

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mission

The mission of the Eximius Academy Charter School is to prepare economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse students from Schenectady in grades K-5 to master 21st Century knowledge, skills and abilities by achieving academic excellence, and demonstrating integrity, commitment and positive relationships to build the bedrock values for success. Eximius Academy will close the academic achievement gap by ensuring that all students meet and exceed NYS Common Core Standards and are firmly on the pathway to become accomplished lifelong learners.

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS: Eximius will relentlessly organize around one thing: **helping students learn a great deal.** We believe three (3) key design elements will help get us there: *academic rigor; a strong school culture; and a comprehensive system of learning supports.*

Academic Rigor: Eximius will provide a rigorous, standards-based academic program that excites and motivates students to thrive in a dynamic, fast-paced 21st Century economy. Students are more engaged and excel in the classroom when they learn-by-doing. Our teachers will be trained in active pedagogy, Understanding by Design (UbD) curriculum development and assessment-guided instructional design to foster student engagement.¹ We will create a learning environment that goes beyond content, fosters inquiry, sets high expectations, integrates core disciplines, and cultivate the kinds of “portable skills” relevant to the world around them to ensure authentic learning occurs.

Unique features of Eximius are: (1) **STEM Summer Academy** for all students to provide remediation, enrichment and close the academic achievement gap; (2) **looping** to begin developing long term relationships which support student learning. (McClellan, 1995); (3) **two instructors** (*one a certified TA*) in each classroom to facilitate differentiated instruction; (4) **single gender classrooms** to improve academic performance of urban males and the math and science achievement of females, while reducing overall distractions. (Wesley-Sharpe, 2002); (5) *data is at the “heart” of our system* where we will apply with fidelity a “*cycle of continuous instructional improvement*” to adapt instruction to meet the differing needs of our students; (6) **differentiated instruction** with our teachers using various strategies and skills to maximize students learning; and (7) **more time** built into our weekly routine and culture to create our professional learning community (PLC), which is sacrosanct for teachers to collaborate, study, and plan; and for extended learning opportunities for remediation and enrichment.

Our key design elements and unique features will allow us to concentrate our efforts on four major questions. (1) What is it we want all **students to learn**—by grade level, by course, and by unit of instruction? (2) How will we know when each **student has learned**? (3) How do we respond when **students do not learn**? (4) How will we enrich and extend learning for **students who are learning** and are proficient?

Strong Culture: Eximius will build the structure of our culture by establishing explicit and consistent processes, procedures, rituals, and routines in every classroom, hallway, as well as,

¹ Kaye M. Martin, “Using Backward Design to Help Pre-service Teachers Develop Curriculum,” *Journal of the Georgia Association of Teacher Educators* Volume XX Number 1 (Fall 2010): 36-43.

other areas in the school. Similarly, our students will build strong character when we train them: (1) to comply with rules, limits and adult directions; (2) to embrace the skills, attitudes and knowledge required to be responsible and cooperative; and (3) to manage their independent choices.

Comprehensive System of Learning Supports (CSLS): Our CSLS will create the conditions for learning by expanding improvement planning outside the walls of the school. CSLS will build the capacity of the school to address both academic and nonacademic barriers to learning, inviting both the parents and strategic community partners inside to share resources and expertise to facilitate personal growth of parents, and in turn the academic success and healthy development of our students.

Planning Team Capacity: We have assembled a coalition of leaders committed to the mission of Eximius and to the education of our children in Schenectady. We are current and former educators, parents, leaders in the community, and non-profit community skilled in grant writing, having successfully secured millions through grant proposals, business executives, executive managers in New York State service, as well as, a local politician, realtor, public and education administrators.

Our founding board includes **Karim Adeen-Hasan**, as lead applicant he brings extensive executive level human resource management experience, cultural diversity training and strong conflict resolution skills and administrative financial experience overseeing a budget in excess of one million dollars. **Dr. Peter F. Stoll**, as Vice President of Quality Assurance and Strategic Initiatives of Northeast Parent and Child Society, has substantial leadership experience in technology, education, media development, program design, project management, finance, sales, and planning. Current he serves on the board of the Brighter Choice Foundation and has a Ph.D. in Foundations of Education (Sociology and Psychology) and Masters Degree in Educational Communications from the University at Albany. **Dr. Quintin B. Bullock** is currently the President of Schenectady County Community College. His career has advanced from an urban high school science teacher, a clinical professional, a community college educator, C/STEP program director, Executive Dean, two Provost Positions, to his current executive level position. He holds a Doctor of Dental Surgery from the University of Texas Health Science Center. **Wesley Holloway** currently serves as the Chair of the Schenectady Human Rights Commission, and Schenectady Fathers. As the Vice President of Diversity with Price Chopper, a Golub Corporation Company, he brings an exemplary reputation of community and philanthropic involvement. **Councilman Joe Allen** is a lifelong resident of Schenectady, and has been on the City Council for 15 years. Councilman Allen is also a former President of the Schenectady NAACP, and currently a board member of Minority Contractors Technical Assistance Program. **Reneta Robinson** brings strong data analysis skills, holds a Masters in Public Administration, and is a licensed Realtor. **Elizabeth Simmons** brings deep knowledge as a retired elementary school teacher and an experienced school board treasurer/secretary. **James J. Celestine Jr.** bring a wealth of knowledge in the field of finance analyzing the financial reports of various non-profit organizations utilizing fund accounting principles and ratio tests, Portfolio manager and trader for the NYSCRF's \$35 billion S&P 500 and \$800 million S&P Small cap funds as Senior Investment Officer for NYS and holds a Master's in Economics from SUNYA. **Kim Guy-Jonas** brings exemplary experience as an English teacher of 24 years and is a licensed School District Administrator.

II. STUDENT POPULATION

A. Student Enrollment: Eximius Academy will enroll 160 students – four (4) sections of twenty (20) students – in the initial year for entering kindergarten and first grade. Kindergarten will be open to students who turn five (5) on or before December 31 of the year in which they enroll.

Table 1: Eximius Student Enrollment Projections					
School Year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Kindergarten	80	80	90	90	90
1 st	80	80	80	90	90
2 nd		80	80	80	90
3 rd			80	80	80
4 th				72	72
5 th					63
Totals	160	240	330	412	485

Capital District attrition rates for charter schools are 12%. For planning purposes the enrollment projections in Table 1 assumes a 10% reduction in enrollment from third to fourth grade, during the fourth year of full operation (2014-2015). Similar attrition rates are anticipated from fourth and fifth grade during the fifth year (2016-2017). This enrollment pattern keeps our class sizes small, with an average of 20 students. We will expand our school size by adding one additional class of kindergarten students and backfill where necessary to reach our targets. In the fourth and fifth grades we will only accept new entrants if they have a sibling in the lower grades. At full capacity, the school will serve approximately 485 students in Kindergarten through fifth grade.

