

Alma del Mar Charter School
Questions as derived from Panel Review

Mission and Vision

1. Why an Expeditionary Learning school?

- Kids need rich content knowledge to be successful. New Bedford has lots of low income kids who don't get these contents through their family, so experiential learning is key to getting these kids caught up.
- Tried this idea of experiential learning with Citizen Schools, and it works.

2. What do you mean by 'thinking boldly'? What would indicate to you that students have developed these skills?

- The ability to apply ideas in a new context.
- Displaying creativity in the sense that you master essential knowledge or skills and are able to apply those in a new context.

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction

1. What progress has been made in curriculum development for the founding grades (grades K-2)?

- Over the next couple of months, we will bring together Will Gardner and the design team to look at the standards and prioritize them. As we work on this, we'll pull in the expertise of Expeditionary Learning (EL).

a. Principal and EL school designer collaboration

- EL will put on the table the standards and learning expedition curriculum maps aligned to the state standards. In year one, EL will help the founding team work from the place of a proven model. We'll put in place the standards and projects for kids. We'll work with the founders to customize the curriculum. Start with the proven model and modify as needed.
- We have an online site that guides teachers through the process of developing lesson plans; there are sample lesson plans as well.
- We're not going to hire staff and expect them to start from scratch. We're looking for principal candidates to have strong expertise in finding proven curriculum materials.

2. How often will the ILT (instructional leadership team) meet to perform curriculum development once the proposed school is operational?

- The ILT will meet several times every semester, at least once a quarter. They will take input from teacher teams who are looking at data on a regular basis.

a. Is your plan to form a curriculum committee once the proposed school has fully expanded? How would this differ from the ILT?

- Yes, and it will be ongoing.

- 3. Please explain the process of instructional rounds and how this practice will inform the improvement and refinement of curriculum and instruction.**
 - This is a process Expeditionary Learning uses in many schools. Basically, the rounds are a chance for all constituencies from the board to outside partners to get into the classroom and look at essential components of teaching and learning. Instructional rounds are a way of joining what's happening in class with the board's ideal for what kids can achieve.
 - Rounds are infrequent. It's about looking at overall instructions. Not used for evaluation or coaching for individual teachers. Classes will be selected for observations on a rotation basis.

- 4. What about professional development training for general education teachers in instructional strategies prior to school opening?**
 - We already set up time in August for teachers to come and get on board. Students and parents will have a day of introduction too.
 - The principal will be the instructional leader of the school and will help to put together professional development trainings. Right from the beginning, we'll be looking to put together the team to make all the preparation.

- 5. How will the consultant from Expeditionary Learning (EL) provide coaching to the staff?**
 - EL will work with school team on a calendar of events. Will want to meet 3 weeks before the school opens. Will work with the school to create a code of clear expectations for students and teachers. Will create a consistency list around school culture and behavior to ensure consistent messaging.
 - EL will provide two coaches to the school for that work. These same coaches will work with the school through out the year in a continuum of professional development, providing teachers with summer training, classroom-based coaching and specific skill institutes throughout the year. These elements contribute to a coherent annual work plan that the board will approve to get specific about student achievement and programmatic consistency.
 - EL provides a week long elementary and secondary professional development institute in the summer. There are also opportunities in August for teachers to be involved in learning expeditions. There's one full week of staff development specific to Alma del Mar before school begins. There will be Alma Days, which are half days for the students where they will be engaged in building our culture; in the afternoons, teachers will have time for professional development.
 - Also freeing up the principals to give teachers targeted feedback on regular basis.

- 6. What's the role of the arts in the curriculum and culture of the school?**
 - It's important. There will be 90 minutes of literacy and 60 minutes of math a day. Because of the extended day and year, we have the opportunity to make sure kids get arts, music, and wellness too. We want to teach the whole person. Aside from the academic benefits, research shows that when you have a strong arts curriculum, it helps with academics and school culture too.

- It's about the theory of multiple intelligences, which is endorsed by EL and by our model. We know that you need to have arts and music as part of learning.
- New Bedford is a small city, but we have many arts resources to build expeditions around, to engage kids.

a. How will the arts and media specialists function in the school?

- Will have a class that is arts for arts' sake to teach to the arts standards. Will also work with classroom teachers to help integrate the arts standards with academic content too.
- 25 hours of contact time with the arts, and 7 hours for integration.

