

FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW 2010-2011

Proposed School Name: Alma del Mar Charter School

Grades Served At Full Capacity: K-8

Number of Students At Full Capacity: 360

Proposed School Location: New Bedford

Proposed Opening Year: FY2012

Public Statement:

Alma del Mar will be an inclusive, K-8 Expeditionary Learning school that puts New Bedford students on a college trajectory and challenges them to be service-oriented leaders. By engaging in a rigorous academic program with an emphasis on meaningful work, our students will master essential skills and content, take ownership of their learning and think boldly while addressing complex academic and community issues. Our school will be located in the city of New Bedford and have a maximum enrollment of 360 students.

Mission Statement:

Alma del Mar is an inclusive, K-8 Expeditionary Learning school that puts New Bedford students on a college trajectory and challenges them to be service-oriented leaders. By engaging in a rigorous academic program with an emphasis on meaningful work, our students will master essential skills and content, take ownership of their learning and think boldly while addressing complex academic and community issues.

Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:

| School Year | Grade Levels | Total Student Enrollment |
|-------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| First Year | K-2 | 120 |
| Second Year | K-4 | 200 |
| Third Year | K-5 | 240 |
| Fourth Year | K-6 | 280 |
| Fifth Year | K-7 | 320 |

Mission, Vision, and Description of the Community(ies) to Be Served

Primary Strengths

- The mission clearly defines the purpose and values of the school, communicates high academic standards and student success, and is reflected throughout the application in a meaningful way. (Section I.A.)
- The vision illustrates a compelling image of the school and serves as an organizing principle for the application. The vision statement aligns with and expands on the mission and outlines what the school will look like for students, teachers, families,

Primary Weaknesses

- No primary weaknesses.

board members, and the broader New Bedford community and how it will positively impact these stakeholders. (Section I.B.)

- The application provided thoughtful connections between New Bedford students' needs and the proposed school's design to support the value of the proposed school and its ability to serve the families of New Bedford. Within the application and during the interview, the applicant group provided compelling information about the needs of the community of New Bedford and their commitment to serving this community. (Section I.C.)
- As an Expeditionary Learning school, the applicant group has access to resources in staff, leadership and curriculum development that will enhance the applicant group's ability to serve the target student population and provide unique educational programming in New Bedford. (Section I.C.)

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction

Primary Strengths

- The educational philosophy describes clearly the applicant group's six core beliefs (principles) and values which align strongly with the mission and vision statements. (Section II.A.)
- The application provides explicit examples of how the educational philosophy will be integrated into the implementation of a comprehensive educational program and how it will meet the diverse needs of individual students. (Section II.A.)
- The application provided a thorough examination of research pertinent to their educational philosophy and programming choices. The research cited provided support that their approach may improve the academic performance of the diverse learners they intend to serve. (Section II.A.)

Primary Weaknesses

- While the application's curriculum outline provides sample learning expeditions for each grade level, the outline does not fully address the breadth and depth of content and skills taught in the core content areas for the proposed grade levels. (Section II.B.)
- The reviewers commented that the curriculum design process seemed underdeveloped and that the application contained limited information on the refinement of curriculum and instruction during the school year by faculty. (Section II.B.)

- The application describes supporting high standards of achievement for all students through learning expeditions that will allow students to construct meaning through active pedagogy and varied instructional and assessment methodologies. The application emphasizes that learning expeditions will integrate standards from English language arts, mathematics, science, technology, social studies, and the arts. (Section II.B.)
- The application describes specific non-academic goals, called the five commitments, which are emblematic of the proposed school’s mission, academic program, and educational philosophy. These goals will be systematically monitored and reflected on by students, teachers, and families. (Section II.B.)

Assessment System, Performance, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

Primary Strengths

- The application provided clear and cohesive common performance standards that are easy to understand for all stakeholders. Though reviewers were concerned about the use of ‘below basic’ to describe the lowest performing standard and wondered why ‘not demonstrated’ had not been chosen instead to mitigate the negative connotation. (Section II.C.)
- The promotion and graduation standards are based on high standards and are aligned with the school’s mission and educational program. The proposed school has exit requirements at the end of fifth and eighth grade that provide a clear sense of what the students will know and be able to do. (Section II.C.)
- The application described a variety of assessments that are consistent with the proposed school’s mission and educational program. (Section II.D.)

Primary Weaknesses

- Though the application states that student achievement data will be used to inform instruction and improve curriculum effectiveness, it is unclear how the monthly data team meetings will accomplish this outcome. The applicant group indicated during the interview that Expeditionary Learning has the expertise to help develop this component of the assessment system. (Section II.D.)

