



**AKOBEN
CYBER CHARTER SCHOOL**

Cyber Charter School Application

Submitted to
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Education
October 3, 2011

By
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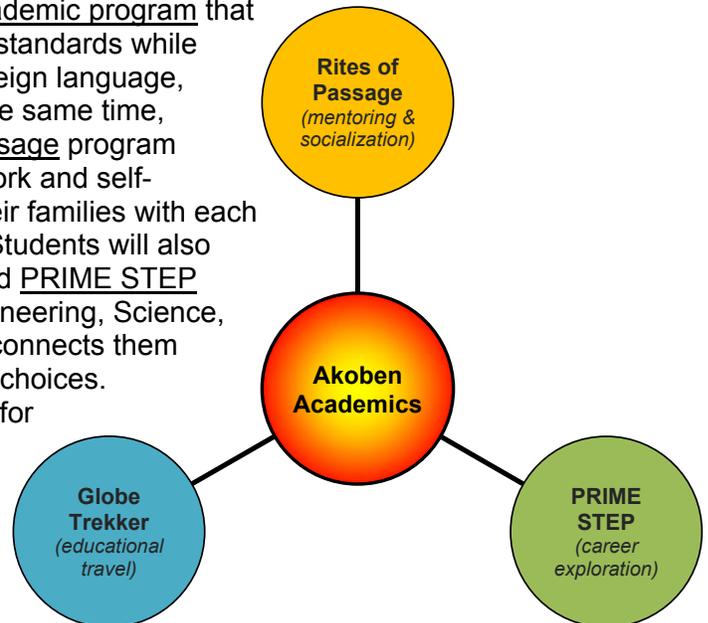
School Focus:

The mission of the Akoben Cyber Charter School (Akoben) is to optimize academic mastery, community responsibility, and college/career readiness for young people from the Greater Philadelphia Metropolitan Area and across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania through a unique African-centered, technology-facilitated school experience. Akoben will combine top-quality online curriculum, excellent teaching, and a proven-effective mentoring network to prepare students for success in school, work and life. As a public school of choice, Akoben welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. Akoben will launch with a focus on middle school (grades 5-8) and hopes to ultimately add high school grades.

Akoben joins a small but growing community of schools providing African-centered education in Pennsylvania and around the nation which are demonstrating the effectiveness of this cultural approach, especially for learners who have previously struggled in school. In Philadelphia, for example, Imhotep Institute Charter School regularly outperforms the state on the PSSA and sends more of its graduates—66 percent—to college than any other charter school in Philadelphia.¹ African-centered schools are also having an impact in communities like Detroit, Chicago, and Kansas City. What makes Akoben unique is its complete integration of technology to both deliver instruction and build community. To the best of its founders' knowledge, Akoben will be the first African-centered cyber charter school in America.

Although Akoben will blaze a trail as an African-centered cyber charter, the school will make strategic use of facilities for services such as sports training, art/music, homework help and afterschool programming. Initial drop-in/after-school locations will include the school's offices in Philadelphia. It is Akoben's hope to ultimately have such locations throughout Pennsylvania.

At the heart of Akoben is a rich and rigorous academic program that addresses all Pennsylvania and Common Core standards while providing unique enrichment opportunities in foreign language, technology, art/music, and cultural studies. At the same time, Akoben students will benefit from a Rites of Passage program that teaches core values such as cooperative work and self-determination while connecting students and their families with each other and with successful community mentors. Students will also participate in a career-exploration program called PRIME STEP (Pennsylvania Regional Institutes for Math, Engineering, Science, Technology, Education, and Pharmacy), which connects them with internships and helps guide their academic choices. Finally, Akoben aspires to provide opportunities for its students to travel within the US, the Caribbean, Africa and Europe through a Globe Trekker educational travel program focused on the African Diaspora.



Akoben will fulfill all Pennsylvania cyber charter school requirements while offering a unique and effective choice for families in Philadelphia and beyond.

¹ http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/02/23/22pnbk_african-centered.h30.html

I. SCHOOL DESIGN

1. Mission Statement:

Explanation: Define a concise plan for an innovative public school that will lead to improved educational performance. Consistency between the mission and the educational programs should be articulated to achieve improved performance.

A. Briefly describe the core philosophy or underlying purpose of the proposed school.

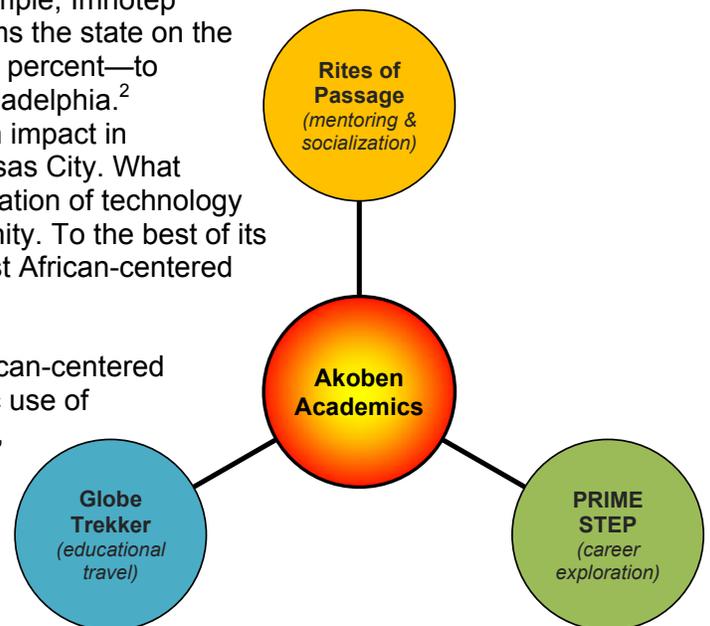
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B. What is your overarching vision of the school?

Akoben's overarching vision is of 21st century African-centered education for students in elementary school, middle school, high school and beyond.

