

PAN AMERICAN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL  
BRIEF PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

## I. MISSION

*Pan American Academy Charter School prepares students for a successful future by promoting academic excellence through rigorous instruction, the integration of cultural awareness and respect throughout all aspects of the curriculum, and the skills and motivation to learn in any circumstance.*

Pan American Academy Charter School is a new K-8 school opening in North Philadelphia in the fall of 2008. The school's unique approach blends the highest academic expectations, explicit instruction in thinking skills, and cultural awareness. Its literacy-based, academically-focused program is enriched and sustained through hands-on learning, daily instruction in Spanish language and culture, and strong parental support. PAACS students will meet and exceed the highest academic goals as they strive and learn in an environment where nothing but the best is expected from them.

## II. VISION

Pan American Academy Charter School will be a model K-8 charter, where high expectations, consistent parental involvement, and rigorous instruction will allow 100% of its students to perform on grade-level in math and reading, write proficiently, speak, read, and understand Spanish, and have a global perspective allowing them to interact and learn effectively throughout their lives.

## III. STUDENTS

PAACS will primarily serve students from the School District's North Region, the majority of whom are Latino or African American. These students face numerous risk factors such as poverty, community violence, and a cycle of low educational attainment. Families in the region also have low educational attainment rates, with school dropout rates, absence rates, and high school graduation rates among the lowest in the city.

## IV. ACADEMIC PROGRAM

PAACS's education model is designed to bring its vision to life. Every aspect of the school – from class size and calendar to pedagogy and assessment—is designed to foster each student's academic abilities and achievement, and make it possible for the school as a whole to stand for hard work, pride, and accomplishment. Key elements include:

- **Intensive instruction in foundational math and literacy skills.** PAACS students spend an hour in Math class and two hours in Language Arts every day. In addition to foundational mathematics and reading skills, studies also include “learning-to-learn” skills that will help students transfer and apply their literacy and numeracy skills in other subject areas. Students will both learn basic skills and experience using reading and math in the real world.

- **Spanish language instruction and cultural awareness.** In its opening years, PAACS will offer neither an immersion nor a dual-language program. Instead, all students (most of whom hear Spanish at home but grow up in a predominantly English-speaking world) will learn Spanish as a world language so they don't "lose" their home language. Spanish instruction will also focus on students' own cultures and cultures of other Spanish-speaking peoples around the world. Finally, students will learn ways to draw on their heritage to enhance their own learning and life opportunities.
- **Balanced instruction and curriculum to ensure deep understanding.** The goal of PAACS curriculum and instruction is not content coverage, test-readiness, or student involvement. It is *learning*. To achieve this goal, students' classroom experiences combine best practices of constructivist inquiry and problem solving, as well as more traditional, standards-based instruction. Classes at PAACS include both drill and discovery. Projects in the classroom and partnerships with organizations around the city ensure that students will have complex, real-world experiences through which to develop and apply skills and knowledge. In addition to these active learning strategies, PAACS also uses standards-based textbooks and clear, explicit instruction to make sure that all students are not only engaged, but are learning.
- **Highly-skilled, bilingual/ bicultural teachers.** PAACS intends many of its teachers to be bilingual and/or bicultural. All PAACS teachers are deeply committed professionals who have chosen to work at a place where they can make a difference. They collaborate on creating and evaluating school lessons (using the Japanese and other Lesson Study protocols) during weekly Professional Development sessions.
- **Small classes and consistent behavioral expectations.** Classes at PAACS are small enough to allow every student to get the support he or she needs. No student falls between the cracks at PAACS. Students in every class follow a school-wide set of classroom routines, customized by each teacher and tailored to meet the unique needs of his or her students, which provides a seamless net of support and consistency.
- **Strict code of conduct.** To foster a climate of academic excellence, PAACS has drafted a clear description of the positive behaviors and attitudes PAACS students must exhibit. These expectations are stated in the Code of Conduct and written handbook, and "No Excuses" language also permeates every student and family's introduction to PAACS. The PAACS handbook details prohibitions and clearly spells out consequences. Accompanying this strictness is a commitment to disciplinary interactions that are always respectful and viewed as learning opportunities.
- **A focus on the student's sense of self as successful learner.** The school's academic program is organized around activities and learning experiences that support all types of learners and learning styles. Individual student progress is consistently celebrated whether it represents attainment of grade-level skills or gains toward academic excellence. In addition, PAACS students with special needs (including emotional needs

and English Language Learners) are served through personalized Learning Support programs and contracted learning and counseling services.