B. Target Populations

Schenectady City School District has an enrollment of 9,971 students of which 1,663 or 14.9% are Students with Disabilities (SWD), 303 or 3.04% are English Language Learners (ELL) and 5,963 or 59.8% received Free and Reduced Priced Lunch (FRPL) during FY 2008-09. Eximius intends to meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets of SWD, ELL and FRPL students presented in Table 2 as prescribed under New York Education Law § 2852 (9)(b)(i).

Table 2: Schenectady CSD SWD/ELL/FARPL	
FY 2008-09 Data	Schenectady CSD
Student with Disabilities	14.90%
English Language Learners	3.04%
Free & Reduce Priced Lunch	59.80%

Source: NY SED Comparison Chart, FY 2008-09

Targeted Community: Most of the FRPL students live in the City of Schenectady's Hamilton Hill/Vale neighborhood, a distressed urban community in census tracts **209, 210.02, 211.02, and 214**, with poverty, unemployment and dropout rates three times higher than national figures. Also, 50% of rental properties are substandard and rent burden ranges from 39% to 50%. Hamilton Hill/Vale accounted for 64% of all crimes and 84% of all violent crimes in Schenectady County. (U.S. Census 2000)

Academic Risk Factors: Several social and behavioral risk factors impede our target population's educational progress in school. (Northeast Parent and Child Society, 2010) Among them:

- 1) Many families of students in our target population are severely at risk, and struggle with tragic histories of abuse, neglect, academic failure, and dysfunctional behaviors.
- 2) Most are at risk of placement outside the home due to alcohol/ substance abuse, inadequate parenting, and chronic truancy.
- 3) More than one-half of the youth live in single parent/caretaker households.
- 4) All youth lack strong positive role models and are identified as having a significant behavioral and/or mental health diagnosis.
- 5) All youth have poor problem-solving skills, social skills, and coping skills.
- 6) Many youth are identified as educationally handicapped by their public school district with a multiple-year history of school failure, truancy and behavioral problems.

Our target population is also at risk of involvement (or further involvement) in the juvenile justice system, as well as, at risk of dependence on the human service/social service system. They are at risk of gang-related violence and of eventually being impacted by a highly prevalent suicide contagion.² As they become older and encounter increasing school failure, they or their older siblings are at risk for engaging in criminal activities, substance abuse, running away, dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy and/ or self-destructive behaviors. Eventually they develop histories of truancy, multiple suspensions, and educational attainment below age appropriate levels, Persons In Need of Supervision (PINS) or PINS "like" behaviors.

Identifying and Attracting Impoverished Students: Hamilton Hill/Vale neighborhoods and the five neighborhoods which have elementary schools with the highest percentage of students enrolled in the Free and Reduced Priced Lunch (FRPL) program have been identified as the geographic areas in which our target population is concentrated. We will focus our outreach in census tracts **209, 210.02, 211.02, and 214**, and the neighborhood schools found in Table 3.

Table 3: Targeted Elementary Schools with Highest % of FRPL				
King	Yates	Roosevelt	Keane	Pleasant Valley
79%	76%	72%	68%	67%

Source: NYS School Report Card, FY 2008-09.

- 1) *Cultivating Grassroots Support:* The Community Outreach Committee Team members will continue to text, e-mail and telephone the parents on our distribution list (approx. 300) developed last year during our the petition drive and public forum held. We keep in touch and update them on our application progress.
- 2) *Small Community Meet & Greet Sessions:* We will attract our target students by continuing to reach out to their parents, in the neighborhoods where they live and socialize. The Schenectady Municipal Housing Authority has agreed to help coordinate meet and greet informational sessions for parents living in Lincoln Heights, Schonowee Village, Ten Eyck Apartments, Steinmetz Homes and Yates Village. The President of the Schenectady United Neighborhoods has agreed to host a meet and greet for a consortium of neighborhood associations: Goose Hill Neighborhood Association, Guyanese American Association, Hamilton Hill Neighborhood Association, Mt. Pleasant Action Coalition. In addition, our Community Outreach and Public

² "Schenectady Student's Suicide is Fourth Since November," *Daily Gazette*, 4 April 2009, http://www.dailygazette.com/news/2009/apr/04/0404_suicide/

Relations Committee has begun to cultivate relationships to ease the way to coordinate the meet and greet informational session with community based and civic organizations, and religious groups such as: Iglesias De Dios, Schenectady Boys & Girls Club, Girls, Inc., Schenectady Inner City Mission, The Schenectady Father's Group, Northeast Parent and Child Society, Hamilton Hill Arts Center, Carver Community Center, the YWCA and YMCA.

2) *Door-to-Door Recruitment Campaign:* We will continue to walk the neighborhoods, talk to the parents as we did last summer when collecting over 300 signatures on our petitions asking for their support while sharing our vision. This time we will target neighborhoods of our target populations Kings, Yates, Roosevelt, King and Pleasant Valley elementary schools.

3) *Direct Mail Campaign:* Upon Regents approval, we will begin a direct mail campaign to announce our prospective opening, provide contact and website information to prospective parents. The postcards will be mailed to the zip codes for addresses in the Hamilton Hill and Vale neighborhood, and that are assigned to the elementary school with the highest percentages of FRPL, as aforementioned.

4) *Marketing and Advertising:* We will also advertise in local media through Lamar (billboards), Constant Contact (social media), Custom Information Center (rolling screens at local Price Chopper stores) and local radio spots (JAMZ96.3, WVCR 88.3, WCDB 90.9, WRPI 91.5), to reach our targeted markets. In addition, numerous flyers will be posted in all the public venues frequented by our targeted population, such as local corner stores, barber shops, hair salons, Laundromats, Schenectady Housing Authority, community health and social service agencies. There are also numerous e-mail distribution lists that we have access to and have compiled to reach our targeted population. Finally, we intend to place transit advertising on the bus stops that our parents frequently use (i.e. local CDTA buses). Brochures and flyers will be distributed at the Montassori Child Care Center located on Schenectady County Community College's Campus, the Child Care Center at Carver Community Center, and Parsons.

Identifying and Attracting Students with Disabilities: The special education classification rate in Schenectady and relative to its neighboring communities. In Schenectady 14.9% of students are classified, 12.83% in Rotterdam-Mohonasen and 10.07% in Niskayuna. Table 4 identifies the five elementary schools with the greatest concentration of SWD. King also had a high concentration of FRPL students, and we intend to place additional focus on the neighborhoods feeding this school during our recruitment efforts.

Table 4: Targeted Elementary Schools with Highest % of SWD.				
Woodlawn	Van Corlaer	Lincoln	Paige	King
13%	12%	11%	10.3%	9.1%

Source: New York School Report Card, 2008-09

The planning team, board, and staff of Eximius will actively recruit students with special needs using the following strategies:

1) *Marketing Material:* Design marketing materials highlighting the number of special education teachers on staff and the special education teacher to student ratio. Design materials describing the inclusive special education program and related services, inclusion model, and services provided by the district of residence and other providers.