Akoben joins a small but growing community of schools providing African-centered education in Pennsylvania and around the nation that are demonstrating the effectiveness of this cultural approach, especially for learners who have previously struggled in school. In Philadelphia, for example, Imhotep Institute Charter School regularly outperforms the state on the PSSA and sends more of its graduates—66 percent—to college than any other charter school in Philadelphia.² African-centered schools are also having an impact in communities like Detroit, Chicago, and Kansas City. What makes Akoben unique is its complete integration of technology to both deliver instruction and build community. To the best of its founders' knowledge, Akoben will be the first African-centered cyber charter school in America.

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In addition to its strong cyber program, Akoben will integrate key elements of blended learning, combining the best of face-to-face and online programming. For example, all Akoben students and their families will participate in a six-week orientation program at the beginning of each school year, which will involve up to 15 hours per week of face-to-face time at the Akoben headquarters and selected community locations. Throughout the year, students will have extensive access to physical education and recreational activities at the Kroc Center near the school's headquarters. In the last six weeks of each school year, students will participate in the community/business-based PRIME STEP program. And as the Globe Trekkers program evolves, Akoben students will engage in face-to-face exploration of their world.

Akoben will provide new generations of citizens with the requisite skills needed to continue the development of society in general, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in particular. The Akoben Cyber Charter School will use proven systems to bridge the gap of the digital divide through dynamic instruction, the use of technology, an integrated curriculum, and the blending of culturally relevant socialization and activities. Akoben will prepare its students for leadership and entrepreneurship that will embrace and exceed the challenges of the new millennium. The ability to utilize digital technology, the internet, and all emerging technologies at younger ages will afford Akoben students the skills needed to fully participate in the world's global economy, in general, and in America's cultural, political and social leadership in that economy, in particular. As lifelong learners of the blending of technology into their daily lives, students will acquire 21st Century skills that can automatically increase their values of education, their quality of life, those of their families, and the lives of their subsequent children. This will produce students with fantastic digital literacy skills, access to advanced computer technologies, and the receiving of corrective-actions that affords students all of the "next steps" and "best practices" to travel the multiple-paths to success in the 21st Century, and beyond. Akoben Cyber Charter School is poised to effectively deliver these opportunities to all Pennsylvania youth, inclusive of those who hail from under served, under represented, at-risk minority and ethnic populations. Our community organizers have asked, *"If not Akoben, then who? And if not now, then when?"* Many populations of families have not been properly included in such offerings, whether as stakeholders or even as aspirants. Akoben will change this, dramatically. These systems will also prepare our teachers to stay ahead of the "norms" of the past, and to stay focused on the future towards the cutting edge of the delivery of education services. And this demonstrates the viability of the Rites of Passage parable, *"You cannot lead where you won't go, and you cannot teach what you don't know!"* This cyber charter model will bring a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environments (LRE) to students in their homes, at our sites, and everywhere

in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the world where our children, or future, happen to have an interest. This includes the inclusion of mobile and migratory populations of students being able to maintain an excellent educational opportunity, without being attached to an historical, typical public school that's restricted to a city neighborhood, a community sector, or a topographical zone.

As a public school of choice, Akoben welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. Akoben will launch with a focus on middle school (grades 5-8) and will ultimately add high school and elementary school grades.

To fulfill its mission and vision, Akoben intends to license core online curriculum and the Connexus® education management system (EMS) from Connections Education, whose affiliated cyber charter in Pennsylvania, Commonwealth Connections Academy, is one of the state's most highly respected cyber charter schools.

2. Measurable Goals and Objectives:

*Explanation: Develop clear, **measurable** goals with objectives for building the educational program that reflects a commitment to academic excellence for all students.*

- A. What are the school's measurable academic goals and objectives to promote student learning?

<p>Academic Goal 1: Student Performance Akoben students will demonstrate mastery of key concepts and academic standards across core academic subjects.</p>	
<p>Measurement Tool/Data Source: Student performance is measured on internal assessments including quizzes, tests and portfolios, graded by the teacher and reported in real time through the Connexus® Education Management System (EMS). This Performance metric is tracked and aggregated in EMS for each student based on performance on assessments.</p>	
<p>Objective 1.1: The school wide Performance rate will demonstrate mastery across all content areas.</p>	<p>Timeline/Target: The school wide Performance rate averaged across all reported months within the school year will be: Year 1: 75% or higher Year 2: 77% or higher Year 3: 79% or higher Year 4: 81% or higher</p>
<p>Objective 1.2: Students in the bottom quartile in the first half of the year will show improvement on Performance by the end of the year.</p>	<p>Timeline/Target: The aggregate improvement in Performance by the end of the school year for students in the bottom quartile during the first half of the year will be: Year 1: at least 3% Year 2: at least 5% Year 3: at least 7% Year 4: at least 9%</p>

Academic Goal 2: Yearly Academic Growth Akoben will demonstrate a year of academic growth for a year in school.	
Measurement Tool/Data Source: The school will administer a pre- and post-test each school year to measure academic growth over the year, and will also track results against the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS).	
Objective 2.1: Akoben students will increasingly demonstrate academic growth in reading and/or math from the beginning of the school year to the end.	Timeline/Target: The percentage of students demonstrating appropriate annual academic growth based on the pre- and post-test will be: Year 1: 75% or higher Year 2: 77% or higher Year 3: 79% or higher Year 4: 81% or higher
Objective 2.2 Akoben will demonstrate its effectiveness in supporting students to achieve one year's worth of academic growth in a year, as measured by the PVAAS.	Timeline/Target: Akoben will achieve and maintain an annual Green/Effective rating on the PVAAS.
Academic Goal 3: Student Achievement Scores Akoben will meet or exceed statewide performance on key required state tests.	
Measurement Tool/Data Source: Required state tests including Pennsylvania System of Student Assessment as defined and reported by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.	
Objective 3.1: Akoben will demonstrate at least 95% participation in PSSA and other required state tests.	Timeline/Target: Akoben will achieve test participation rates as follows: Year 1: at least 95% Year 2: at least 95% Year 3: at least 95% Year 4: at least 95%
Objective 3.2: Akoben students will meet and then exceed the state's percentage of students achieving the standard on the PSSA in Language Arts, Math, and Science.	Timeline/Target: Akoben's percentage of students meeting or exceeding standard on PSSA shall be: Year 1: Within 5% of state on the aggregate of grades and subjects tested Year 2: 1-5% above state on at least 50% of the aggregate of grades and subjects tested Year 3: 1-5% above state on at least 75% of the aggregate grades and subjects tested Year 4: 1-5% above state on the aggregate of grades and subjects tested
Objective 3.3: Akoben will meet AYP (or its future equivalent) each year.	Timeline/Target: Akoben will meet AYP in its first eligible year and will maintain its AYP status each year.

