

Mon, Oct. 24, 2005

## **The Philadelphia Inquirer**

### **Low-income students, top-notch education**

#### **Germantown Academy and Project H.O.M.E. will team up to ready pupils in North Phila. for prep school.**

By Martha Woodall  
Inquirer Staff Writer

Germantown Academy, founded in 1759, is the oldest nonsectarian independent day school in the country.

Project H.O.M.E., cofounded in 1989 in North Philadelphia by Sister Mary Scullion, helps to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness by providing an array of services to adults, children and families.

In what national education officials say will be a first in the country, the prestigious school and Project H.O.M.E. in September will open a private elementary school in North Philadelphia to prepare talented, low-income youngsters to attend top prep schools.

Germantown Academy and Project H.O.M.E. were scheduled to announce the Community Partnership School today at H.O.M.E.'s Honickman Learning Center on North Judson Street, where the new school will be located.

Germantown educates 1,124 students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade on a 120-acre campus in Fort Washington.

"Less than 1 percent of the kids who are high school age or younger go to schools like Germantown Academy," said James Connor, head of Germantown Academy. "The idea is to export our educational program and spawn an independent school."

Classes will be limited to a dozen students. Teachers will use Germantown Academy's curriculum, and Project H.O.M.E. will provide social services and support for students and their families.

Although parents pay between \$10,200 and \$19,335 to send children to Germantown Academy, tuition at Partnership will be on a sliding scale based on parents' ability to pay. "Everybody will pay something, but it could be as little as \$100," Connor said, even though the cost for each student is \$12,000.

The school already has raised more than \$400,000 of the \$2 million it needs to cover the first two years of its operating costs from foundations and private contributions. No public funds are involved.

Project H.O.M.E already runs an after-school program at the Honickman Learning Center.

"We see this as another educational resource for kids in our community," Scullion said.

The Rev. Keith Williams Sr., pastor of the Nazarene Baptist Church in Nicetown and a Germantown Academy parent, said all children deserved the educational opportunities his children had had at the private school.

"We hope to bring those kind of experiences to kids in the area of North Philadelphia," said Williams, who is serving on a joint board overseeing the Community Partnership School.

Although plans call for the new school to grow to include fifth grade with two sections for each grade, it will open in the fall with 36 children from pre-kindergarten to first grade.

Students will be selected using the same admissions process that Germantown Academy uses with its youngest students, which includes testing, observations and teacher recommendations. Connor said the goal was finding students "who have the best chance of being successful in this program."

He said educators from Project H.O.M.E.'s after-school program would guide families through admissions.

James Nevels, chairman of the Philadelphia Reform Commission, which oversees the city's public schools, and Paul Vallas, the district's chief executive officer, endorse the new school. "I support any educational initiative that benefits children," Vallas said.

"This will give great opportunity and choice to economically challenged but gifted young people," said Nevels, who was expected to speak at today's news conference.

Connor said the idea for a new school began germinating nearly six years ago. While Germantown Academy had increased the number of minority-student applicants, officials found that older students often were too far behind to catch up. The school focused its recruiting on younger students. That led to the decision to open the new school.

The project was also seen as a way for Germantown Academy, which had relocated to Fort Washington in the 1960s, to give back to the city.

As an independent school, Partnership can select its students and use its own teaching methods and curriculum, he said.

Some Roman Catholic religious orders and their supporters have opened inner-city schools in recent years. Hope Partnership for Education and La Salle Academy opened last year. And a decade ago, benefactors and the Jesuits took over the Gesu School when the Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced plans to close it.

National education officials said that while a few independent schools had founded charter schools, none has created anything like the Community Partnership School.

"I don't know of anything else like this," said Myra A. McGovern, information director at the National Association of Independent Schools in Washington, an organization of 1,200 day and boarding schools.

Connor added: "It is my hope that this will just spur more independent schools to sort of look out and say: 'We can help. We can do more.' "

For Information

To learn more about the Community Partnership School being founded by Germantown Academy and Project H.O.M.E., call 1-800-574-4002 or e-mail [cpspk5@earthlink.net](mailto:cpspk5@earthlink.net).

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