2) *Open House:* Eximius will target information sessions into neighborhoods with elementary schools that have the highest concentration of students with special education classifications such as Woodlawn, Van Corlaer, Lincoln, Paige and King. Additionally team members with

close ties to Northeast Parent and Child Society and Parsons Child and Family Center will coordinate information sessions for parents these organizations serve.

3) *Advocacy Group Education and Outreach:* We will distribute our brochures, flyers and applications through the Healthy Schenectady Families, Family and Children Services of Schenectady and other advocacy groups for children with special needs. It will be important to also educate the staff of these organizations on the unique supports Eximius will provide our special education students, so they in turn will pass this information along to their constituents given their HIPPA concerns.

4) *District Outreach:* The Charter School Director and members of the Instructional Services (IS) Team will meet with any parent of special education students who express interest in learning more about how the school can meet the particular needs of their child. We will also develop relationships with special education coordinators and feeder elementary schools in the community and provide them with marketing materials to give to the families of their students.

Identifying and Attracting English Language Learners: We will focus our outreach in the school's neighborhood found in Table 5 which identifies the highest concentration of students enrolled with Limited English Proficiency for targeted elementary schools. We will pay particular attention to the neighborhoods feeding Roosevelt Elementary School.

Table 5: Targeted Elementary Schools with Highest % of LEP.			
Roosevelt	Pleasant Valley	King	Paige
30%	4%	4%	4%

Source: New York School Report Card, 2008-09

Eximius will attract ELL students by using the following measures below, and others. For any parent that request assistance in completing the application, the School Registrar will provide help. If translation services are required and bi-lingual staff is unavailable, we will hire translators during the admission period. Eximius will:

1) *Build Trust within the Community through Identified Community Leaders.* We have reached out to the President of the Guyanese American Association and Reverend Carlo Caraballo of Iglesia De Dios to begin cultivating relationships with the community leaders for these main immigrant groups. They have both agreed to holding informational sessions to help us reach out to their constituent groups in support of Eximius.

2) *Conduct a Home Language Survey.* We will develop our school application to include a Home Language Survey. Parents/Guardians will be required to complete this form. The survey will be available in hardcopy and via website. The survey will elicit the following information from our parents:

1. What Language(s) are spoken in the student's home?
2. What language is spoken most of the time to the student in the home?
3. What languages does the student understand?
4. What languages does the student speak?
5. What languages does the student write?
6. Do you consider your child proficient in English?

The Home Language Survey will serve as our initial language (LEP) screening of all new applicants. If the parents/guardians responses on the survey indicate that the child falls into any of the categories below, the student may be LEP:

1. Language other than English is spoken at home

2. Pupil is foreign born and speaks or understands a language other than English
3. Pupil because of foreign ancestry speaks or understand a language other than English
4. Pupil lives in a home where English is spoken, but still speaks a language other than English

If the student speaks a language other than English and speaks little or no English, then the school will administer the Language Assessment Battery-Revised (LAB-R). A student who scores below the designated proficient level is Limited English Proficient (LEP), thus eligible for ESL services. The LAB-R will be administered only once to each incoming student, during summer orientation. After placement in ESL services, student achievement or progress in the English language will be measured annually with the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NTSESLAT) and the New York State English Language Arts assessment. NYSESLAT will not be used for Title I accountability purposes, except for students newly arrived in the United States.

3) *Provide Marketing and Recruitment Materials in Native Language:* Eximius will ensure that its materials are understandable for all levels of reading abilities and languages. All promotional materials will be translated into Spanish, Pashto, and Chinese. Develop relationships with ELL coordinators and feeder elementary schools in the community and provide them with marketing materials to give to the families of their students.

SERVING POPULATIONS

How will we serve Free and Reduced Lunch Eligible Students: Our strategies to serve and retain these students are:

(1) *Differentiated instruction:* We will have two instructors in each classroom to ensure that instructional strategies for specific levels of learning are used. Small group, one-on-one tutoring will facilitate use of systematic teaching with the SCREAM variable (structure, clarity, redundancy, enthusiasm, appropriate rate, and maximized engagement through questioning and feedback. (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2002, 2004) Instruction will be matched to student need with increasing intensive levels of targeted intervention and instruction for students who do not make satisfactory progress in their levels of performance and/or in their rate of learning to meet age or grade level standards.

(2) *More time and support to close the achievement gap:* We will extend learning opportunities beyond the school day for our students. Our school calendar will have a lengthened school day and year. Our school day will start at 7:30am and end at 5:00pm. We will also make a four week summer school mandatory, allowing for a 215 day calendar. To prevent teacher burnout, we will provide afterschool school programs and the mandatory STEM Summer Academy through Eximius Education Foundation and in collaboration with our CSLS strategic partners. Our rationale for this extended school year is that studies have shown, given the global competitiveness our students will face and the challenge of closing the academic achievement gap, they cannot afford to have 60 days set aside for vacation. Further, research demonstrates that any academic gains low-income students may make in closing the gap during the school year are *lost in the summer months* when their parents are unable to provide summer camps that offer academic enrichment, unlike their middle and upper income counterparts.

(3) *Data driven instructional planning:* Our students will receive repeated assessments to measure achievement to determine if interventions are resulting in student progress or grade level standards. We will use these data to inform our instructional plans.

(4) *Comprehensive System of Learning Supports (CSLS):* Our strategy is to create a comprehensive system of learning supports to get the conditions right for learning to occur for our target

population. We must address both academic and nonacademic barriers to learning. To do so requires a focus on family renewal and supports. Toward this end, we will establish the Eximius Family Resource Center, establish a Parent Advisory Council, organize Parent focused activities (i.e. Development Workshops, Family Weekends/Retreats/Fun Day). The parent personal development meetings will be monthly and mandatory. The topics will be developed in concert with our parents, but will include such topics as financial literacy and household budgeting, nutrition, test taking skills for State Civil Service Exams, English Lesson for Adults, Early Childhood literacy, to name a few. Our primary goal is the academic and person growth of Eximius students, but our experience has taught us that all constituents – students, teachers, and parents—must strive for personal growth in order for optimal learning, academic achievement and healthy development of Eximius students to occur. We will create MOU's with community based organizations (i.e. Parsons Child and Family Center, etc.) to provide many of the programs and services we identify as needed for our families.

How will we serve Student with Disabilities (SwD): Eximius will provide a program that will serve students with disabilities based upon their individualized education plans (IEP), as developed by the Committee on Special Education (CSE) of the Schenectady City School District. Eximius firmly believes in the value of inclusion for all students. All students will have access to the same curriculum and materials. The flexibility that is inherent in charter schools, the relentless focus on whether our students are learning, the use of data to inform our answers and collaborative nature of the school culture will enable Eximius to offer a special education program that exceeds the statutory requirement of a least restrictive environment and to provide an educational experience where special education students can truly thrive.