[B. Missing from PDE Cyber Charter Application]

C. What are the schools measurable non-academic goals and objectives to promote student performance?

<p>Non-Academic Goal 1: High Quality Mentoring Akoben will provide its students with high-quality mentoring focused on the needs of each learner.</p>	
<p>Objective 1.1: Rites of Passage, PRIME STEP, and Globe Trekker programs will be fully staffed with mentors as needed throughout the year.</p>	<p>Measurement Tool/Data Source: School records, reported monthly to Board of Trustees</p>
<p>Objective 1.2: At least 90% of parents and students will express satisfaction with their mentors.</p>	<p>Measurement Tool/Data Source: Annual Parent Satisfaction survey; results reported to Board of Trustees and all stakeholders.</p>
<p>Non-Academic Goal 2: School Community Akoben will create a measurable sense of community within the cyber charter environment.</p>	
<p>Objective 2.1: Parent Advisory group will be active and well-attended throughout school year.</p>	<p>Measurement Tool/Data Source: Minutes from Parent Advisory group</p>
<p>Objective 2.2: At least 75% of parents/guardians will participate in programming around Rites of Passage, PRIME STEP, and/or Globe Trekker programs.</p>	<p>Measurement Tool/Data Source: Data collected by school administration and reported monthly to Board of Trustees.</p>
<p>Objective 2.3: On annual Parent Satisfaction survey, respondents will demonstrate at least 80% satisfaction with Rites of Passage, PRIME STEP, and/or Globe Trekker programs.</p>	<p>Measurement Tool/Data Source: Annual Parent Satisfaction survey; results reported to Board of Trustees and all stakeholders</p>
<p>Non-Academic Goal 3: Overall Family Satisfaction Akoben families will rate their school highly and be satisfied with their children's school experience.</p>	
<p>Objective 3.1: Akoben will measure at least 3.0 or at least 75% in overall program satisfaction</p>	<p>Measurement Tool/Data Source: Annual Parent Satisfaction survey; results reported to Board of Trustees and all stakeholders.</p>

3. Educational Program:

Explanation: Describe effective teaching methods, curriculum, and a specific plan to meet the needs of ALL students that are consistent with the mission of your school.

A. Describe the educational program of the school, providing a detailed description of the curriculum and the content in all subject areas.

As an African-centered “school without walls,” Akoben embodies innovation while implementing educational and cultural relevance strategies proven effective for increasing student achievement. The Akoben Board of Trustees has the vision and expertise to offer a thoroughly unique charter school that will effectively meet the urgent educational needs of students throughout Pennsylvania who will benefit from the learning approach, flexibility, and academic outcomes that the program offers.

For its core academic program and certain electives, Akoben will license the rigorous, Pennsylvania-proven Connections virtual curriculum that is aligned to state and Common Core Standards. This curriculum is the first of its kind to be accredited by AdvancED (formerly CITA, Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation), and has an established track record in increasing academic achievement for previously low-performing students. The core curriculum is integrated with the Connexus® education management system (EMS) designed specifically for high-quality, highly accountable K-12 cyber charters to provide 360-degree accountability through comprehensive data collection, analysis and reporting.

To round out its African-centered education program, Akoben will build or license African history, language, and cultural curricula to be delivered through the same EMS (see Appendix A for content details.)

All courses will be taught by top-quality teachers who are Pennsylvania-certified, highly qualified under NCLB, and specially trained to excel in a virtual environment. Akoben students will access the program via loaned computers and Internet subsidies it provides for its students, ensuring that no Akoben family is left on the wrong side of the Digital Divide.

The complete description of the Akoben educational program that follows integrates some unique terminology, as defined below:

- *Jegna*: A parent, extended family member, or similarly qualified adult designated by the parent/guardian who works in person with each Akoben student under the guidance of the Pennsylvania-licensed professional teacher. At the high school level, the Jegna is less involved with daily instruction but serves an important supervisory role for the student.
- *Connexus® Education Management System (EMS)*: The platform for organizing and managing the entire Akoben educational environment, this proprietary, secure web-based software delivers every assignment and tracks every activity (whether online or offline), monitoring completion of individual lessons as well as mastery of discrete skills and knowledge. Parents and students must access Connexus® to organize, document, and interact in the learning experience, ensuring Akoben an unprecedented level of time-on-task detail.
- *Multi-tiered Intervention*: Akoben will employ a multi-tiered intervention model so that every student has access to the resources they need to be successful: Tier 1 – Core

Instructional Program; Tier 2 – Supplemental Programs and Supports; Tier 3 – Alternative Programs; The school’s Student Support Team meets on a weekly basis to discuss students who are struggling academically to develop an intervention plan and strategies for improvement.

