

ROCKLAND ACADEMY OF EXCELLENCE CHARTER SCHOOL  
LETTER OF INTENT

I. Applicant Information

Lead Applicant: Dionne Olamiju, School Administrator



Address: [REDACTED]

Telephone number: [REDACTED]

Email address: [REDACTED]

b. Media Contact: Peter Obe

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c. **The members of our founding team are:**

- **Patricia Dancy** is a retired guidance counselor from New York City Public Schools. She is a parent and grandparent of students in the East Ramapo community. She has over 30 years of experience providing counseling to at risk students in the public schools and in community organizations.
- **Pierre Gay** is currently the Supervisor of Instructional Technology in the East Ramapo School District. He brings solid experience in many areas including curriculum development, data governance and educational technology.
- **Dionne Olamiju** is an Assistant Principal in the East Ramapo Central School District. She holds significant educational leadership capacity and the insight into the academic, emotional and social needs of the students in the district.
- **Lydia Lestrade** is an educator in the District and is very well versed in teaching the ELL population.
- **Dawn Holness** is a guidance counselor in a charter school in New York City. She provides support in creating a nurturing school culture that is geared to meeting the academic, social and emotional needs of all of our students.
- **Segun Olamiju** is an ESL teacher in East Ramapo who understands the needs of the ELL population in the district.
- **Josie Felix** is a bilingual parent in the district who plays a crucial role in our parent outreach.

d. **Our Prospective Board members are:**

ROCKLAND ACADEMY OF EXCELLENCE CHARTER SCHOOL  
LETTER OF INTENT

- **Kalu Agwu, MD** is a parent of two children in the East Ramapo Central School District. He is currently a psychiatrist at Manhattan Psychiatric Center and an Assistant Clinical professor of Psychiatry at Columbia University College of Physician & Surgeons. As a prospective board member, he will advocate for enriching and engaging Math and Science curricula for our students.
- **Surendra Bansal, Ph.D.** is a research director for a pharmaceutical company and a parent of two graduates of East Ramapo Central School District. As a prospective board member he will advocate for academic rigor in our Science and Math curriculum.
- **Rod Merkley** is a real estate builder who lives in the East Ramapo community. As a prospective board member, he is spearheading the process of identifying a facility for our school.
- **Doris Ulman** is a village attorney for numerous villages in the county. She brings her keen and insightful legal capacity as a prospective board member.
- **Peter Obe** is a mechanical engineer, software developer and an entrepreneur in the East Ramapo Community. As a prospective Board member he brings strong advocacy for the infusion of technology into the curriculum.
- **Paul Weiner** is a prospective board member who is employed as an IT charter school consultant who offers technological data reporting support. He will provide guidance over our data reporting system.
- **Filomena Nortey** is a parent and an administrator in the New York City public school. As a prospective board member, she shares the awareness of the needs of students in urban school settings.
- **Allan Dubow** is a CPA who has worked for years with non- profit agencies. As a prospective board member, Allan will provide fiscal acumen over the school's budget.

e. Replication or Network Information: N/A

f. Application History:

Winter 2010 to Charter School Institute – Application was subsequently withdrawn.

Spring 2010 to Charter School Institute – Application was subsequently withdrawn.

Spring 2011 to New York State Education Department – Application was subsequently withdrawn.

Winter 2012 to New York State Education Department – Application was subsequently withdrawn.

**II. Proposed Charter School Information**

- a. Proposed school name: The proposed name of our school is Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School.
- b. Proposed school location: The proposed location of the school is in the East Ramapo Central School District.
- c. Planned grades and enrollment in each of the years of the proposed charter term.

<b>Grades</b>	<b>Ages</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>	<b>2016-2017</b>	<b>2017-2018</b>
6 <sup>th</sup>	11-12	78	78	78	78	78
7 <sup>th</sup>	12-13	n/a	78	78	78	78
8 <sup>th</sup>	13-14	n/a	n/a	78	78	78
<b>Totals</b>		78	156	234	234	234

- d. Proposed Management and/or Partner Organization(s): N/A
- e. Proposed school mission: The mission of the Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School (“Rockland Academy”) is to develop and nurture all students by providing them with the academic, emotional, and social skills essential for college and career readiness.
- f. School overview:

**Inclusive Academic Program:**

Consistent with our mission of adhering to a standard of academic excellence for all of our students, we will support our special education students and ELLs through a full inclusion, collaborative team-teaching (CTT) model. In this model, each content area teacher will work in conjunction with either a certified special education teacher or a certified ESL teacher to implement instruction that is differentiated to meet the needs of each student. The general and special educators will share responsibility for planning, delivery and evaluation of instruction for a heterogeneous group of students..