Eximius will deploy a collaborative co-instructional model for ELA and Math. We will have a certified elementary teacher and certified teaching assist in each classroom. For each grade level, one classroom will be dual certified in elementary and special education. They are trained to function as our Response to Intervention (RTI) Coach for their respective grade level. We will have one special education teacher dedicated to coordinate services and provide instructional support for our students with IEP's. In addition, will serve SWD through our Instructional Support (IS) Team who will push-in or pull-out as appropriate, along with the classroom instructor's differentiated instruction during the 90 minute uninterrupted ELA and math blocks. The IS Team is composed of our special education teacher, ELA instructor, literacy specialist, AIS math specialist, and school counselor. We will provide a Resource Room for students requiring even more support. There is enormous measurable benefit to having two instructors in the classroom for these core subjects, and our RTI Coaches are resources to all our classroom teachers when serving the needs of SWD.

The faculty will receive specific training and professional development regarding special education students. All our faculty, if they have not already done so, will complete a course in Teaching Student with Special Disabilities at SUNYA, ESPE 580. In addition, a book of study within their PLC will be "The Inclusive Classroom: Strategies for Effective Differentiate Instruction" by Margo Mastropieri and Thomas Scruggs. Our special education teacher will provide on-going training, within the embedded professional development model, on the referral process to the district's CSE, implementation of the students' IEPs, evaluation of students' progress toward meeting IEP goals and objectives, reporting requirements to parents and the CSE and the importance of confidentiality.

How We Serve English Language Learners: First and foremost we will develop a program that will respect the home language of our students. The inclusion model for English Language Learners is based on the belief that the acquisition of verbal skills is enhanced through immersion. All instructional staff will receive training on ELL teaching strategies. We plan to hire a full-time ELL teacher who will provide push-in and pull-out as part of our intervention during ELA class time. We want to ensure that if any student is pulled out, no new instruction is occurring during this time. We strongly believe the special support that the ELL teacher, along with a structured program, will provide students with the foundation they need to attain the achievement goals we have set for all Eximius students. The actual enrollment level of LEP students during the initial year of operation may necessitate hiring an ELL coordinator in a part-time capacity. We will make a concerted effort to employ, at minimum, one staff member in the building who is fluent in Spanish.

How We Will Retain Our Students: (1) *Maintaining Parents' Trust:* We do this by guaranteeing that their children are well cared for, safe, learning and developing into well-adjusted students. We will meet this challenge by providing the extra supports and always knowing the answer to our questions. Are our students learning? If not, why not? What are we doing to correct the problem? Are our interventions working? These questions are just as important to answer for our SWD as our general education students. We will relentlessly implement a solid system of learning supports to ensure the conditions are ripe for learning to occur. We are embedding Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) into the culture of the school, integrating a school wide Response To Intervention system, placing two instructors in each classroom to facilitate differentiate instruction, creating a schedule to support intervention, establishing large blocks of uninterrupted time for math and language arts at each grade level each day and allowing the IS Team to push into the classroom during this time, extended learning opportunities into afterschool and summer months, establish a strong culture and high expectations to ensure continuous student improvement. When our students are learning we will earn and sustain our parents trust. (2) *Enhancing Parental Engagement:* Integral, also to our success, will be parents who feel welcomed and engaged. Fundamental to quality parental engagement is the need for strong school-parent-community partnerships which offers unique supports to our parents. We will integrate the Ohio Community Collaboration Model to help us build a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports to help rebuild and support families through purposeful and sustainable community partnerships. Our founding team is well equipped to meet the challenge of earning and maintaining our parent's trust, as many are homeowners in the targeted neighborhood, utilize the resources in the community and reflect the population we plan to serve.

III. SCHOOL DESIGN

The Eximius educational focus is to prepare economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse students from Schenectady to master 21st Century knowledge, skills and abilities by achieving academic excellence. Academic rigor is a key element to our student's success. Equally as important is getting the conditions right for learning to occur. Eximius will build a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports (CSLS) to create the optimal learning conditions. (See Figure 1) CSLS will work because at its heart is *student achievement*". Our relentless focus on academic rigor and CSLS will let us know how much our students are learning. Because our system will help us know deeply all aspects of our students' lives, Eximius will be responsive to

student needs and will continuously improve in order to effectively impact student achievement.

The CSLS will enable Eximius to produce these positive outcomes by emphasizing *improvement priorities*, processes, and mechanisms for organizing and mobilizing the school, family and community resources to support student's learning, healthy development, and success in school.³ The Continuous School Improvement (CSI) Team will conduct a resource and gap analysis to provide the data necessary for the team to determine our annual improvement priorities. The improvement priorities we will continuously monitor are: (1) *Academic Learning* through a rigorous, standards-based program, grounded in active pedagogy and active learning will excite and motivate our student to thrive in a dynamic, fast-paced 21st Century economy; (2) *Youth Development* through after-school programs, mentoring, peer counseling, service learning, community service, volunteerism, leadership development, conflict resolution, life skills program, academic remediation and enrichment; (3) *Parent/Family Engagement and Support* strategies such as the traditional parent involvement activities, as well as, supporting families through referral and assistance, continuing education, family workshops/retreats on relevant topic (literacy, household budgeting, parenting) and other linkages to vital services in the community; (4) *Health and Social Services* will include school- and-community-based resources such as mental health services, financial and housing assistance, child welfare support, and dental and medical services; (5) *Community Partnerships* and collaborations such as formal arrangements with Capital District Child Care Council, Carver Community Center, Schenectady County Community College, Northeast Parent and Child Society, Schenectady Fathers Group and the YMCA as examples to enhance both the programs and service linked to and offered at the school, as well as augment resources for both our school and community partners.

Historical Evidence of Success in Existing Schools: The Eximius Comprehensive System of Learning Supports is based upon the Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement (OCCMSI). It is a formal, research-supported, and field-tested school improvement model that specify how best to achieve genuine community engagement. Another contrast is that our model will not require massive relocation of programs and services at the school. Instead, we prefer to link where appropriate and interweave school owned and operated with community owned and operated.⁴ Research over the past fifteen years⁵ has supported the efficacy of community based models. The Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement expands school improvement beyond the walls of the school house, as will Eximius.

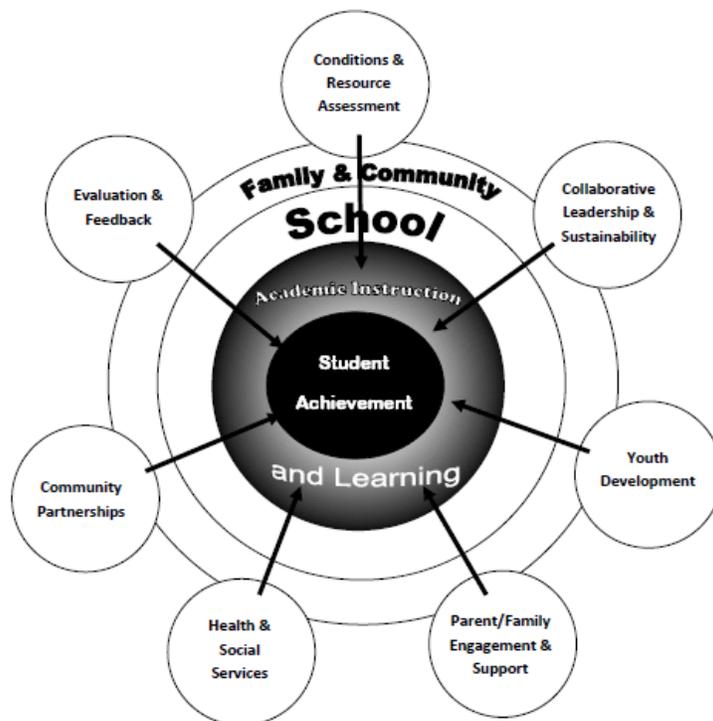
³ Dawn Anderson-Butcher, Hal A. Lawson, Aidyn Iachini, et. Al. *The Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement: Lessons Learned from School and District Pilots*. Ohio State University, June 2008.