- *Student Status/Escalation Process*: The Connexus® system tracks and reports ongoing student attendance progress based on the objective numeric data generated by the EMS including student contact with Akoben teachers, participation, and completion of lessons and assessments. The student’s status (On-Track, Approaching Alarm and Alarm) is displayed on the Jegna and teacher home pages for instant identification of potential problems.
- *LiveLesson™*: This innovative web conferencing tool allows Akoben’s online teachers to work synchronously (in real time) with small groups of students using voice over IP, chat, electronic whiteboard, and shared web surfing; based on Adobe® Connect™.
- *Teachlets™*: Highly interactive, asynchronous tutorial “movies” integrated in many lessons introduce and illustrate targeted skills and concepts to guide student learning. Teachlets are created in Flash® (an industry-standard web animation protocol) to provide maximum media impact for minimum bandwidth.
- *WebMail*: The proprietary private email system included in the EMS. Because this system is “closed,” Akoben students, parents, Jegnas and teachers may only use it to communicate with each other, and are protected from spam, contact from strangers, and other mainstream email issues.
- *StarTrak*: This integrated rating system allows every Akoben student and teacher to rate each lesson from a low of one star to a high of five stars. Ratings are used by curriculum staff to identify areas of needed improvement as well as curriculum approaches that work especially well.

Following are important aspects of any quality virtual charter school program and how the Akoben program addresses them.

Curriculum Design: The curriculum selected by Akoben combines proven and rigorous print-based materials, when appropriate, with the best in technology-enhanced learning such that a significant portion of the curriculum is delivered through the Internet and other electronic means in a developmentally appropriate way. Connections is the ideal provider because its instructional design and curriculum development are guided by principles which correspond directly with the principles, beliefs, and attitude of the school:

- Curriculum fosters breadth and depth of understanding in each subject area
- Content is aligned to national and state standards
- Curriculum is supported by quality, reputable, recently published textbooks and/or proven instructional resources and materials
- Content and assessments are accurate and unbiased
- Content is current, relevant and provides real-world applications
- Content is appropriate for the learner (age, ability, background, reading level, learning style)
- Instructional design is adaptable and flexible to meet individual needs of students

- Instructional design provides students with opportunities to improve learning skills using technological tools (e.g., virtual labs and instruments, Teachlet tutorials, business software, online calculator, WebQuests)
 - Navigation is intuitive and age-appropriate
 - Scope of course is appropriate with regard to amount of content, length of course and lessons, and course requirements
 - Lesson introduction is effective and presents lesson objectives, accesses prior knowledge, sets expectations and motivates
 - Background information effectively prepares students to access new content, skills and strategies
 - Curriculum includes opportunities for developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills
 - Curriculum includes opportunities for collaboration and independent study
 - Curriculum includes opportunities to develop oral and written communication skills
 - Curriculum incorporates timely and appropriate feedback to students
 - Curriculum incorporates ongoing formative assessment
- **Active learning:** Each core Akoben course includes active learning elements (including online and/or offline interaction) that address diverse learning styles and preferences, including textual, visual, auditory, and/or hands-on. The core courses include 1,500 Teachlet® proprietary instructional movies and more than 1,000 primary source and instructional videos. Integrated “i-text” electronic textbooks are licensed from a variety of leading publishers including Pearson®, McGraw Hill®, and others, while non-proprietary technology-based content is licensed from “best of breed” providers such as, BrainPOP®, Grolier Online®, SkillsTutor™, Compass®, and Discovery Education®. In addition, the instructional design includes interactive LiveLesson® web-conferencing sessions and threaded discussions.
- Getting Started** - An overview of the lesson will be provided, along with a fact or exercise to pique a student's interest and establish relevancy and connection with prior knowledge.

Instruction - Teachlets™ will incorporate graphics, video, and audio to show the student the concepts and ideas he/she will need to complete the lessons.

Activity - The student will apply what he or she has learned during the instructional segment.

Review - This section will recap the key terms, concepts or ideas covered in the lesson.

Assessment - Finally, the student will be required to show what he or she can now do as a result of what he or she has learned in the lesson.
- **Lesson structure:** Key curriculum design principles are reflected in a consistent course design allowing for both general ease of use and flexible implementation to meet specific student needs. The consistent elements are shown at right, and include an overview (“Getting Started”), content (“Instruction”), activities and assignment (“Activity” and “Review”), and assessment (“Assessment”). A student may generally spend as much time as she or he needs on each element to master the concept, and may repeatedly return to any element (except Assessments) for reinforcement.
 - **Content:** The “course tree” (syllabus) for each course is always available for students and teachers to review in its entirety while they are working on any given lesson, which helps students plan ahead and develop metacognitive skills – learning

how to learn – that are critical to future success. Each Connections course has clear goals and objectives. The course objectives are available for review by the student, teacher or Jegna at any time (see sample).

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying 'https://www.connexus.com/content/chrome/online/default.aspx?idCourse=1262'. The page title is 'Science 7 B: Diseases - Windows Internet Explorer'. The main content area is titled 'Lesson 4: Diseases' and 'Science 7 B Unit 1: Human Body Systems: Part 1'. It features a navigation bar with buttons for 'Getting Started', 'Instruction', 'Activity', 'Review', and 'Assessment'. Below this is an 'Edit Document' section with the following text: 'Due mostly to ever-evolving technology, many diseases that were threats in the past have been wiped out. Unfortunately, however, the causes and cures of many diseases still elude scientists. In this lesson you will study various types of diseases. Objectives: Describe the work of Pasteur, Koch, and Lister in the discovery and prevention of disease; Identify diseases caused by viruses and bacteria; Explain how HIV affects the immune system; Define noninfectious diseases and list their causes; Explain what happens during an allergic reaction.' A small image of a scientist is visible on the right side of the page. The bottom right corner shows '1 of 5' and a play button icon.

Detailed information about the curriculum (Core and African Heritage/Enrichment) is shown in Appendix A.

Details about the Rites of Passage program for social development, the PRIME STEP career exploration program, and the GlobeTrekker educational travel and adventure program are shown in Appendix B.

B. Describe how your school will meet the educational needs of students with disabilities in accordance with Chapter 711. Provide a projection of the number and type of special education programs that will be operated directly by your charter school or through contracts. Provide a projection of the number and type of related services that will be provided directly by the charter school or through contracts.

Akobon will provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities, including, but not limited to, identifying and evaluating students; planning educational programs; conducting IEP team meetings; arranging for the provision of any necessary related services through charter school staff and contractual arrangement with private providers and/or, where feasible, traditional public school districts; and implementing placements in accordance with federal and state law.

