

# Letter of Intent to Establish Utica Academy of Science Charter School

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Submitted to the Charter School Office at the New York State Education Department

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## Lead Applicant(s) Information:

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**Dr. Fehmi Damkaci:** [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Board President of Syracuse Academy of Science Charter School.

## Media Contact:

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## Application Founding Group:

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**Dr. Fehmi Damkaci:** Professor of Chemistry and Director of Chemistry Graduate Program at SUNY Oswego. Dr. Damkaci holds a Ph.D. in chemistry and conducts research on medicinal and nanotechnology research. He has been actively involved in education at both the secondary school and university levels. He holds a teaching certificate and has three years of high school chemistry teaching experience. He has been nominated for SUNY Chancellor's Excellence of Teaching Award in 2011-12 academic year. He was one of the founding members of a successful secondary level charter school in Boston, MA. He has been a board member of the Syracuse Academy of Science Charter School (SASCS) since 2006 (and the board president for the past two years). He will be a founding board member and will oversee the school's educational leadership, and the school's science, technology, and environment related curricular and extra-curricular activities.

**Dr. Yildirim Yildirim:** Professor and Chair of Department of Finance at the Whitman School of Management, Syracuse University. Dr. Yildirim holds a Ph.D. in Finance and Statistics and engages in research on real-estate and risk management. He was a founding board member of the SASCS in 2003 and has been a board member since then. He will be a founding board member and will oversee the school's financial operations, operational quality, and real-estate issues.

**Dr. Birol Ozturk:** Post-doctoral researcher at Northeastern University. He holds a Ph.D. in physics and conducts nanotechnology research. He has been a board member at the SASCS since 2009. He will be a founding board member and will oversee the STEM-related educational activities.

**Rev. Sherman Dunmore:** Community leader in Utica and a chaplain at the Marcy Correctional Facility. He has been an active leader in inner-city youth programs and a parent board member at the SASCS since 2006. He will be a founding board member and will oversee the school's civic engagement, community outreach activities, and parental involvement.

**Patricia Coban:** Mrs. Coban is a certified social studies teacher. She served for two years as the Frank Foundation's Child Assistance International's Reach coordinator and educator for Southern Cayuga. She was a founding board member of SASCS in 2003 and has been a board member since then. She will be a founding board member and will oversee the school's educational activities.

## The names of proposed members the school's initial board of trustees:

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The founding group as presented above will be the school's initial board of trustees.

## Replication Information:

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The proposed Utica Academy of Science Charter School (UASCS) will be a replication of Syracuse Academy of Science Charter School (SASCS), whose board members will be the founding board members of UASCS. The SASCS has been a NYSED-authorized charter school since 2003. SASCS is accredited by Middle States Association, a nationally acclaimed K-16 accreditation organization. It has successfully surpassed its local district in all state exams and has a current cohort graduation rate of 92.5%.

No other application will be submitted by the founding group members during this round.

**Application History of the Founding Members:**

**Dr. Fehmi Damkaci:** a founding board member of the Pioneer Charter School of Science in Boston, MA, which was approved in 2006 and has been in operation since then.

**Mrs. Patricia Coban and Dr. Yildiray Yildirim:** founding board member of the SASCS, which was approved in 2003; the school is still in operation.

**Proposed School Name:**

Utica Academy of Science Charter School

**Proposed Location:**

Utica City School District, possible school location: 1214 Lincoln Avenue, Utica 13502

**Proposed Grades and Enrollment:**

	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	TOTAL
2013- 14	60	40	40	40				<b>180</b>
2014-15	60	60	40	40	40			<b>240</b>
2015-16	60	60	60	60	60	40		<b>340</b>
2016-17	60	60	60	60	60	60	40	<b>400</b>
2017-18	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	<b>420</b>

**Academic Program Partner:**

As an academic program partner, the Syracuse Academy of Science will serve as a model for the UASCS. We have the ability to readily replicate the SASCS’s parent/guardian inclusion and communication programs and policies, its expansive scheduling approach to core curriculum remediation and improved performance, its embedded tutoring program, and its extensive supplemental educational activities through academic clubs and competitions.

**Proposed School Mission:**

The school will provide support, challenges and opportunities for its students, and it will instill the necessary skills and knowledge in math, science, and technology to empower students, through high intellectual standards, preparing them for college, career, and citizenship. The school seeks to graduate students who can think critically and creatively, who are committed to a lifetime of learning and civic involvement, and who are conscious of local, global, and environmental issues.

**School Overview:**

**Replicating the Success:** The school will replicate the success of an existing college-preparatory public charter school, which has a similar mission and has proven to be very successful in its operation, educational methodology, and curriculum.