⁴ Dawn Anderson-Butcher, Hal A. Lawson, Aidyn Iachini, et al, "Community Collaboration to Improve Schools: Introducing a New Model from Ohio," *Children & Schools*, 30, No. 3 July 2008.

⁵ Expanded school improvement framework and models which encompass family and community resources for learning, healthy development, and success in school have gained increased currency over the past 15 years, for example, community schools (e.g. Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003), multi-service ("full service") school (e.g. Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005) family/community partnership models (e.g. Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Epstein, 2001), school-linked health and social services (e.g., Lawson & Sailor, 2000), after school programs (e.g. Halper, 2003), comprehensive learning supports system (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2005), school of the 21st Century, especially "Co-Zi school" (e.g. Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996.; Zigler, 1997), coordinated school health programs (Brener, Pajvara, Barrios, Crossett, Lee, McKenna, Michael, & Wechsler, 2006; Weiler, Pigg, & McDermott, 2003), and community collaboration models (e.g., Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2005).

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) studied six pilot schools and six districts over an eighteen (18) month implementation and overall the results were very positive. Specifically, in

Figure 1: Eximius Comprehensive System of Learning Supports



one of the pilot schools, they prioritized their efforts within the academic learning core component of the OCCMSI, focusing their efforts on curriculum alignment, curriculum-based measurement, and parent/family “state core” awareness strategies. An additional strategy involved teacher’s use of short-cycle assessment data to guide daily instruction. The school also simultaneously focused on the health and social services and parent/family engagement and support core components. Based upon their efforts, this pilot school jumped two places in school designation for academic proficiency data in one year. More specifically, this pilot school moved from Academic Emergency to School Improvement. Significant increases in proficiency in relationship to key subgroups of the student population were found at both the 3rd grade and 4th grade reading level. For example, African-American 3rd grade students reading proficiency scores rose from 32.0% in 2004-2005 to 42.9% in 2005-2006. Similarly, for the same cohort in the 4th grade Reading Proficiency scores increased from 40.9% to 52.2%. Overall the teachers rated the impact of OCCMSI, very positive. The teachers and staff perceived the project as having helped them in their job and agreed that the model helped them understand expanded school improvement. They also viewed the project as having helped to build internal capacity in the school and as increasing community participation in the school.⁶

⁶ Dawn Anderson-Butcher, Hal A. Lawson, Aidyn Iachini, et.al. *The Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement: Lessons Learned from School and District Pilots*. Ohio State University, 2008.

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

Academic Rigor

The Eximius Comprehensive System of Learning Supports will increase student achievement and decrease student achievement gaps in reading/language arts and mathematics because it will create the conditions for the school to provide a rigorous academic program. We will provide academic rigor in the following manner.

Active Pedagogy & Active Learning: Our Schenectady students need to be inspired to learn. They need to have a purpose that drives their learning. They need to feel as though school has meaning and purpose. To this end, Eximius will use *active pedagogy* to stimulate engaged learning. During the past year our Planning Team has diligently researched best practices, visited both traditional public and Charter schools to identify best practices that would work for our children in Schenectady City School District. We studied the Expeditionary Learning Model and spoken with operators of these schools. We also studied elementary schools providing a strong Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) focus. What we learned is that *Active Pedagogy and Active Learning* produces exceptional academic instruction. Exceptional academic instruction increases student achievement.

We will build active learning into our school by organizing our curriculum around subject areas and “Big Ideas” derived from the content standards. Our field projects and hands-on activities will be linked to compelling topics relevant to the history of Schenectady, the Capital District and the world around them. We will expect our students to construct deep understanding and skills to create products for real audiences. We will also design our active learning projects to support critical literacy, promote character development, create a sense of adventure, spark curiosity, and foster an ethic of service. Our primary aim will be to allow for and encourage authentic integration of disciplines.

Focused Teaching on Reading across the Disciplines: Eximius believes in the balanced literacy approach. Reading is a complex process that includes phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and an array of comprehension strategies. This approach helps to deal with the complexities of learning to read by allowing students to receive the teaching needed in order to reach grade level status, while ensuring that students work at a level that is not frustrating for them. Our balanced literacy classrooms will focus on four different types of reading experiences: (1) reading aloud to children; (2) shared reading - whole class; (3) guided reading - small group; (4) independent reading. We will teach these and other comprehension strategies from kindergarten through fifth grade to convey the idea that reading is all about making meaning.

The excitement of active learning through projects and fieldwork we believe will motivate our student to read; in turn, the explicit teaching of reading comprehension deepens students’ understanding of content. We will teach reading across all content areas because each subject area requires students to learn from written materials and requires different kinds of text (e.g. science articles, primary sources in history, word problems in math). Trade books, primary sources, and discipline-related articles will be used along with or instead of textbooks. The following reading comprehension strategies may be used in all subjects and grades: locating

main ideas and support details; making inferences; recognizing patterns; using context clues; asking questions; summarizing or outlining re-reading; and “Think-aloud” with a partner.

Focused Teaching on Writing across the Disciplines: Students in Eximius will write for various purposes and audiences and across all areas of the curriculum. Students will do their best writing when they care about the topic, purpose, and audience. Compelling topics, rooted in “Big Ideas”, in-depth investigations, and written projects and products motivate students and require them to represent their understanding of the content and issues. “Big Ideas” topics such as “Light Your Way” (electricity), “Shapes All Around” (Geometry) “Structures” (math and social studies), “Pack your Trunk” (history, measurement, geometry, etc.) and Solar Cooking (energy). The teachers will develop and teach a common language for the writing process and the components of writing and use consistent practices for teaching and assessing writing. While the nature and amount of writing will vary with each “Big Idea” explored reading and writing is integral to completing the task regardless of discipline or grade level.