The Akoben teaching staff will include a Special Education Coordinator, who together with the Principal, regular education staff, service providers, and virtual special education consultants will be able to effectively meet the needs of special learners. The role and the

function of the Special Education Coordinator at Akoben, who will at a minimum possess full certification in special education, will be to facilitate the implementation of the students' IEPs. The Special Education Coordinator will consult with the general education teachers so that the general education teachers may provide direct instructional support to special education students. Consultation provided by the Special Education Coordinator will include adjustments to the learning environment, modifications of instructional methods, adaptation of curricula, and the use of appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of individual students. If specified by the child's IEP, direct special education will be provided by the Special Education Coordinator via telephone, Internet, LiveLesson, and in person.

To ensure service for students entering Akoben without prior diagnosis for special education, the Akoben Principal and Special Education Coordinator will regularly review teacher observations, assessment results and other data to identify any possible special education needs among Akoben students. The Akoben Special Education Coordinator will serve as the Child Find coordinator to conduct Child Find coordination and location activities. These activities will include coordination with appropriate state and local organizations and agencies, as well as ensuring public awareness throughout Pennsylvania through outreach each fall about Akoben special education services and procedures.

Pre-referral/Referral/Evaluation: The Akoben staff will form a Child Study team consisting of teachers, Special Education Coordinator, and Principal to handle all pre-referrals, which may be made by teachers, parents, or others. (Child Study team procedures will be reviewed with PDE if the department so desires.) The Child Study team will determine if the student's needs can be met through a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach, with curriculum modifications, or if a formal referral for special education evaluation is warranted. If the former, the teacher then implements and documents suggested modifications, lesson adaptations, and alternative instructional strategies, as well as the student's level of success with each.

If the Child Study team suspects that a student requires special educational services, the following procedures are implemented:

- The Akoben teacher consults with the Principal and Special Education Coordinator to complete an official special education referral. The parent is notified of this referral.
- Parental consent for the student evaluation is obtained and the appropriate evaluations are arranged. Parents are sent a copy of *Procedural Safeguards*.
- The initial evaluation is conducted within 45 school days of receiving parental consent for the evaluation; and will consist of procedures to determine if the student is a student with a disability; and the educational needs of the student.
- Either the parent or the Akoben staff may initiate the request for an initial evaluation.
- Parent is invited to the interdisciplinary Child Study team meeting to review the assessment results.

IEP Development: If, as a result of evaluation, the Child Study team determines that the student has a disability, the Pennsylvania Special Education Rules will be followed to develop an IEP. An IEP meeting is scheduled within 30 calendar days— at the Akoben office, at another mutually agreeable site, or by telephone – and the parents are invited to attend. IEP goals are formulated with parental consent. All appropriate parties, including the student where possible, are invited to participate in this meeting to develop an IEP that makes effective use of the virtual environment.

For students enrolling in the charter school who do already have an IEP, Akoben begins meeting their needs with a review of the existing IEP. All families applying to Akoben are

asked to disclose if their child has an IEP in place and, if so, to provide the IEP for review. (It is understood by families and by the enrollment team that the presence of an IEP will never prevent a student from gaining admission to Akoben.) During the enrollment process, Akoben will review the existing IEP and take one of these actions:

- If the IEP already reflects a virtual environment, the student continues through the enrollment process with the existing, compliant IEP.
- If a student with a disability who had an IEP that was in effect in a previous Pennsylvania public school transfers to Akoben, Akoben (in consultation with the parents) will provide FAPE to the child (including services comparable to those described in the child's IEP from the previous public agency-to the extent possible), until the Akoben either (1) Adopts the child's IEP from the previous public school; or (2) Develops, adopts, and implements a new IEP that meets the Pennsylvania Special Education Rules.
- If a student with a disability who is receiving special education services pursuant to an IEP in another state transfers to Akoben, Akoben will, in consultation with the parents of the pupil, provide the pupil with a FAPE including services which are comparable to the services described in his/her previous IEP. Akoben shall continue to provide such a free appropriate public education to the pupil until such time as the school conducts an evaluation of the pupil and develops a new IEP for the pupil, if determined appropriate, in accordance with applicable federal and state law.

Although Jegnas (parents and others so designated) may play an important role in this cyber charter setting, the Akoben staff of highly qualified, Pennsylvania certified teachers will in fact be responsible for the day-to-day monitoring of progress for students with special needs. Teachers carry out this responsibility through a variety of means, including monitoring of attendance, participation and performance metrics through the Connexus (described in "Student Status/Escalation Process" in the Definitions section); WebMail, telephone, and LiveLesson communication; and student completion of online quizzes and activities. Students with special learning needs are further assisted by the school's Special Education Coordinator, working closely with a national team of trained cyber charter special education consultants, the school's regular education staff, and contracted professionals in the students' communities. These professionals work in close partnership with the Jegna (thus allowing the student to benefit from the proven positive impact of parent/family involvement) but the responsibility remains with the professional teachers.

Virtual schools like Akoben open up a vast range of possibilities and options for the delivery of the full continuum of special education and related services such as speech-language, occupational or physical therapy, psychological counseling, among others-to eligible students as described below. These services include but are not limited to:

- consultative support to the Akoben regular education teachers to provide modification and accommodation to the general education curriculum;
- direct special education support to a student which may be provided via the telephone, Internet, LiveLesson, as well as in person;
- direct related service support (for example, speech-language, occupational or physical therapy, psychological counseling, among others) provided face to face via computer, in homes, community sites and therapist offices;
- related services may also include parent training, autism support, parent groups, student support groups, and itinerant supports;
- hearing or vision support consistent with the student's IEP;

- ongoing progress monitoring for every student, including:
- frequent and thorough review of student performance, attendance, and participation data;
- as reported to the student, parent and teacher through their respective home pages; careful logging in the Connexus of every conversation (by phone, WebMail, LiveLesson or other means) and consultation with the student and/or parent;
- specific tracking and reporting for providers of direct/related services, with close scrutiny by the special education staff of any missed appointments or incomplete services.