**Experienced and Diverse Founding Group:** The founding board members have extensive experience in overseeing a charter school and have diverse backgrounds and expertise, as stated above. In addition to board members, the school will have an advisory group who can help to build stronger community relationships.

**College Preparation:** The importance of college readiness is will be paramount at the UASCS. The charter school will create a college-bound culture and will provide an extensive and targeted curriculum aimed at college preparation. Enrolling all graduates to a college will be the most important feature and focus of the proposed charter school’s educational model. The school will organize college fairs, college visits, summer residential college programs, after-school and Saturday

SAT programs, and more, which have been proven to be successful at the SASCS, to make sure that every student has an opportunity to attend college.

**Focus on STEM:** The curriculum will focus on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) which provides the necessary foundation for college entrance and careers in technical fields. STEM education is a high national priority because of lack of skilled workers in these fields.

**Glocal Education:** The school will teach thinking globally and acting locally. The school will combine extensive local and international interactions through local, national, and international field trips, and through visits by local, national and international leaders and members of institutions. The school will actively recruit a diverse student population (e.g. ELL, free and reduced lunch, etc) in order to create a small-world community within the school to promote its glocal educational mission. In order to achieve high community involvement, the school will invite the community leaders to participate in education by sharing their experiences and challenges with our students.

**Character Education:** The school will teach universally recognized values (e.g., honesty, stewardship, kindness, generosity, courage, freedom, justice, equality, and respect), using multicolored posters, banners, and bulletin boards featuring a value or virtue of the month, lively morning public-address announcements, and occasional motivational events with parents. Parents will be encouraged to be part of these efforts to reinforce the values outside of the school setting.

**Adventure-Based Education:** As a complementary program for character education, adventure-based education will provide engagement, challenge, and risk management in a group setting to enhance interpersonal growth, leadership abilities, self-concept, academic achievement, and personality. It will be offered as extracurricular activities on a monthly basis and it will last three to four hours. Students will engage in problem-solving initiatives that promote teamwork and communication. In addition, each program will provide focus-group reflections that allow for a transfer of learning between the activities and the classroom.

**Environmental Education:** Environmental education is a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness of the environment and associated challenges; develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges; and fosters attitudes, motivation, and the commitment to make informed decisions and take responsible action (UNESCO, Tbilisi Declaration). The school's environmental education will promote awareness of the environmental challenges and quality, and will include environment related programs for practicing acquired knowledge.

**Small School Setting:** The school's small setting will allow us to give close attention to, and set individual goals for each student, taking into account different academic backgrounds and abilities. This will be achieved with the help of one-on-one tutoring, intensive counseling, home visits, weekly chair and department meetings, and periodic key performance assessment of the school. A smaller school setting also provides more opportunities for parental involvement.

**Extensive Tutoring and After-School Programs:** These programs will increase the performance of low-achieving students and will prepare high-achieving students for regional, national, and international science and engineering fairs. The school will have some athletics program, Saturday school for interested students, and clubs mainly organized by students but guided by teachers. The school will include a master schedule that includes daily remedial instruction or academic enrichment for all students during the regular school day, Title 1 tutoring for core academic subjects (including push-in and pull-out attention given to students at risk), a monthly advisory program incorporated into the regular school schedule, four days each week of tutoring available after school, Saturday Academy, Saturday IVY League, Saturday SAT Classes, MathCounts, Science Olympiad, and the SUNY Oswego Summer Science Immersion program.

**Parental Involvement and Home Visits:** Students' success and performance are affected not only by teachers, but also by their parents and environment. Therefore, parental involvement is a significant part of our school's strategic goals. The school's teachers will perform home visits to understand the students' problems and abilities and to create a better triad of parent-student-teacher relationships. As part of this program, the SASCS educators contact a minimum of ten school parents each week, and carry out a minimum of four home visits each academic year.

**Extended School Day:** The school hours will be from 9 am to 4:00 pm. Teachers will provide extra help, one-on-one tutoring, or after-school activities until 5:00 p.m.

**Performance Assessment and Evaluation:** Student progress and teacher effectiveness will be measured quarterly through data collected and tracked by multiple assessment instruments, including NWEA MAP Testing, Benchmark Exams utilizing ExamView Software, and full-length practice tests for state assessments such as the Regents exams. Student performance will be documented and reviewed by teachers and the Academic Dean to create action plans to improve individual student achievement. There will be an extensive teacher observation and enrichment program, in which each and every teacher is visited biweekly and given feedback, with resources tailored for their individual needs using the Observation 360 program. In addition, the school will use a comprehensive electronic dashboard system based on its performance metrics to more effectively oversee school operations.

