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## Group creates charter school plan

BY SARAH LANG  
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Lebanon - A group of parents that wants more school choice in Boone County is in the application process to bring a charter school to the area - and it is looking for input from the community.

Parent Advocates for Gifted Education, or PAGE, is working to create Achieve Academy, a K-8 charter school that would offer a challenging curriculum aimed at high-ability students. But the school would work to teach every student - high ability or not - at their level, said Paula Hudson, a member of the school's organizing committee.

"The whole idea is to provide a challenging environment for students," she said. "But the goal is to allow kids to work at their level and be successful that way."

Many charter schools have a specific focus, like acting or fine arts. The focus of Achieve Academy

would be on academic rigor, said George Piper, a member of the organizing committee.

"We just want what's best for our kids," he said. "And we think a charter school reaches that goal - the best possible education."

Both Piper and Hudson have children who were part of Lebanon schools' high-ability academy at Hattie B. Stokes Elementary before it was closed this school year for budget reasons. The closing of the academy is what brought the charter plan to where it is today, Piper said.

The organizing committee does not plan to have a curriculum that mirrors what the Stokes High Ability Academy had, Piper said, but a curriculum that approaches independent thinking and creativity.

"Hopefully it will excite and compel students to do their best," he said. "They'll tackle problems in a new way."

Other hopes are to include a

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PAULA HUDSON  
Charter school organizational  
committee member

kindergarten class, life sciences - because of Boone County's location between Purdue University and Indianapolis - and a progressive technology approach.

"We want to create something that's looking forward," Piper said.

The group is going through Ball State University as its charter. A charter is like a sponsor, but without financial support, Piper said. Ball State would oversee the school - its finances and its progress - on a yearly basis. Charter schools are

public schools that are still part of the Indiana Department of Education, and as such, must still abide by IDOE regulations, like reaching Annual Yearly Progress benchmarks and taking the ISTEP tests.

And as public schools, charter schools may not charge tuition and must allow any child to attend. As there are no school districts for charter schools, any parent willing to take their child to school at Achieve Academy may enroll. The organizing committee will establish the school in Boone County, but the amount of interest from surrounding counties may determine what part of the county. Hudson said options for the actual building might include leasing an existing building or space in a church.

"The magic number is 200 students. That's what suggests a viable school," Piper said.

If Ball State decides Achieve Academy is a viable school option,

it will issue the charter. The group has already received more than 100 positive responses to the school, Piper said, but they want as much input as possible - positive or negative.

They have set up a survey Web site for the community at [www.surveymonkey.com/s/AchieveAcademy](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/AchieveAcademy).

Achieve Academy would have no impact on property taxes. Since it's part of the IDOE, the state would fund the school, the same way the state funds the general fund of other public corporations. Any other money for the school would come from fundraisers and grants.

"I am confident this will happen on a financial standpoint," Piper said.

If Ball State does not accept the Achieve Academy's charter school this year, Hudson said they have just one more try. If everything goes well, the committee plans to begin classes in the fall of 2011.