Focused Inquiry-Based Math: Learning math involves understanding concepts, grasping procedures, and applying them to real-life contexts. In Eximius, mathematics is taught in an inquiry-based manner as emphasized by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. We will focus on the “Big Mathematical Ideas”, high quality student work, and structures for teaching math within and outside of learning projects. Our teachers will invite students to find patterns and relationships, to become flexible problem-solvers, to articulate their reasoning, and to become meta-cognitive about their strategies. Teachers will cultivate mathematical habits of mind: curiosity, risk-taking, perseverance, craftsmanship, and tolerance for ambiguity. No matter what math curriculum is used, math class will be conducted as a workshop. It begins with a complex problem, and continues with independent or group work, a mini-lesson based on what students are struggling with or have discovered, sharing/comparing problem-solving strategies, and a synthesis of the day’s learning. This sequence ensures that students are doing the thinking. Research supports this approach will increase student’s achievement in mathematics. (<http://www.nctm.org/standards/content.aspx?id=270>)

Differentiated Instruction: Great teaching doesn’t happen overnight. It takes patience and consistent dedication. Our teachers will focus on becoming comfortable differentiating one new lesson at a time. We expect our teachers to use various strategies and skills to maximize our students learning. We will train our teachers to use the PASS Variable to promote effective differentiate instruction. They will: (1) Prioritize instruction; (2) Adapt instruction, materials, or the environment; (3) Systematically teach with the “SCREAM” variables; (4) Systematically evaluate the outcomes of their instruction. Systematically teaching with the “SCREAM” variables refers to the use of effective teaching techniques for content coverage and teacher presentation: structure, clarity, redundancy, enthusiasm, appropriate rate, and maximized engagement through questioning and feedback.⁷ Differentiated instruction will produce great teaching which in turns will produce great academic achievement.

Two Instructor Model: We will have two instructors in each classroom, a fully certified lead teacher and a certified teaching assistant. We will hire dual certified teachers in reading, special

⁷Margo A. Mastropieri and Thomas E. Scruggs, The Inclusive Classroom: Strategies for Effective Differentiated Instruction. Merrill. Columbus:OH

education, science, math, engineering, and technology where possible. Our two instructors per classroom model will allow increased individual attention and daily small group instruction. Our prospective Charter Director is currently working closely with Albany Community Charter School to observe and study their two-instructor model. Our teaching model will facilitate differentiate instructional strategies such as station teaching, parallel teaching, and alternative teaching. Also, we are currently developing an MOU with Schenectady County Community College to provide two (2) internship opportunities for their Teacher Education Transfer students. Research tells us that two *instructors in a classroom* and *differentiated instruction* are powerful factors to increased academic improvement. (e.g., God & Brophy, 2007; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004; Wittrock, 1986). We are confident that our two instructor model will increase student achievement and decrease student achievement gaps in reading/language arts and mathematics.

More Time to Learn: Eximius will serve student Monday through Thursday from 7:30 am to at least 5:00 pm, until 1:30pm on Fridays. Studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between “time and achievement”. It will take time, effort and practice to meet the challenge of high academic standards. Our schedule is based on an extended school day (7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) and an extended school year (215 days). Eximius Extended Day Program will provide small-group and one-on-one tutoring for student who need extra help and attention in order to reach mastery. This tutoring consists of 60 minutes of instruction, or focused lab work aligned with the school day curriculum, from 3:00pm to 4:00pm four (4) days per week. A student who attends Eximius from Kindergarten to fifth grade will receive over approximately thirty (30) additional days of learning time than students in Schenectady.

STEM Summer Academy: A summer session is mandatory for all students. Research shows that a sixty (60) day summer session widens the academic achievement gap.⁸ Our mandatory summer program will have project-based Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) focused curriculum. The STEM Summer Academy Coordinator in collaboration with Schenectady County Community College will develop a STEM P-20 curriculum; compile a library of STEM projects, lesson plans, and student assessment methods organized by discipline, theme, and grade level. An inventory of STEM projects will be posted on respective websites to share with Schenectady City School District and the general public. The STEM Summer Academy Coordinator will develop written documentation of all curriculum and lesson plans, developed in collaboration with Eximius teaching staff and experts in the respective fields. We are currently developing an MOU with SCCC to formalize this agreement. Program and operational costs will be defrayed through grant funding. The STEM portion of the summer session will be scheduled daily, from 8:00am to 12:00 pm. The afternoon session 1:00pm to 5:00pm, will be coordinated in collaboration with the YMCA and other community based organizations as a traditional summer camp.

Our STEM Summer Academy will provide students in need of extra help significantly more instructional time each year than they would receive in a district school, additionally, those on grade level will receive enrichment. Increasing learning time is essential for students who enter school with skills and knowledge deficiencies, those with disabilities, and those with

⁸ Karl L. Alexander, Doris R. Entwisle, and Linda S. Olson. Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap. *American Sociological Review*, 2007, Vol. 72 (April:167-180)

Limited English Proficiency to achieve at the highest levels. Our student will receive this extra time during the summer months, through the STEM Summer Academy, thereby decreasing the academic achievement gap.

Single-Gender Classrooms: The Eximius Academy will be a single gender classroom model, whereby the boys and girls will co-exist in one facility and share administration, staff, and school design. Single gender education improves the general academic performance of urban males and the math and science achievement of females. (Wesley-Sharpe, 2000) In addition, it creates a learning environment that is free from distractions that boys and girls fashion for one another, which allows for greater academic achievement. This unique and innovative alternative is unavailable to students in public school in Schenectady. The boys and girls at Eximius will be educated by the same teachers to the same high standards, and benefit from the same course offerings and same access to resources. This approach offers the benefits of single-gender instruction, while ensuring equal opportunity for boys and girls alike. In addition to a cultural preference from some of our parents, we believe that this is important because education is not a "one size fits all" business. This also carries out the legislative intent of the New York State charter-school law, which specifically authorizes single-gender charter schools (NYS Education Law §2854 [2] [a]).

Strong School Culture

A strong school culture is the second key element to our school's success. We will build a strong culture of care by: (1) adhering to principles embodied in the meaning of our name, "Eximius" a Latin definition for "excellence, exceptional and extraordinary"; and (2) teaching by example our core values of academic excellence, integrity, commitment and positive relationships. We will create a strong, supportive school culture marked by rules, rituals and routines to establish the tone for a sound academic environment. Our planning team's visit to Albany Community Charter School and our study of the Amistad Academy influenced the ideas of the importance of the whole community coming together in celebration of each other. We will grow slowly to have the space and time to cultivate our strong culture.

Looping: To facilitate a learning environment that cultivates the development of meaningful relationships between our students and their teachers, we will institute looping starting in the first grade. Eximius believes that the benefits of looping include reduced apprehension at starting a new school year and increased continuity, and more in-depth relationships with teachers and with peers (McClellan, 1995). For teachers the benefits of looping consist of becoming familiar with other developmental stages of children, and working with students and parents for longer periods of time (Mazzuchi & Brooks1993). The long term relationships established through looping have been shown to support student learning. This level of support and structure is critical to our students from Schenectady, many of whom experience homelessness and an unstable home life. By looping our students, we will begin to cultivate solid and positive relationships at this critical developmental stage.