7. How do you envision weaving the Five Commitments (non-academic goals of service, quality, integrity, accountability, and persistence) throughout the school culture and educational programming?

- We'll weave them in in every possible way. Service is right there in the mission. We expect top quality from all the staff. Accountability is built into your curriculum, in everything you do. Persistence is about doing things 10 times if necessary to get something right. Integrity is the key – the school will have integrity of school, and the community is going to shine.

a. How would your first Alma Days introduce these concepts to students and staff?

- In Alma Days, we want to make sure that parents understand we will push high expectations, homework completion, and partnerships with parents. Want students to know that these are our expectations.
- Have each day filled with activities around the Commitments. Develop a concrete experience for the students around a particular value.

b. How will the Commitment Card practice be implemented by staff and practiced by students?

- Teachers are responsible for filling those out. In quarterly reports, the board will get them as a component of the dashboard.
- The vision for our school is very clear and strong. It will get more exciting when the principal and staff come on board. I'm excited to see the creativity from the staff about what the commitments will look like in the school.
- The commitments make up the culture that we envision the education process will unfold in. We expect that board, staff, parents, and students will all be committed to those commitments.

Assessment, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

1. What academic supports will be in place for students who are struggling?

- We'll get the assessment data to figure out what problems exist for each student. We have the RTI model, individual support, small group support, afterschool support, tutoring, and other services such as a lending library.

- Have time built in the enrichment block at the end of the day. We're committed to hiring specialist teachers to work with students.
 - We have partnerships with other agencies and volunteer groups for tutoring.
 - Decisions are made in conjunction with the parents, so there is support at home.
- 2. What happens if grade exit standards are not being met sufficiently?**
- a. Promotion requires proficiency (3 or 4) in 75% of essential standards for each subject**
 - There will be long discussions with parents. We will be watching the kids, so we catch them at a younger age. No set answer.
 - b. Will the school offer any summer programming for students at risk of retention? ('recommend approved online and summer programs')**
 - We have lots of resources in New Bedford for programming. Will have conversations with parents around this.
 - As new school, we're not doing summer programming. Might take it on at a later point.
- 3. How will the monthly data team meetings work? Who participates on the data team?**
- Grade level teacher meetings are once a month to look at data. EL has the structure and templates for what data to look at.

School Characteristics

- 1. How will remediation and extension programming work during the 'acceleration' part of the school day?**
- "Acceleration" provides additional support for remediation and also for challenge work.
- 2. What type of instruction occurs during the two specials each day?**
- The two specials are taught by the arts and media specialist. Kids will get two specials each day.
 - Media specialist would teach health, PE, music, arts.
 - These specials will teach to the particular arts standards. In addition, specialists will be resources to classroom teachers.
- 3. Tell us about the partnerships that you are developing for your proposed school and how it will enhance your educational programming.**
- a. Smiles mentoring program** (early elementary literacy and mentoring)
 - b. Gifts to Give**
 - Partnerships are mostly through the expeditions. We have a lot of resources available at the city's door steps. As we talk to other organizations, we will develop more options too.
 - These partnerships won't cost us money.

- A real strength of the school is that we have built-in opportunities for these relationships and partnerships to come to fruition. We are leveraging the strength of our community for the kids.
- Smiles is committed to providing mentors for our students. Early Literacy Consortium. One-on-one focus on early literacy.

Special Student Populations and Services

1. How will you provide equal access to the curriculum and the required support services to students with special needs and/or English language learners during the official school day?

a. When is pullout scheduled?

- As far as giving extra supports - we are hiring an ELL teacher. Besides having a teacher who will provide PD to teachers in working with ELLs and working with students around second language acquisition, we feel that the Expeditionary Learning model gives purpose for our students to learn English. There's a difference between social and academic language. We'll have assistant teachers. We have additional afterschool programming. Lots of support. Which support is needed will depend on looking at assessments to identify the needs of our student population's. We will make sure we will access what ever services are needed.
- For students with disabilities, this will be an inclusive school.
- Pull outs will be implemented as needed in the acceleration block towards the end of the day. We will do as much push-in as needed and pull-out as needed as determined by students needs.

2. Please describe the proposed staffing to implement both ESL and special education programming. How does your staffing reflect your ability to adapt to the needs of your student population?