**Structured and Supportive School Culture**

As a school that will hold our students, staff and parents to the highest level of accountability; we will operate under a “No Excuses” philosophy, which has been proven successful in schools and networks like the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), Uncommon Schools, and Achievement First. High academic and behavioral standards will be set for every student, reflective of our belief that each student, no matter what his or her background, is capable of high academic achievement and success in life when provided with the right set of supports and opportunities.

ROCKLAND ACADEMY OF EXCELLENCE CHARTER SCHOOL  
LETTER OF INTENT

Coupled with these high expectations, Rockland Academy will provide a structured and supportive environment that will foster in our students the intrinsic **D.R.I.V.E** to succeed; **D**etermination, **R**esponsibility, **I**ntegrity, **V**ision and **E**xcellence in all endeavors.

**Reflective and Data-Driven Pedagogy**

Rockland Academy is committed to hiring highly qualified, passionate and committed teachers who have experienced success in teaching in an urban school environment and who believe firmly in the power of effective planning and data analysis to impact student achievement. In our school, we believe curriculum and assessment are inseparable. Using a backwards design process, our teachers will identify learning objectives for our students and essential questions to be explored, all aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). At the same time, teachers will also identify the assessment evidence needed to document and validate that the targeted learning has been achieved.

**More Time**

A key element of Rockland Academy's mission is to develop college and career readiness in all of our students, and an intensive focus on instruction in core subject areas is required in order to have the kind of significant impact we envision. We expect that many students who enter Rockland Academy will require significant remediation in the core disciplines of literacy and mathematics. We therefore anticipate that our students will need more time to learn skills and content assumed to have been learned in previous grades, as well as an opportunity to acquire grade level appropriate skills and content to prevent additional academic deficits. Our academic program, delivered during a school day running from 7:30am to 5:00pm, will provide students with dramatically more time on instruction. Weekly, each student will receive over nine hours of instruction in English Language Arts, over six and a half hours of instruction in math, over four and a half hours of instruction in social studies, and over four and a half hours of instruction in science.

**Ongoing Teacher Support and Development**

Rockland Academy is committed to hiring skilled, passionate teachers and providing them with the support necessary to hone their craft. Through weekly in-house professional development workshops, visits to other successful schools, external professional development opportunities, regular observation and feedback, collaborative planning, and peer support, the school will provide teachers with the tools and assistance necessary to provide a college-preparatory academic experience to all students. Those teachers who are new to the profession will receive supplemental support through a mentoring program, enabling Rockland Academy to capitalize on the talents of master teachers on its staff.

**g. Briefly describe the school's target population and the community that the school intends to serve.**

ROCKLAND ACADEMY OF EXCELLENCE CHARTER SCHOOL  
LETTER OF INTENT

Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School will serve students in Grades 6-8 in the East Ramapo Central School Community. East Ramapo is a vibrant community that is economically, racially and culturally diverse; 59% of East Ramapo school-age children are Black/African American, 22% are Latino/Hispanic, 11% are White and 8% are Asian. The majority of students live at or below the poverty line, with 65% of the students in the district receiving free or reduced lunch. English Language Learners make up 14% of the student population and students with special education needs make up 25% of the student population. We anticipate that the Rockland Academy of Excellence Charter School's population will be reflective of the East Ramapo community.

**III. Enrollment and retention of students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the free and reduced price lunch program.**

Since 25% of East Ramapo's students are classified special education students and 14% are designated English Language Learners (ELL), Rockland Academy's planning team has ensured that all recruitment materials contain specific language that promotes our services to the Special Education and ELL populations. We have notified the related service providers who serve the students of East Ramapo of our available special education and ELL services. We have also advertised our ESL services in community centers, churches, and stores frequented by non-English speaking immigrants as well as neighborhoods that are inhabited by the same immigrants. Rockland Academy has also reached out to community centers, mental health clinics, foster care agencies, food pantries and other social services agencies in Rockland County, to give them information about our school and its services for economically disadvantaged, special education and ELLs. To evaluate our effectiveness, Parent Surveys will be completed at the end of each trimester. To reiterate the importance of our parents' input in the school's decision making process, we will retain at least one voting slot on our Board for our parents.

**IV. Public Outreach and Community Support**

Over the last two years, our planning team visited homes, churches, community centers, businesses and social service agencies to share plans for the school with community stakeholders and solicit signatures in support of opening the school. We collected more than 200 signatures expressing support from parents of eligible 2013-2014 sixth graders. Members of the founding team held several information sessions with members of the East Ramapo community where we shared the design elements of our school. The planning team held several community forums at the Village Planning Board meetings, houses of worship and on local television cable shows. We have met with and received support from community leaders such as the Village Mayor, the Village Planning Board, the County Executive, and the heads of local colleges and local businesses.