School Characteristics

Primary Strengths

- The application provided a clear plan for establishing school culture and developing family-school partnerships during Alma Days and the school or class gatherings built into the proposed school’s programming. (Section II.E.)
- The application describes how the five commitments of service, quality, integrity, accountability, and persistence are integrated into the academic program and school culture in direct alignment with the proposed school’s mission and educational philosophy. Commitment cards are used by teachers and students to regularly track progress in demonstrating each of the five commitments. (Section II.E.)
- The applicant group has a commitment from the South Coast Mentoring Initiative for Learning (SMILES) to recruit, screen and train mentors to work with students in literacy-based programs. They are also developing relationships with other organizations in the New Bedford area, such as The Ocean Explorium, Working Waterfront Festival, ArtWorks!, Partners for the Arts and Community, GiftsToGive, and The Coalition for Buzzard’s Bay. All of these organizations have submitted letters of intent to collaborate with the applicant group in developing programming or assisting in curricular components for the proposed school. (Section II.E.)

Primary Weaknesses

- No primary weaknesses.

Special Student Populations and Student Services

Primary Strengths

- Within the curriculum and instruction section, the applicant group provides instructional strategies to provide all learners access to the general education curriculum. The strategies named within the application include small group and peer learning strategies, leveled reading and language groups, and the Response to

Primary Weaknesses

- While RTI methodology is proposed as the framework for meeting the needs of diverse learners prior to referral for services, the application provides a limited discussion of how the processes and procedures related to delivering special education services will operate.

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <p>Intervention (RTI) approach. (Section II.F.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The application states that all general education teachers will be trained in the four Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) categories and in supporting students with special needs. (Section II.F.) • The application describes the process to identify and evaluate English language learners and indicates that Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students will be provided support in English language development by an English as a Second Language/English Language Development (ESL/ELD) licensed instructor. (Section II.F.) | <p>(Section II.F.)</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|

Enrollment and Recruitment

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><u>Primary Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed recruitment plan described broad outreach to families which includes advertising on Spanish and Portuguese language radio and outreach events at New Bedford low-income housing communities and social service agencies, such as the Immigrant Assistance Center, Community Connections, Head Start, and Community Health Center. (Section III.A.) | <p><u>Primary Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the draft enrollment policy provides information that the proposed school understands the Department’s enrollment data submission requirements and some of the application and lottery guidelines, the actual policy is incomplete and missing a full explanation of the proposed school’s student eligibility requirements, application process, lottery procedures, enrollment notification, waitlist, and backfill procedures. (Section III.A.) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Capacity and School Governance

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><u>Primary Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant group has a diverse skill set and professional expertise related to education, finance, community development, mental health services, non-profit management, and law. They have tangible ties to the New Bedford community. (Section III.B.) • The founding group shows a willingness to learn and has been proactively developing knowledge about charter schools and Expeditionary Learning schools during the past year through | <p><u>Primary Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No primary weaknesses. |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

school visits. The capacity of the group to address these challenges is increased by a proposed board member who has worked in a Massachusetts charter school for over 10 years and the proposed relationship with Expeditionary Learning. (Section III.B.)

- The governance model is a thoughtful workable structure that encourages an appropriate relationship between the board of trustees, school leader and administration. It includes a clear description of the roles and responsibilities of the board. The application includes a clear process for the recruitment, selection, and development plans for board members and intends to create performance goals for itself as part of evaluating the work of the board. (Section III.C.)
- The application describes a viable process for policy making that involves parent advisory councils and school constituencies. The applicant group developed comprehensive bylaws through this process. (Section III.C.)

Management

Primary Strengths

- The organizational chart provides a clear description of the reporting structure while the narrative explicitly describes the role and responsibilities of all staff members from the Executive Director to the teachers. (Section III.C. and III.D.)
- During the interview, the applicant group and a representative from Expeditionary Learning (EL) were able to clarify the professional development programming provided to teachers at the proposed school and the role of EL school designers in providing the necessary professional development. (Section II.B. and III.D.)

Primary Weaknesses

- While the professional development and evaluation practice is robustly designed to benefit from frequent observations and opportunities to collaborate, reviewers believed implementing such a system would prove challenging. The management of daily, weekly, biweekly and monthly meetings among teachers, school leaders and EL school designers during morning Team Meetings, daily common planning time, and professional development on Fridays will require a tremendous amount of planning and oversight. (Section III.D.)

Facilities, Transportation, and Finances

Primary Strengths

- The application describes a viable process for conducting a facility search based on reasonable assumptions. (Section III.E.)

Primary Weaknesses

- No primary weaknesses.