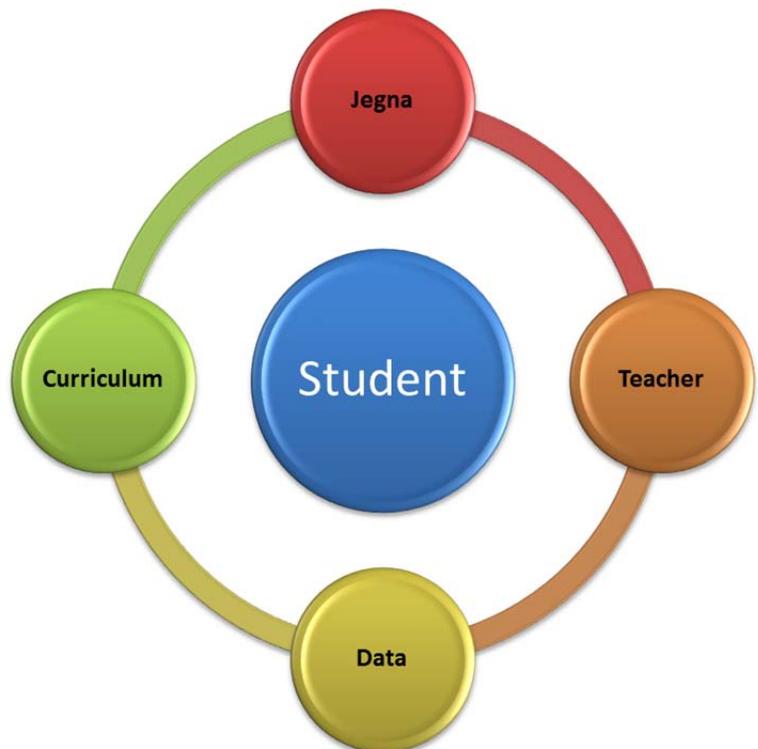
It is also worth noting that the individualized focus of a cyber charter, along with the one-on-one learning environment, often has a positive impact on students' ability to participate in the general education environment. While a special education student in a brick-and-mortar school may need to be removed from a busy classroom in order to focus, in a cyber charter that same student may need little special education support to progress satisfactorily in the general education curriculum.

C. Describe the teaching methods that will be used to deliver instruction and assess academic performance. How will this pedagogy enhance student learning?

Explanation: Describe your commitment to high academic standards for all students; well-developed evaluation program for either school-developed or standardized testing; use of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) or the PA Alternate School Assessment (PASA); and an analysis of assessment results to improve student performance.

To effectively implement the high-quality curriculum described above, Akoben embraces a unique instructional model that combines deep personalization with high expectations and data-driven accountability. Key aspects of the instructional model are as follows.

- **The Learning Circle:** Instruction at Akoben surrounds each student with the resources needed for success. Each student is part of a "learning circle" as shown in the accompanying graphic. Each student has at least one Jegna – a parent, extended family member, caregiver or mentor – who provides face-to-face guidance, with professional teacher direction using high-quality curriculum directed by data.
- **The Personalized Learning Plan:** The centerpiece of instruction at Akoben is the Personalized Learning Plan (PLP), which



provides for individualized instruction tailored to the learning needs of each child. The PLP is an extensive document developed at the beginning of the school year by the Pennsylvania-certified teacher in consultation with the student and the student's parents/guardians. This PLP is built from a combination of baseline assessments of both academic skills/knowledge and learning modalities, information gathered from the parents, and input directly from the student. Learning needs that go beyond the purely academic (such as study habits and interpersonal skills) are addressed in the PLP as well. The PLP then guides the student's course through the Pennsylvania Core Curriculum Content standards-aligned curriculum. All daily lesson plans are provided to students and families online as well as in print, directing them step-by-step through use of the comprehensive set of textbooks, trade books, manipulatives, and consumables that Akoben ships to them.

- **Multi-Tiered Intervention:** Akoben will utilize a multi-tiered intervention approach to curriculum and instruction, which ensures that individual students receive the support they need. Students who may not be successful in the standard program, Tier 1, receive additional support via the supplemental and alternative programs in Tier 2 and Tier 3. The Akoben staff will form a Student Support Team (SST) to focus collaboratively on the needs of students who are struggling, and facilitate tutoring and other supports using this multi-tiered approach.
- **A complete learning team:** At Akoben, student learning benefits from multiple stakeholders committed to seeing them achieve success including dedicated educators and involved parents who provide total support for the student's PLP.
 - **Pennsylvania-licensed, highly qualified teachers:** Each Akoben student has a Pennsylvania-certified teacher specially trained in the Connections curriculum and instructional method. Teachers work closely with each student on a one-on-one basis using innovative technology tools. The teacher is responsible for evaluating assignments and work products, providing instructional assistance, assigning and scoring assessment activities, and providing feedback on the child's performance. Based on a student's demonstrated mastery of the material, teachers add, expand or replace assignments; they also grade students in each subject for the regular progress reports and make promotion or retention decisions. Depending on the need of the learner, teacher contact –via telephone, LiveLesson session, and WebMail – with the student and Jegna may be as frequent as several times a day, and at minimum once every two weeks depending on student age. Teachers do not wait to be contacted; they are proactive participants in their students' learning plans. In addition, Akoben families are always welcome to visit the school office/teaching center during business hours to meet with their teachers in person.
 - **Face-to-face Jegna support:** Each Akoben student has a Jegna—a parent or other responsible adult designated by the parents—who works with him or her in person under the guidance of the Pennsylvania-certified professional teacher. Parent involvement is a centerpiece of the Akoben concept. Whether a parent's role is as a Jegna, or as someone providing oversight to the Jegna, all parents/guardians are intimately familiar with their child's progress on a day-to-day basis. The school provides ongoing training and support to help Jegnas carry out their important role while making optimum use of the available technology tools and professional teacher support to do so. In grades K-8, Jegnans are directly involved with students' day-to-day learning. In high school, they play an important oversight role, but students work with their teachers more independently, taking on increasing responsibility for their learning.