Effective School Discipline: We will create positive behaviors and culture in our school by establishing a common vision of school expectations for our students at arrival, morning routines and meals; during bathroom and water breaks; in uniforms, class, and hallways; on the bus; at meals; and treatment of their school. Discipline is about developing and creating appropriate behaviors, not just managing the ones the students bring to the classroom with them. If parents have done a good job with discipline, their efforts will carry over into the classroom. However, when this has not occurred, or given our culturally diverse community

the lessons taught in the homes may not be appropriate for the classroom. Eximius will design support structures for our teachers and school staff to ensure effective school discipline and a strong culture which is a key element to increasing academic achievement. Our prospective Charter School Director is currently working closely with Albany Community Charter School to observe and study the Ronald Morrish School Discipline model.⁹

Family Renewal: The Schenectady parents are our partners in educating their children and need extra support to become effective partners. Through CSLS we will establish parent/family engagement as an improvement priority and develop meaningful strategies to emphasize, foster and develop family renewal to focus on their personal growth. Parents as effective partners will help us to educate their children, which in turn, increases student achievement.

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

Eximius will be opening an elementary school and believe that this question is not fully applicable. However, the Eximius school design will establish a strong foundation for our student's successful transition into high school and beyond.

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

Eximius will be opening an elementary school and believe this question is not fully applicable. However, the Eximius school design will establish a strong foundation for our student's successful transition into middle school and beyond.

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

We believe in the data-driven instruction philosophy that schools should constantly focus on one simple question: are our students learning? Assessment is the first core principle of data-driven instruction, and when properly applied are among the most powerful drivers of academic success. We will build data-driven instructional practices into our culture. We do this by: (1) creating our annual Assessment Calendar; (2) carving out time for assessment, analysis and action; (3) strict adherence to the same standards and assessments for all students (by grade level & content area); and (4) teacher collaboration on data analysis, professional development, strategies for re-teaching and improving student learning. Eximius will use a variety of high-quality assessments to measure understanding and critical application of concepts by executing the assessment tools, timelines, and actions as laid out in Table 6.¹⁰

Table 6. Eximius Academy Annual Assessment Calendar		
Timeframe	Unit or Assessment	Diagnostic/Assessment Tool
July 30 th – Aug. 17 th (3wks)	Initial Screening (Summer Orientation)	AIMSweb-Academic, Language Assessment Battery-Revised (LAB-R)
Aug. 20 th –Aug. 31 st (2 wks)	Analysis of Diagnostic Data (1 st Data Driven Instruction PD)	Action Plan Templates to identify(re-teach standards; create tutoring plans for basic foundational skills that are “pre-knowledge”; create first Unit plans and in class assessments tools
Sept. 4 – Oct. 12 th (6 weeks)	Unit 1	

⁹ Ronald G. Morrish. *With All Due Respect: Keys for Building Effective School Discipline*. Colorado Spring, CO: Purposeful Design Publications 2003.

¹⁰ Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, *Driven By Data: A Practical Guide to Improve Instruction* (California: Jossey-Bass, 2010),

Oct 15 th	Interim Assessment (IA) -Unit 1	Terra Nova, AIMSweb - Behavior
Oct 19 th	Analysis of Data	Action Plan Templates; (6 wks) Unit 2 Instructional Plans adapted to results
Oct 22 nd – Oct 26 th (1 week)	Re-Teach Objectives from IA Unit 1	Re-Teach based on test results analysis
Oct 29 th – Dec 7 th (6 weeks)	Unit 2	
Dec 10 th (7wks after 1 st assessment)	Interim Assessment 2	AIMSweb, ERDS reading diagnostic
Dec 14 th	Analysis of Data	Action Plan Templates; Unit 3 Instructional Plans adapted to results
Dec 17 th – Dec 21 st (1 week)	Re-Teach Objectives from IA- Unit 1 &2	Re-Teach based on test results
Jan 2 nd – Feb 8 th (6 weeks)	Unit 3	
Feb 11 th	Interim Assessment 3	AIMSweb
Feb 16 th	Analysis of Data	Action Plan Templates; Unit 4 Instructional Plans adapted
Feb 18 th – March 23 rd (5 week)	Unit 4, Re-Teach of Units 1-3, and test preparation	Re-Teach based on test results
March 25 th	Interim Assessment 4	Terra Nova, AIMSweb
March 30 th	Analysis of Data	Action Plan Templates; Unit 5 Instructional Plans modified
April 1 st – May 18 th (7 weeks)	Unit 5, Re-Teach of Units 1-4, and test preparation	Re-Teach based on test results
April 13 th – June 21 st	STATE TESTING	
May 20 th	Interim Assessment 5	AIMSweb, ERDA
May 25 th	Analysis of Data	Action Plan Templates; Unit 6 Instructional Plans modified
May 27 th – June 21 st (4 weeks)	Unit 6, Final Performance, Test Prep	Re-Teach based on test results
June 24 th – June 29 th (1 week)	Final Performance Tasks	Oral Presentations and Large Math Project; Action Plan Templates for STEM Summer Academy;

Eximius students will be required to meet all of the New York State Learning and Performance Standards. New York State Assessments in English Language Arts and Mathematics will be administered in grades 3-5. The New York State Science Test will be administered in grade 4. The timing and administration of these exams shall be the same as that dictated by the New York State Education Department of other public elementary schools. This information, while helping to determine the overall efficacy of Eximius's curriculum and instructional design, will also provide information that we can provide to the board of trustees as a dashboard indicator of program alignment with the New York State learning standards

We will administer the Terra Nova CAT 3 which is used to understand baseline performance, starting points from which to measure growth annually in the spring. This nationally norms test affords us the opportunity to see how our students perform against their peers nationally. We will use these results in concert with the formative assessment to analyze the strengths and

weaknesses of our student's achievement in each content area, plan for further instruction, curriculum development, and to report the progress to the parents. This will help us to measure the overall efficacy of our educational program.

We will hire a Director of Curriculum and Instruction (DCI) tasked with the singular focus of instructional leadership, to support Eximius instructional staff expand and strengthen their instructional capacity. The DCI will use frequent classroom observations and examination of data to determine if there are any school wide, grade-wide, class-wide, subgroup-wide or department-wide challenges that need to be addressed. The DCI will coach the school's instructional staff and provide training and guidance in the use of data to drive instruction in their work with all learners, including SWD and ELL populations.

In addition to parent teacher conferences and regular teacher-parent meetings the Parent Advisory Council and Family Resource Center Coordinator will help design regular workshops that focus on the importance of data and assessments.

