regarded Japanese approach to teaching secondary math. This approach emphasizes critical thinking so that students understand the concepts behind the mechanics and are able to explain how they reached a math solution. In the simplest terms, we want our students to not only know how to turn  $\frac{3}{4}$  into 75% but to understand that the process works because of the principles governing ratios. Along with FAM units, we plan to use the highly regarded problem-centered curriculum known as Connected Math for those students not quite ready for Algebra I level work. When the competency levels for Pre Algebra are attained, our students will move on to Cognitive Tutor, a computer-based curriculum developed by Carnegie Learning which is being used with great success at the National Academy Foundation (NAF) Academy.

In addition a specially designed 21<sup>st</sup> Century Careers Seminar will be introduced in the first year of enrollment at ACCE. During this year long Seminar, students will hone study skills, develop computer literacy skills and embark on their career and college exploration process, all with a defined set of competency expectations.

It is anticipated that students will gain and demonstrate the levels of competency required to equate to about 14 credits during the preparatory phase of the ACCE instructional program. We are considering the awarding of a “certificate of initial mastery” to those students, signifying their readiness to move into the next phase.

**Intermediate Phase** - Entry to the Intermediate Phase of ACCE occurs when the student has successfully mastered competencies associated with the curriculum identified above and has met the 14 credit requirement. Students will participate in project-based learning aligned to State and local learning goals and standards. The curricular framework that will be used is based on the successful experiences at the Career Academy, which for over 15 years has provided classroom and work based learning experiences for out of school youth. Their success has been nationally recognized by PEPNet , a Department of Labor initiative recognizing promising and effective practices and by BCPSS which approved their use of the educational design known as Diploma Plus. (See Appendix A for a complete description of the course matrices and competency/grade report forms that have been developed.)

This approach will enable students, working in instructional groups, to achieve proficiency in defined learning competencies that translate to course requirements. Our proposed highly individualized, competency-based learning system will enable students to achieve content knowledge at their own pace. It relies on portfolio assessment as a key

strategy in determining student progress, needs, and competency. Core courses that will be offered in this framework during the Intermediate Phase of student enrollment include:

- Algebra II
- English III
- Physics
- World History
- Foreign Language I

These courses will also be augmented with a full range of activities in art, music, physical education, health education, technology and the full sequence of career development discussed in the next section.

The science and social studies courses will be thematically sequenced, and students will progress through the sequence consistent with State and BCPSS graduation requirements. However, as with all subjects in ACCE, competencies will guide the design of the courses and will be articulated in assignments and assessment rubrics, and in the opportunity for students to move on to more challenging content and processes as they evidence mastery.

Students complete the Intermediate Phase upon demonstrating achievement of the competencies required, that will equate to an additional 6-7 credits.

**Advanced Phase.** In this phase of the program, normally associated with the last year of high school, students must demonstrate readiness for college level work. In this phase, students take on high levels of responsibility for their learning and begin to transition to post high school life. Students engage in structured workplace internships in fields of interest. Additionally, students complete three substantive projects -- bringing

together the workplace internships, community service, academic knowledge and skills, interests, and future plans -- to demonstrate achievement in context.

Students will take English IV, Advanced Math linked to their career choice, Advanced Science linked to their career choice, Advanced Technology and Foreign Language II. Students will also have the opportunity to co-enroll in college or community college, technical schools, or apprenticeship programs -- taking post-graduation steps before graduation. As a condition of graduation, students will compile and present a final portfolio of their best work and accomplishments during high school. Thus, the Advanced Phase will enable students to sequence smoothly to the postsecondary world or the world of careers after high school.

**College and Career Exploration.** In addition to the rigorous academic program described above, ACCE students will, in each phase of their high school careers, participate in a carefully structured sequence of courses designed to provide career exploration and preparation as well as exposure to college life and expectations. This will include training in college and career planning and decision-making skills, employability development competencies, work and service experiences, and multiple opportunities to apply core academic content in the context of the workplace. The career development progression of courses will each have a defined set of competency expectations and carry academic credit aligned to the three phases of the ACCE high school program.