- **Accountability through ongoing and varied assessment.** All programs at PAACS rely on data to develop and improve student learning and organizational efficiency.
  - In the classroom, standardized tests, student surveys, running records, teacher-made assessments, project-based assessments, formal examinations, and summative tests will be used to guide teaching practices and evaluate student learning.
  - The Principal will use tools such as Learning Walks, Math and Literacy Walks, and Equity Walks to monitor instructional practices and various aspects of school culture.
  - Teacher surveys, student performance records, and other tools will be used to ascertain the need for curriculum revisions.
  
- **Family, culture and community as powerful learning assets.** Unlike other charter schools which strive in vain for the parental involvement so critical to student success, PAACS has the great advantage of offering Congreso's social programs and services as incentives to bring PAACS parents into the school. In addition, PAACS teachers will meet each of their students' families personally before the school year starts, and keep in regular phone contact so that parents hear regularly about their children's progress at school, not just their problems. PAACS will also hold frequent family events (including meals and performances) to build community and showcase students' home cultures as rich, vital sources of pride and academic motivation.
  
- **Unique calendar.** PAACS has an extended school day and year. The extended school day at PAACS begins with breakfast and homework lab, offered at 7:30. The regular school day runs from 8:30 to 3:00. The extended school day runs from 3:00 until 6:00, when students attend tutorials, cultural programming, homework or language learning labs. The regular school day is comprised of 6 blocks, one of which is a two-hour Language Arts block. The other subjects offered are Mathematics; PE/ Art/Music; Recess/Lunch; Science; Social Studies. Students attend PAACS for 200 days, not the 180 days of the traditional school year. PAACS students will also be encouraged to enroll in Congreso's academically-oriented summer program.

## **VI. ACADEMIC SUPPORT & INTERVENTION**

At PAACS, all students work hard and exceed the low expectations that so often pervade urban classrooms. Even students with special needs—cognitive, behavioral, emotional, or language-based—get all the support they need to believe in themselves as successful learners. The school prizes effort and hard work, with all teachers' daily practices and school-wide programs for students with special needs reflecting this value. Programmatic supports and interventions include:

- *After-school tutorials* for both remediation and enrichment, offered from 3:00 to 4:00 daily.

- *Extra help and homework lab*, offered both before and after the school day.
- *Summer school*: PAACS students will be invited to participate in Congreso's (its partner organization ) academically-oriented summer program.
- *Teaming*: Teachers, administrators, parents and the student in need meet to help solve that student's academic or behavioral problems, using principles and protocols described by William Glasser.
- *Special Education*: PAACS will evaluate students who may be eligible for special education services, will create an Individual Education Plan and will monitor and measure progress as mandated by special education law. PAACS will support these students in regular classes and in some cases, through pull-out services.
- *Student Support Services* including speech therapy and counseling will be contracted out so that eligible PAACS students, and/or students with disabilities receive help at school from licensed professionals.

## **VII. GOVERNANCE**

PAACS is an independent school. It shares clientele and uses some of the services of Congreso, the community-based organization which launched it, but the two organizations have different Boards of Trustees. Members of PAACS's Board are elected trustees who will act as an interface between the school and the community; they are ambassadors for the school. Part of their responsibility will be to act as knowledgeable spokespersons for the school, explaining and promoting the school's mission, philosophy, and structure. Two PAACS parents will also be board trustees. PAACS's Board of Trustees is ultimately responsible for the school and must approve any revisions to the overall school direction or implementation strategy, the strategic plan, budget, etc. The Board hires and reviews the Principal/CEO.

## **VIII. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

In PAACS's first year, school leadership is in the hands of the Principal/CEO. The Principal is responsible for the overall student performance and operation of the school. S/he has control over the school's budget and program implementation. There will also be a Special Education Coordinator hired in Year 1 to launch and implement Special education services. In year two, an Assistant Principal will be hired to share leadership responsibilities.