The Board of Trustees will have an Education and Accountability Committee. This committee will monitor the academic outcomes as measured by state, nationally normed, and internally created benchmark assessments. The Charter School Director will prepare monthly reports for the Board of Trustees regarding student academic performance. The school will track this data in a dashboard format. The Committee will closely monitor student performance and work closely with school leadership to ensure that adequate resources are in place and effective decision-making occurs in support of strong and measurable student achievement.

e. Increase implementation of local instructional improvement systems to assess and inform instructional practice, decision-making, and effectiveness; Eximius will execute with fidelity a school wide Response to Intervention system and embed it in our weekly PLC's. Critical to increase implementation of our improvement systems is effective leadership. *Evaluation of Leadership Team:* One of the main functions of the Board will be to annually evaluate the Charter School Director (CD). The CD will be evaluated on all items on the school's accountability plan, her annual goals set during the performance appraisal process, and specific management criteria outlined in a performance appraisal form. To oversee this process, the Board will appoint a CD Performance Appraisal Task Force. The CD will receive feedback of their performance from school staff and the Board of Trustees. The Eximius staff will use the Vanderbilt Assessment for Leadership in Education™ (VAL-ED) which is a research-based evaluation tool that measures the effectiveness of school leaders by providing a detailed assessment of a school leader's/principal's performance. Aligned to the ISLLC standards, the VAL-ED focuses on learning-centered leadership behaviors that influence teachers, staff, and most importantly, student achievement. The school leadership team will be evaluated on an annual basis. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction, school business manager and school counselor will be evaluated by the CD. *Evaluation of Instructional Staff:* The instructional staff will be formally evaluated annually; however, informal evaluations will take place on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Evaluation for faculty will include specific criteria and a narrative summary, which will be in letter form, co-written by the DCI and CD based upon year-to-date observation. While the DCI will perform classroom observations on a regular basis, the CD will conduct periodic observations throughout the year. Instructors will also be asked to submit a self-evaluation.

The Board, through the work of its Education and Accountability Committee, will review results of comprehensive assessments, New York State Tests, and standardized tests annually. This review will allow the Board to monitor the progress towards meeting agreed-upon student achievement goals. The Board will work closely with the CD and DCI to facilitate formal reviews and stay up to date on interim and other assessments as results become available. Progress towards achievement goals will be reviewed by at Board meetings through a “dashboard” presented by the CD, and other staff as requested, and will include results from state standardized tests, interim student achievement assessments, student performance, attendance, teacher performance data, professional development, financials and other key operating indicators. The Board will ensure that the CD and DCI are using data to make necessary adjustments to the school’s program and curriculum.

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

Eximius Planning Team has identified the lowest performing elementary schools in SCSD. We will work to formalize the processes for teachers to interact through: regular site visits; video-conferencing; uploading videos and documentation of best practices on our website; consistent communication between leadership teams at different schools; invitations to other schools to assist and help assess STEM and Project Based Presentations delivered by Eximius students.

g. Demonstrate the ability to overcome start-up challenges to open successful school through management and leadership techniques. Eximius Charter School will have the ability to overcome start-up challenges to open a successful school because of the following strategies that will assure the New York State Education Department that they have the (1) Facility, (2) Finances, (3) Start-up Team Leadership, (4) School Operations, (5) Legal Services, (6) Grant Funding, (7) Governing Board.

(1) **Facility:** Eximius has purchased an existing charter school building in Rotterdam, New York that housed a prior charter elementary school. The building is properly zoned, handicap accessible, and all pertinent safety, security, and environmental sign-offs are in place. The building will be purchased by the Eximius Education Foundation and lease to the school at cost. The building will undergo a complete upgrade for energy efficiency through NYSERDA and a team of professional advisors that will ensure savings for years to come. (2) **Finances:** The building to house Eximius has been purchased for \$225,000 with an estimated value of \$2.7 million dollars. We have developed this opportunity through a cooperative effort with the financial institutional owners of the facility. This alone will greatly alleviate cash flow problems that are generated initially by startup charter schools, with savings of over \$250,000 in normal capital principal and interest charges. Eximius Education Foundation will secure a \$500,000 line of credit against the equity in the building and provide to Eximius Academy as working capital. (3) **Start-Up Team Leadership:** We have identified a strong and committed leader to head our school. Our proposed Charter School Director has over 22 years of excellent experience in organizational and program design, implementation and evaluation. She is an experienced business owner, graduate of the Maxwell School of Public Administration from Syracuse University with a concentration in state and local government finance and community development. She completed the NYS Public Management Intern Program through Cornell University and will complete her Advance Graduate Certificate in School Building Leadership at SUNYA in May 2011. Our proposed School Business Manager has over ten years experience in finance, and five year of excellent charter school experience in business and operations

management. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Accounting/Business Administration from the College of Saint Rose. (4) **School Operations:** We have engaged the New York Charter School Incubator (NYCSI) to assist our staff in developing and implementing the charter school operations and educational program. They will collaborate with us during the pre-operational phase and two years after the opening of the school as we develop and implement effective practices in instruction, finance and operations, compliance and governance. (5) **Legal Services:** We have retained the services of Couch White, LLP to represent us in all legal matters.

(6) **Grant Funding:** We have been provided the service of a grant writer through one of our strategic partners and they are currently working with the planning team. We have already begun to identify streams of funding resources through NYS agencies, Federal programs, as well as through local and national foundations, in concert with our strategic partners. Funding for the energy efficiency upgrades in the building have already begun through NYSEDA with a \$1.0 Energy Smart Loan to be secured through these channels. (7) **Governing Board:** We have assembled a coalition committed to the mission of Eximius and to the education of the children in Schenectady. We are current and former educators, parents, leaders in the community, and non-profit community skilled in grant writing, having successfully secured millions through grant proposals, business executives, executive managers in New York State service, as well as, a local politician, realtor, public and education administrator.

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

Eximius is committed to partnering with SCSD and have initiated dialogue calling Cathy Lewis the current School Board President to request an opportunity to meeting with the School Board and Superintendent in October, 2010. On January 9, 2011 our planning team mailed a letter to formally request a meeting with the School Board and Superintendent to discuss our intention of opening a Charter School to serve the students of Schenectady. Our long-term goal is to develop a District/Charter Collaboration Compact similar to that between Rochester City Schools and their Charter Schools. We are hopefully they will agree to our meeting request within the near future.

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

There are no other viable educational alternatives for parents in the Schenectady City School District. There was only one charter school operating in the Rotterdam-Mohonasen Central School District. The International Charter School of Schenectady opened in 2002 and was closed at the end of the 2007-08. The school at full operation served 693 students in grades K-8. The majority of students attending the Charter school were from Schenectady City School District.

The nonpublic schools require tuition and are cost prohibitive for most of the parents we will serve. First, Wildwood School is a private, not-for-profit day program for students between the ages of 3 to 21 with neurological impairments, complex learning disabilities, autism and other neurologically-based developmental disorders. Students are accepted through referrals from their school district's Committee on Special Education. We will work with any parent to ensure that the least restrictive educational setting is provided for their child. Second, of the five (5) parochial schools: Schenectady Christian School; St. John the Evangelist School; St. Helens School; Notre-Dame Bishop Gibbons School; Annur Islamic School and the one (1) nonsectarian private school, The Brown School, within the SCSD, Eximius expects these schools to be cost prohibitive as they all require tuition. The vast majority of the parents we will serve will find this tuition cost prohibitive. Therefore, these schools are not viable options.