**Programs for At-risk Students:** A key feature of the school day will be integrated remediation and/or enrichment. Students who are struggling academically will be assigned to remediation classrooms, where they will receive additional instruction or academic assistance. During this same class period, students who are excelling academically will be assigned to enrichment classes, where they will complete projects that will be entered into competitions, as a means of adding experiential and presentational elements to their learning while deepening comprehension and levels of applied understanding in core subjects.

### **Students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the free and reduced price lunch program:**

UASCS will target students who reside in the inner-city and lower socio-economic regions of the City of Utica and surrounding communities and will reach out in particular to students who are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program, and who compose approximately 74% of Utica's student population.

To attract and recruit English language learners, the school will reach out to the significant refugee population in Utica and disseminate informational materials regarding the school in several languages, such as Bosnian, Russian, Vietnamese, and Cambodian, nationalities which compose 13% of Utica's ELL student population. This information will be available at the school, delivered through targeted mailings, and distributed by hand in refugee housing locations and community centers. In addition, the school will employ staff from various communities to have direct connection. The replication model school, SASCS, maintains a highly diversified student body in terms of race and culture, as well as economic diversity, with 70-80% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. The UASCS can replicate this success in terms of recruitment and retention, as Utica has a similarly diverse population. Information about the UASCS and its admission process will be disseminated throughout the Utica area via flyers, bulletins, media spots, and direct mailings. At open houses, prospective students and their guardians will hear comprehensive presentations about the school. In the flyers and informational meetings, the special education and ELL services will be emphasized to attract students from those populations.

The UASCS' retention program is subsumed under the overarching goal of providing a safe, belonging environment where students feel accepted, nurtured and motivated. A key element of the school's retention program is to involve students in short- and long-term extra-curricular activities that will not only improve students' connectedness and relationships with other students and staff members, but also identify and develop students' interests and capabilities. The UASCS will conduct two annual satisfaction measurements as part of its retention program: a survey and an essay competition. Over the past nine years the model school, the SASCS, which has registered a rating of over 95% parent satisfaction with the school's programs, has conducted annual surveys of its entire student, family and staff population to determine areas of strength and weakness. In the event that a student withdraws from the school for reasons other than relocation or graduation, we will attempt to conduct an exit interview to determine factors which led to their withdrawal. The BoT and school leadership review survey and exit interview data, as well as anecdotal responses. A retention improvement plan will be created if a problem in retention exists, and the Board and school leadership will strategically design and assure implementation of an improvement plan. In addition, the BoT will have a metrics-based dashboard system, which includes ELL, special education, and free and reduced lunch student percentages to be regularly reported to the BoT to take action.

### **Public Outreach:**

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Rev. Sherman Dunmore, SASCS' board member, who works in the Marcy Correctional Facility (8 miles from Utica) was approached regarding the desire for a charter school in the Utica area, and has been discussing this need with leaders and the residents of the greater Utica community more than a year. In 2010, Bosnian families from the Utica region attempted to send their students to the SASCS from Utica. While this was not feasible, the SASCS administration understood the deep interest of these families in having more choices in education for their students. The show of interest in the SASCS on part of these parents was the initiatory event for understanding the Utica community's need. In addition, our proposal has gained support and feedback from hundreds of Utica residents, Mr. Jerome McKinsey, Utica Councilman, Sonia Martinez, the Chairwoman of Mohawk Valley Hispanic Association, and Sakib Duracak, the president of Bosnian community. A tour of the SASCS will be provided for these leaders in early 2012. A public information session regarding the UASCS was held on 1/12/2012 and sessions will be held two more times in the coming months at the Utica Public Library. Flyers and additional printed material have already been disseminated, especially in refugee communities. Additional outreach is being conducted through various technological avenues, including a website (<http://www.uascs.org>) and Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/uascs>). A UASCS executive summary was given to businesses throughout Utica, in an effort to notify residents and garner their support. We also reached out to Utica Superintendent's office to inform about the application by phone, email, and an official letter. Mr. Chris Salatino, president of Utica Board of Education has been reached out by email and an official letter. A press release was sent to eight local newspapers, three TV stations, and one radio station. As of 01/17/2012, two articles appeared ([Utica Observer Dispatch](#) and [wibx950.com](http://wibx950.com)) and one radio interview (talk of the town, 95.5FM) was asked to be scheduled. Moreover, the UASCS has conducted public door-to-door canvassing and [online survey](http://www.uascs.org/you-can-help.htm) (<http://www.uascs.org/you-can-help.htm>). More than 98 percent of about 200 respondents showed an interest in UASCS and would consider enrolling their children if it is chartered. Ongoing results are demonstrating strong community interest.



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Dr. Fehmi Damkaci, Lead Applicant

January 17, 2012

Date