- Yes, we will be flexible with staffing.

a. One SPED teacher during year one (1 per 2 grades when expanded); Director of Student and Family Services; ½ ELL teacher year one...

- The Director of Student and Family Services will provide administration for both ELL and SPED students.

b. They say they expect 5% LEPs on page 28. Is that a typo? The district has 25 % (page 25).

- The district actually has 3.6% LEPs. 5% is higher than the district's number. We're ready to serve a higher number of LEPs if necessary.
- In the district, 22% of kids do not have English as their first language, but they're not all necessarily classified as LEPs.

c. How will teachers obtain SEI category training?

- Starting Year 1, we will offer a cycle of training. It's unrealistic to do trainings for all four categories at one time.

Enrollment and Recruitment

1. Have you developed a draft enrollment policy and student application?

- We have been working on an enrollment policy; we will have a draft policy based on the opening handbook.
- We have over 200 pre-applications in already.
- Relying on community partners to help with outreach.

Capacity

1. What Expeditionary Learning experience do you have?

a. What charter school experience do you have?

- We've developed a lot of experience with charter schools over the last 9 months.
- EL has experience with 60 charter schools currently in operation. We worked with Codman Academy in Dorchester and a rural charter school in Massachusetts. Also, we are in 12 charters that are slated to open.
- I've worked in charter schools for the past 10 years. As a design team member and a board member, I have offered to work with Will on an as-needed basis. I have provided mentoring to other charter schools. I worked as a member of the founding staff in the previous school I was at, which was a new charter.
- The board has spent time visiting other charter schools. We did homework and readings on charter schools. It's an on-going learning process. Will continue to reach out to experienced charter schools to learn.

2. What are the qualifications you are looking for in an Executive Director? (page 37)

a. What process did you follow to select Will Gardner?

b. Why is he the best candidate for this role?

- Will Gardner brought us together. In a way, we all made decisions on our own to be involved with this effort based on our initial impression of Will. We have been working together for 9-12 months, educating ourselves about charter schools and about Will. We're impressed with his abilities, his knowledge, and his desire to learn more.
- We reviewed his resume and checked his references. We put together a professional development plan for Will, which focuses on networking with other charter schools and learning more about EL.
- This board has experience in business, nonprofit, government etc. We have already witness how Will draw upon us as resources.

- Will worked 3 years at Citizen Schools where he turned around a laggard site in New Bedford. He clearly has the intellect, the ability, but also the passion for this work.
 - Will lives by the standards we expect the school to live by.
- 3. Have you identified potential candidates for the other leadership roles at the proposed school?**
- a. Principal**
 - Have four great candidates already.
 - b. Director of Student and Family Services**
 - A few candidates.

Governance and Management

- 1. What is your in-house finance experience?**
- a. Who on your board has finance experience?**
 - I was development chair for 9 years and successfully raised amounts between 12 to 24 million dollars. I'm well versed for what it takes to raise money.
 - I have raised money as part of South Coastal Legal Services.
 - I work as an environmental advocate, but primarily I am a fundraiser. In our organization of 15 staff, we just completed a \$15million campaign and preparing to launch a \$10million capital campaign.
 - As a school leader, I have prepared budgets for small and big schools, with student populations up to 880.
 - I'm a grant writer.
 - Will has developed and managed budgets for Citizen Schools New Bedford.
- 2. How often do you expect to meet?**
- We have blocked out the month after the charter approval decision, realizing it will be a very hands-on period for the board.
 - As far as formal meetings, the standard will be once a month. If we need to meet more, we will.
- 3. Please give examples of board versus administrative level policy decision-making.**
- Daily operations and budgeting would be the responsibility of the Executive Director and staff.
 - The board has oversight responsibility and has to make sure our Executive Director is on track. The board has responsibility for meeting the mission of the charter.
 - The board approves the budget and is responsible for fiscal soundness. We'll have a finance committee and treasurer. Will Gardner will work with an academic excellence committee to approve curriculum. We'll have a strategic

planning and assessment committee – a standing committee – whose job is to monitor progress along the terms of the charter and toward renewal.

Facilities and Transportation

1. Has any further progress been made with the three sites that you have identified for potential school facilities?

- We have a couple of strong options and have reviewed a dozen sites by now. We understand there is a lot of work, but we know the path to get it done. The challenge is getting renovations done before the school opens.

Budget

1. How was your budget developed?

- A board member developed the budget.