- **Wrap-around motivational support:** The Akoben Rites of Passage system, staffed by professionals and paraprofessionals, will support participating students' school success by focusing on aspects of history, interpersonal relationships, language mastery, cultural reinforcement, academic enrichment, and the practical application of their skills, knowledge, and talents. Similarly, the mentors in the PRIME STEP career exploration and community service program will guide students in applying their academic skills and focusing on their long-term goals.

Assessment

Akoban shall adhere to the same accountability measures, administer the same state assessments (including both PSSA and the Keystone Exams) and follow the same proficiency measures as all public schools in Pennsylvania. As a cyber charter, Akoben must implement its state testing plan with care, administering all required state assessments to its students at in-person, proctored locations throughout the state, in compliance with Pennsylvania Department of Education guidelines for test security. In addition, Akoben will appoint a testing coordinator, who will attend all required training through the Pennsylvania Department of Education. This testing coordinator will ensure that all guidelines for test security and test administration are adhered to.

In addition to the state-mandated tests, Akoben will use a variety of internal assessment tools, including a standards-based, technology-facilitated pre- and post-test. Akoben's various assessments combine with top-quality curriculum and instruction to improve student achievement and maintain a high level of accountability, as described below and shown in the accompanying schematic.



Akoban's assessment efforts begin with a thorough placement process and progress assessment, offered online and offline, which help to customize the student's academic program and formulate the Personalized Learning Plan. Akoben will also utilize ongoing online and offline assessments to measure student progress on the curriculum, and a commercially available standardized assessment tool to measure student gains over the school year. Specifically, Akoben shall use the following assessments and standardized tests to measure pupil progress:

- **Placement process:** As part of the application process, Akoben works with parents of incoming students to determine the appropriate grade level placement for each child. Students identified as potentially working significantly above or below grade level take a placement test.
- **Yearly progress:** In the value-added model of academic growth upon which Akoben is based, each student will demonstrate a year of academic growth for a year in school. Using its standards-based, technology-facilitated pre- and post-test, Akoben will gauge each student's academic growth over the course of the year.
- **Ongoing informal assessments:** During each phase of their curriculum mastery,

students will engage in several assessments that tap into all levels of student thinking. Such assessment activities include: scored daily assignments, daily “checks for understanding” requiring students to apply and integrate new skills in a thoughtful manner, and regular online quizzes to measure understanding of newly presented material.

- **Unit assessments and portfolios:** Each subject in the Akoben curriculum is broken into logical units of study. Throughout each unit, students are required to complete a series of offline and online assessments. Offline assessments may include written compositions, science lab reports, short answers and essays, book responses, and a variety of work samples, which will make up a student’s portfolio. These assessments require direct teacher evaluation. Online assessments include several quizzes and a unit test. While the quizzes are brief and frequent (occurring after every third or fourth lesson), the unit tests are more comprehensive and occur at the end of an entire unit. Online assessments provide families with immediate objective feedback, while offline assessments provide valuable reflection and expertise from Akoben’s certified program teachers. Student report cards and grades will ultimately include a balanced combination of quizzes, tests, work samples (portfolio items) and Jegna feedback.
- **Baseline achievement data:** To the extent that state standardized test results are available for an incoming student, these results are integrated into that student’s basic information in the EMS; likewise, results for state standardized tests that students take while enrolled at Akoben are also included in the EMS, along with internal pre- and post-test data. This data will be used to track student progress from year to year and also within the year.
- **Keystone Exams:** Akoben high school students will be prepared for success on the Keystone Exam end-of-course assessments in Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Literature, English Composition, Biology, Chemistry, U.S. History, World History, and Civics and Government.

In addition to the assessment methods described above, the Akoben EMS gathers very granular data on every student’s performance every day. During each phase of their curriculum mastery, students will engage in many different types of evaluations, both formal and informal. Formal assessments include quizzes, unit tests, skills checks, portfolio items and graded discussions. Informal assessments include the variety of methods teachers use to gather ongoing feedback about student progress from both Jegnas and students, such as WebMail, LiveLessons, phone conversations, review of student work samples.

Students should expect work to be graded, based on the assignment and format, from immediately to up to one week, with the average being 24-hour turnaround time. In addition to formal graded assignments, teachers continuously monitor student work via the EMS, noting performance on machine-graded quizzes and checks for understanding. The EMS tracks teacher response time and teacher-student/teacher-parent communications, providing the school Principal with rich, actionable data on this key aspect of teacher performance.

D. Attach the school calendar and identify hours of the school operation, as per Section 1715-A(9).

School Starts – 3rd Week of August

Holidays:

Labor Day – September
 Columbus Day – October
 Veterans’ Day – November
 Thanksgiving Day – November
 Christmas Eve/Day – December
 Winter Break – December/January (One Week)
 New Years’ Day – January
 King Day – January
 Presidents’ Day – February
 Good Friday – March/April
 Spring Break – March/April (One Week)
 Memorial Day - May
School Ends – First Week of June

Hours Of Operations:

Advanced Start: 07:00AM
 Standard Start: 08:00AM
 Advanced Close: 02:00PM
 Standard Close: 04:00PM
 Extended Day Close: 06:00PM
 Cyber Systems: 24 Hours Per Day (Multi-Modality)
 Blended/Hybrid Systems: 24 Hours Per Day (Multi-Modality)
 Rites Of Passage (ROP) Systems: 24 Hours Per Day (Multi-Modality)
 Standard Systems: 24 Hours Per Day (Multi-Modality)

4. School Accountability:

Akoban Cyber Charter School is dedicated to a culture of performance that provides accountability for all stakeholders and continuous improvement for the entire school enterprise, driven by rich data from the education management system.



