

## Executive Summary

### **Dream Catchers Academic Academy (DCAA)**

**"Where academic excellence shapes lives and fulfills dreams"**

The Dream Catchers Academic Academy (DCAA) Charter School is a therapeutic educational program within the District of Columbia designed to assist learning disabled middle school students. DCAA will institute the use of best educational practices for learning-disabled students in sixth, seventh and eighth grades. A dedicated team of educators, administrators, and social workers developed this educational program in order to fulfill specific specialized instruction and accommodations that have been mute within the District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) system. Students who participate in this program will become "Academic Achievers" within an extraordinary alternative program that provides social and academic services required in order to progress to their next stages of academic objectives.

DCPS special education programming has become difficult in providing a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) within the least restrictive environment to students with disabilities, which is in violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). DCPS' failure to provide FAPE under IDEA has resulted in substantial budget increases to include: attorney fees, student assessments, transportation cost for students attending nonpublic schools (\$62 million) and non-public and residential tuition fees (\$120 million). These costs, which continue to rise, have significantly impacted DCPS' budget and the ability to implement successful special education programming needs within local neighborhood schools.

DCAA would like to assist the District of Columbia by providing an alternative educational environment for the Districts population of learning disabled middle school students. DCAA incorporates a non-graded atmosphere of learning, which means that for those students who require intensive accommodations they will be placed according to age and ability.

The mission of DCAA is to ensure that "No Child is Left Behind" by collaboratively linking with the community to provide enriching educational experiences that will develop appropriate social and academic skills, build character, and cultivate higher achievement; so that learning disabled achievers are prepared for higher level opportunities enabling them to fulfill their potential of becoming productive and responsible citizens.

DCAA interest in middle schools originates from recent national research that demonstrates students in this population within The District of Columbia Public Schools are falling further behind and at risk for drop out and other illegal activities. Recent research has also shown that students in the District of Columbia face the following additional challenges:

- 54 percent live in homes headed by single women
- 27 percent live below the poverty line; 60 percent live in families with annual incomes below \$50,000
- 22 percent live in homes where English is not the primary language
- 24 of the 27 public schools serving grades 6 to 8 failed to meet adequate yearly progress goals under the federal No Child Left Behind Law
- 720 middle and junior high school students were picked up by DC police for truancy in 2004-05.
- More than 735 students in grades 6 to 9 dropped out of DCPS in 2002-03.

To combat these statistics, DCAA will consist of three components: Day School Educational Component, Community Outreach Component, and After School Component.

The Day School Educational Component will employ the use of best teaching practices and strategies, standards based curriculum and enrichment educational programs that include objectives, content, expected levels of achievement and procedures for evaluation. The educational program will also include the arts, imagination, and exploration through hands on activities. DCAA will utilize best teaching practices that focus on the students existing abilities and talents to foster student accountability within the learning process.

Our philosophy is based on when given the opportunity all children can achieve; therefore, DCAA will develop lessons that integrate the students' individual educational needs and interests while incorporating community outreach programs during and after school.

The classroom structure will make use of appropriate materials and supplies within a small classroom setting of trained educators and administrators. Due to the specific needs of learning disabled students, there will be one (1) highly qualified teacher and at least one (1) educational therapist, available for every class of eight (8) students. Students will receive all related services as dictated by their Individual Education Plan (IEP). However, DCAA will provide mentors and counselors to ensure that the students are taking advantage of every aspect of their educational program. In addition, it is expected that some students might also require supplemental services and DCAA will ensure that all eligible students receive services, which may include the use of a dedicated aides, tutors and/or assistive technology.

The Community Outreach component will consist of community organizations that will partner with DCAA to provide additional support to students. Inter-agency collaborations within the District of Columbia government agencies will be utilized to provide additional health awareness and support services for DCAA families neighboring colleges and universities will also be utilized to provide enrichment activities such as art, music, and theater. DCAA students will also become an active part in the community by completing volunteer services with businesses and organizations. The After school Component will consist of

mentoring, as well as, individual and group tutoring. DCAA will include the out-of-school-time initiative that aims to build a more coordinated system to improve the quality of after-school and summer programs for all DC students. Mentors will serve as an additional advisor for students.

Dedicated administration and staff will determine the students' unique strengths, requirements, and interests. We will develop lessons that integrate the students' individual educational needs, interests, and community programs into their curriculum. With financial support from DCPS, grants, donations, and the community, DCAA will prepare their students for higher learning achievement by developing the necessary social skills to navigate within the school and community; the academic skills required to successfully participate in high school academics and occupational futures; and the work ethics and communication skills necessary to become successful adults.