During the Prep Phase, students will participate in seminars and workshops designed to provide extensive college and career awareness and understanding. This will begin with self-awareness exercises and interest assessments such as Myers-Briggs

Tools for Tomorrow designed to help students understand personal strengths and interests. Students will also participate in structured and supervised experiential learning activities off site in half-day blocks of time weekly. These activities will include guided field trips to local businesses, local government agencies, job shadowing opportunities with individual employers and the full range of Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and Baltimore City Community College (BCCC) campus opportunities. Students will keep a journal of their experiences, reinforcing their writing skills. Their career development sequences will intensify over time as students deepen their self-understanding and knowledge and begin to hone in on career/occupational fields of interest (What does it take to be a lab technician? What does it take to negotiate bank loans?) Through class work, field trips, and job sampling, students will begin to narrow their focus and select three occupational areas or career fields of interest to explore in greater depth . The goal is to ensure that ACCE students have a comprehensive vision of the opportunities and possibilities that exist in the Greater Baltimore labor market and the mainstream of society and have extensive exposure to the depth and breadth of career options. (See Appendix B for a draft teacher and student schedule).

During the Intermediate Phase, specific exercises will engage students in the process of career planning, career decision-making, and divergent thinking so that the areas of Career Exploration and work based learning assignments selected are aligned with emerging career goals, interests, preferences, and equally importantly, labor market trends. Toward the end of the Intermediate Phase students will select internship areas to gain more in-depth hands on experience.

During the Advanced Phase, ACCE students will participate in three rotating internships, each lasting one trimester. Selection of internship sites will be directly connected to career goals and will be determined through the career planning and decision-making process begun upon entrance to ACCE. This process will be strategically designed to provide students with the exposure, experience, and reflection needed to help them make informed career decisions. Advanced Phase project-based learning will be integrated with internships; thus students will be required to connect core academic content within workplace focused projects to do such things as develop or market a product, design or improve a service, respond to a workplace need, and/or recommend actions based on research. Advanced Phase projects will be held to high standards of rigor and accountability – providing a creative way for students to connect skills and demonstrate proficiency.

The college connection is also interwoven throughout ACCE's three phases. Students will have unique opportunities to experience the college environment, access college resources and services, and participate in community college and university programs, both during the school year and summer. The Johns Hopkins University will provide ACCE students the same library and sports fields access as that provided to students of the University. Access to the athletic fields will include instruction in soccer, lacrosse, track and softball. The ACCE faculty will also have JHU library privileges. In addition, special tutorial programs, mentoring, cultural activities, interest clubs and recreation opportunities will be sponsored by the University and provided to ACCE students. Regular "day on campus" will be scheduled at least monthly to provide each ACCE student the chance to sample college life with his/her student mentor.

BCCC will test students using the ACCUPLACER to determine readiness for college level work, and selected courses will be offered by BCCC faculty on site at the high school. As described above, ACCE students also will have the opportunity to co-enroll in BCCC during the Advanced Phase of the school program. It is anticipated that through early exposure to a hospitable climate in institutions of higher education that ACCE students will absorb the compelling message about the importance, relevance, and accessibility of continued schooling after high school graduation. All students will be encouraged to recognize college as a reality and an important step in reaching their career goals.

***Year Round Learning.*** The ACCE school design extends learning opportunities throughout the summer through a comprehensive menu of learning and work experiences. Although we will not have the authority to mandate summer participation, ACCE students will understand the expectations and advantages of year round learning and paid work experience. Summer opportunities will be presented in a manner that will be so attractive that students will want to participate in a menu which will include, but not be limited to:

- Paid work experiences through partnership with the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board
- Internship opportunities and community service activities
- Credit bearing courses for original credit, as well as continuation of Preparatory Phase literacy and math instruction through credit recovery programs if needed
- Computer camp

- Special enrichment programs offered through the school and through its partners,  
JHU and BCCC

The menu of opportunities will grow over time.