The Akoben Board of Trustees has the option of leasing student computers through Connections or leasing/purchasing them from another source.

Student Technology Package

- *One laptop computer per student in grades 5 and above.* The laptop system includes:
 - Hardware
 - MacBook Air, 13-inch 128GB flash storage
 - 1.7GHz Dual-Core Intel Core i5
 - 128GB Flash Storage
 - 4GB 1333MHz DDR3 SDRAM
 - Accessory Kit
 - Keyboard (English) & User's Guide
 - Mini Display Port to VGA Adapter
 - USB Ethernet Adapter
 - Apple MacBook Air SuperDrive
 - Headphone/line out
 - Software
 - Microsoft Office
 - Antivirus
 - Anti-spyware protection
 - Other software installed includes: Adobe Acrobat Reader, Flash Player, Shockwave Player, and Windows Media Player
 - CyberSitter® Internet filtering software is available upon request
 - Extras
 - Headset/Microphone combo
 - Unlimited Technical Support
- *One color printer per household.* The HP Color Deskjet printer comes with one ink cartridge, provided the first year of enrollment. Each student receives one ink cartridge each year. One additional cartridge per student may be requested. Supporting documentation may be required if additional cartridges are needed to complete school work.
- *Subsidy for Internet service.* Each household with dial-up service receives \$50.85 paid three times a year. Each household with broadband service (e.g. cable, DSL, or satellite Internet service) receives \$120 paid three times a year. Payments are made during the first week of December, the first week of March, and the first week of June.
- *Student technology management:* Akoben intends to contract with Connections for warehousing, delivery, tech support and overall management of student technology using the AssetAware function in Connexus®.

“Akoben Advantage” Technology Program

In addition to providing each student with a laptop as described above, the Akoben Cyber Charter School shall utilize its trademark Rites of Passage Systems to bridge the digital divide faced by many of Pennsylvania’s households. A computer repair, refurbishing and construction engineering program shall be implemented as a part of the six (6) week student orientation. For the first two (2) weeks of orientation, students will be trained, educated and

challenged in computer repair and refurbishing as a part of their development towards technology education and equipment maintenance. The computers will be obtained from surplus and excess supplies from the Federal and state governments, corporations, donor programs, college and universities, and any other seasoned operation. For the second two (2) weeks of orientation, students will be mentored, trained, educated and challenged in computer engineering and construction of the desktop computer for home use. Akoben shall obtain the computer's components from contactors and vendors that provide the best prices, warranties, shipping and handling. For the final two (2) weeks of orientation, students will be mentored, trained, educated and motivated to install software, advance their experiences and knowledge of using the cyber learning and distance education infrastructure, and will demonstrate mastery of skills at using technology for their on-line courses and educational interfaces.

In addition, an advanced computer lab suite shall be maintained on-site at the Akoben office for use by students, programs, Jegnas, and enrichment activity managers. In this lab suite, computers shall be equipped with advanced graphics software, database design software, and systems that permit the design of software applications (apps). The advanced computer lab suite shall be used by educators and Jegnas for the development of classes, tests, research projects, and the design of addition curricular elements. The advanced computer lab can be scheduled for any after-school activities and weekend programs that are student-focused. In addition, students will be able to check out advanced mobile equipment such as iPads, digital cameras, and digital camcorders, for use at home or in the field.

5. Timetable:

Explanation: Establish a well-developed, realistic plan of action for opening a charter school.

A. Provide a detailed timetable of projected steps and dates leading to the opening of a charter school.

START-UP ACTION PLAN				
Responsible Party: B=Board P=Principal T=Teachers V=Vendors				
Activity	Staffing	Marketing	Systems	Facilities
Oct 2011	Submission of Cyber Charter Application October 3 (B)			
Nov. – Dec. 2011	Board review of selected facilities (B) Preliminary Posting for Principal (B) Application for all necessary facility-related licenses and certifications (B) Approval of charter application by PDE			
Jan. – Mar. 2012	Principal prospect early interviews, shortlist (B) Final selection Principal (B)	Mail, community group and media outreach (B)	System start-up tasks w/Connections (B)	Final selection of space; inspections and CofO; signing of lease (B) Renovations if needed (B)
Apr. 2012	Principal training (P) Recruitment plan for teachers, initial postings (P, B)	Internet outreach Applications open Parent information sessions (P)	Launch of enrollment/ fulfillment systems (P)	Arrangement of utilities and infrastructure B)
May 2012	Teacher interviews and hiring of teachers (P)	Mail and media outreach (P) Parent information sessions (P) Lottery if needed (P)	Finalization of employee handbook, school procedures (B, P) Board approval (B)	Development of safety plan (P) Equipping/ furnishing of facility (P)
June 2012	Hiring of teachers (P)	Parent information sessions and media relations (P) Waitlist if needed (P)	Family access to Education Management System (P, V)	Principal moves into facility (P)
July – early Aug. 2012	Hiring of teachers (P) August: Teachers report to work; training (P, T)	Ongoing outreach and media relations (P)	Family access to Education Management System Student/family online orientation (P, V)	Teachers move into facility (T)
Aug. 2012	School begins (B, P, T, V)	School begins (B, P, T, V)	School begins (B, P, T, V)	School begins (B, P, T, V)

APPENDICES

- A. Curriculum Information
 - A-1. Core Curriculum Details (in separate binder)
 - A-2. Evidence of Alignment, and Sample Lessons
 - A-3. African Heritage and Enrichment Curriculum
- B. Rites of Passage, PRIME STEP, and Globe Trekker Program Overview
- C. Staff Evaluation and Performance Management Framework
- D. Evidence of Community Support
- E. Akoben Cyber Charter School Articles of Incorporation
- F. Akoben By-Laws
- G. Resumes for the Board of Trustees
- H. Letter to School Districts and Intermediate Units
- I. Budgets – Preliminary/Startup and Operating
- J. Facility Information
- K. Child Accounting – Policies and Procedures
- L. Job Descriptions
- M. Draft Student Handbook