## **IX. FUNDING & FACILITIES**

*As a public charter school, PAACS receives a per-child allocation from the School District of Philadelphia. For 2006-07, our allocation is approximately \$7,000 and \$14,000 per regular and special education students. To enrich students' learning experiences and ensure sufficient dollars are available for the instructional program, PAACS raises funds independently. Fundraising projects are initiated and lead by the Principal/ CEO in coordination with Congreso, the lead partner.*

PAACS will open in a temporary location in the fall of 2008 in Northeastern Philadelphia. Several sites are currently under consideration, in the Eastern North Philadelphia neighborhoods.

By year 3, PAACS will construct its own building, customized to serve its unique needs as a community-based, high achievement school.

## **X. TEACHING AT PAACS**

PAACS seeks teachers who are:

- inspired by the mission of PAACS and passionate about the work of teaching
- dedicated to making the PAACS vision a reality
- committed to ongoing professional growth and development and will meet the requirements of Act 48
- State-certified; we are looking especially for dual certifications in Elementary Education and Special Education
- Preference for bicultural/ bilingual teachers
- Ratio of 1:3 experienced (10-15 years) to less experienced (0-10 years)

### *Grade Teams*

PAACS teachers are organized into four teams (K-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-8). The teams are expected to operate as a unit and support each other through Japanese Lesson Study practices ensuring ongoing support and learning.

### *Parent Outreach*

The family/school vision at PAACS is one of teamwork, so that there is a sense of mutual support and connection between teachers and parents of PAACS students. Teachers contact students' parents/guardians regularly by phone or email, so that parents hear about progress as well as problems. Teachers introduce themselves to their students' parents before the school year begins through informal meetings within the student's respective homes. They keep a log of contacts and are expected to make a minimum number of phone calls home per month.

### *Curriculum Development and Implementation*

Curriculum construction in the 2007-2008 year at PAACS will be an ongoing, iterative process of development, documentation, testing, and revision. Curriculum has been chosen for each subject area, which faculty will be responsible for implementing and customizing. They will also be asked to evaluate the International Baccalaureate Organization's Primary Years Programme for future implementation.

Teachers will also submit weekly lesson plans to the Principal, and participate in weekly professional development.

### *Teaching Load*

### *Professional Development*

PAACS teachers participate in approximately 150 hours annually of professional development every year. Key elements of our professional development program include:

- Two weeks of Orientation in the summer of 2008

- Teambuilding and introduction to school-wide policies and practices. Specific curricular and class management issues.
- Additional support for new teachers
  - Each new teacher is assigned an experienced mentor teacher in their team. In addition, the Principal/CEO meets regularly with new teachers, both individually and as a group, to assess how they are doing and to discern the supports they need to succeed.
- Weekly PD sessions from 4:00-6:00
  - Topics include fulfillment of the PAACS mission (rigorous instruction, integration of culture, and personal inquiry), meeting the academic standards for all students, instructional strategies including inquiry, conflict resolution skills for students, teaching students with diverse learning needs and issues, and working with English language learners. Teachers also collaborate on lesson study at this time.
- Japanese and other Lesson Study protocols.
  - Teachers meet regularly to share and review lesson plans, and co-plan so that instructional goals and approaches are aligned. The Lesson Study process keeps turning practitioners back to the mission of the school as the focus for their work.

**Salary and Bonus (In development):**

To attract high quality teachers, our wage scale for first year teachers is comparable to School District for teachers with zero to five years experience and matches District salaries for teachers with greater experience. PAACS benefits are equivalent to those provided by the Philadelphia School District (including free medical, dental, and vision benefits). To be developed is a bonus structure for teachers based on school and student performance.

**Contracts:**

All teaching staff sign annual contracts that explain the teaching load and non-teaching responsibilities. In addition, the contract includes due process protections to ensure teachers are treated fairly in the event of a dispute or unsatisfactory performance evaluation.

*Work Year*

Teachers at PAACS work \_\_\_\_\_ days/ year ( \_\_\_\_\_ for first year teachers).

*Promotion*

Teacher promotion at PAACS is based on \_\_\_\_\_