

Former York High Coach Pitches New Charter School

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CHRISTINA KAUFFMAN The York Dispatch

Isiah Anderson is familiar with the challenge of inspiring students to succeed. But the former William Penn High School basketball coach is now trying to inspire success off the court.

Anderson plans to petition the York City School Board to start a charter school for secondary students.

The New Hope Academy Charter School would open next August to students in seventh and eighth grades, if the city school board approves the charter.

Over three years, it would expand to include students through grade 12, Anderson said.

The school would be operated out of the 70,000-square-foot building at 459 W. King St. that previously served as York Catholic High School and St. Rose of Lima School. Anderson is leasing the building but plans to purchase it from the church that owns it, he said.

The 36-year-old Anderson was a founding member of the Crispus Attucks YouthBuild Charter School and also worked at Mission Home alternative school for about one year.

He left in January 2005 to start his own business, Three Cord Youth Services, which includes the Challenge Academy alternative school for troubled students.

Anderson started the alternative school, which is also operated out of the West King Street building, last year. It would continue to operate there if the charter school is approved.

"I spent my whole career working with at-risk youth, and I just felt that I had enough experience to go out on my own, to try to make a difference in kids' lives in a broader sense," he said.

New Hope would be the only charter school in the city that is available to all of York City's secondary students.

The Crispus Attucks YouthBuild Charter School is available only to secondary students who have dropped out of school and want to return.

'Part of the solution': Anderson said his model for the charter school is similar to that of High Tech High School in San Diego. That charter high school uses personalized, project-based learning environments and technology to address poor academic achievement.

Anderson said his school would be almost paper-free, using computers and electronic media such as SMARTboards for learning.

Classes would be no larger than 20 students per instructor, and the staff would build relationships with the students and their families to make students more accountable for their performance, Anderson said.

The charter school would also incorporate career internships, technology, leadership development and character education to help the students become successful members of the community, he said.

Curriculum would teach the state standards on which students will be tested during the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests, he said.

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Each of York City's three secondary schools has failed to meet state standards for the past five years, but Anderson said he thinks his program will "bring those scores up within five years. "There's a desperate need for what we're trying to do," he said. "We hope that we're viewed (by city school officials) as a part of the solution and not as a problem."

Lincoln woes: The York City School Board and the city's largest charter school, Lincoln Charter School, got off to a shaky start after the charter school took over the school district's Lincoln Elementary School on West King Street in 2000.

The two entities spent much of the charter school's first six years engaged in court battles. City school board vice-president Tom Foust said charter schools always cost the financially troubled school district more money than it would cost the school district to educate students. Even after being reimbursed by the state and getting grants to help with the cost of charter schools, Lincoln Charter School costs the school district about \$700,000 or \$800,000 per year, he said.

Also, charter schools, in his opinion, are not superior or equal to public schools when it comes to academic performance, he said.

Haven't seen plan yet: School board president Jeffrey Kirkland said he hasn't been versed on the specific approach or potential merits of Anderson's program, but said "if it's going to lift up the students, it's worth the cost."

School board member Barry Freeland said Anderson's application -- which must be submitted to the board before Nov. 15 -- will be judged fairly and based on criteria such as whether the school will meet the same standards as the school district and whether the facility is adequate.

Freeland said he won't "pass judgment" on Anderson based on his tenure as Bearcats coach, which was successful but sometimes controversial.

Anderson was hired in 1997, but his contract wasn't renewed because the school board said there had been the appearance of recruiting, which is illegal under Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association rules.

He coached the Crispus Attucks charter school team for one season, but the program was disbanded after recruiting suspicions arose because nearly all of its players were not York City residents.

Anderson returned to William Penn in 2002, when a new school board rehired him to coach basketball. He resigned last April, saying he wanted to spend more time with his family.

Anderson said yesterday that, while "You can never say 'never,'" he thinks his basketball coaching days are over because he's too busy.

And the problems and innuendos of the past, he's putting behind him, he said.

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