

Bridge Boston Charter School

Questions as derived from Panel Review

Mission and Vision

1. What do you mean by “focus on the whole child” and how is that reflected in concrete terms throughout the application?

- “Whole child” refers to the medical, dental, social, emotional aspects – everything that makes a person whole. If you’re not healthy or well fed, you won’t be able to focus on your work. Take care of those things and the child will be able to focus better on the curriculum.
- We have a specific position, the director of student services, who will help families identify the needs getting in the way of the students. Will create outreach teams with community partnerships we have already established.
- Serve the whole child by integrating into the curriculum not only the academic but also social benchmarks, such as resiliency, respect, self- esteem and the understanding that they are the stewards of their own future. These benchmarks tie into their social development as well as academics and physical well being.

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction

1. What would a rigorous academic program mean for K1, K, and 1?

- Right from the beginning, it’s about establishing a transparent culture where kids are expected to do their best—academically, behaviorally and as community members. Report cards often say things like “child reading on grade level.” We want our evaluation home reports to have specifics like knowing the oa dipthong, so the child and the family know what they’re working on.
- In developing the curriculum, we talked about what we think kids can handle. At 3 years old, kids’ brains are ready for all kinds of information. Having them at such young age, we will provide them with the Success for All curriculum, which has KinderCare and wraparound components, including math and science. We will push beyond the normal academic expectations for kids who are entering without a lot of home support.
- Rigor often means higher levels to people, for example third graders studying fourth grade materials. That’s not how we’re using the term here. We are really thinking about habits of mind. Children are coming into elementary schools are inquirers; they want to know the why and how. The way our curriculum is rigorous is in teaching them habits of questioning and exploration. It’s about asking why things work the way they do and inculcating this way of thinking that will propel them throughout their academic and personal careers.
- Rigor is about the belief that children can absorb as much as you put out there. Our approach is cross curricular and interdisciplinary. We want to embed in students the passion we feel for the school.

a. Have you considered the EEC curriculum demands?

- Yes.
- One of the reasons I feel so linked to Bridge Boston is because of the passion and commitment they bring to building a foundation for children starting with early childhood. These well-informed educators and colleagues have presented a curriculum that children will be able to embrace easily.
- We also have small classes to help build trust. We have small classrooms with experienced teachers.

2. What exactly do you mean by full-service programming? You mention partnerships in the application. Do you have any formal agreements at this point? What programming will they provide? How will students be identified and selected for the full service programming? What would be the services available to students entering this school through the grades?

- Full-service program will be based on what we developed at Epiphany where we have strong partnerships with agencies, including Forsyth Dental, Northeastern Audiology, and New England Eye. Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC) and the Walker Partnerships will be helping us with therapists and family counselors. Mattapan Community Health Center and Codman Square Health Center have agreed to serve as medical land bases for us, to provide vaccinations for students and see kids with special health needs.
- No cost for students to have these services except that the school will pay for a coordinator. All these services exist in Boston, but it's so difficult for people to access them, so the school becomes the most logical place to commission that work.
- The other type of partnership is academic. For example, an informal partnership has been established with Boston College Lynch School of Education and with Harvard Graduate School of Education. These informal partnerships can provide us with tutors.
- The other piece to the full-service program is the case-by-case base of doing what it takes to support families and bring resources to bear. Parent partnerships to come from parent programming. All these pieces exist piecemeal in a lot of places, but we have a strong commitment to bringing them to one place to have a real unified approach.

3. On the Epiphany School website, you state that Epiphany, “does not proselytize, but the school does bear witness to the idea that we find God in and through each other” You go on to say that” Epiphany is about action inspired by faith.” Will that philosophy be a part of this school?

- No, this philosophy will not be part of Bridge Boston.
- What will be part of it is every child has values and every adult has value. We're open, we're transparent, we help each other, and we learn from each other. We

do rounds of classrooms and evaluations of our teachers, principal, executive director. We ask families for information, because we want to be better. It's not about religion. It's about the belief in people and in us as a group and in our potential to achieve by working together.

4. What makes your classrooms “fascinating”? What is the approach – methodology?

- We do this through hands-on experience and involve the children as partners. For example, you can be learning about the farm, have fieldtrip to a farm, and have the children translate their learning into classroom decorations.
- We would use an interdisciplinary curriculum and the school structure would be created to support this. Have built-in teacher collaboration time. Have a framework for teachers to work with and adjust according to student interest.

5. How will the teacher evaluations work? How does “peer mentoring” work? How will the school determine the professional development needs of the staff and when will it take place?

- Every teacher will have at least two formal evaluations. The principal will observe class, popping in and spending as much time in classroom as possible. The principal may notice an issue that all staff have trouble with and can choose to tackle this in professional development for all.
- Peer mentoring is about giving feedback and helping each other. Teachers can select a peer to do classroom observations of them. Using these observations, the principal will sit down with a master teacher and discuss professional development opportunities.
- Professional development is more than just checking through pro forma. What I see on this board is a true culture of improvement. We value teachers, kids, parents. I see lots of charter schools with young teachers. We are not built that way. We plan on hiring experienced lead teachers.

Assessment, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

1. How will ISLP work?

- Work on determining each child's individual and specific goals for them. Gather information and data to consider goals for individual child. Use the I-block after lunch to work on some of these goals.
- a. **Why will the ISLP's be completed and updated by the child's advisor, instead of homeroom teacher?**
 - The fewer children someone is responsible for, the better. Six students per advisor, who would actively involve parents and review student data.
 - We want every child in school to be known by every adult in the building. Advisors can help build relationships with the children. Idea would be to have multiple adults focused on each child's needs.

- Roster review built in every other week. Advisor and teachers reviewing what's working for the child or not. We want children who need the most academic support to succeed.
- This system gives the students an advocate for their individual needs. Advocates can connect with families to identify what's happening with families too. This is important for students who come from broken homes. To come to a school with all this attention speaks to quality of education, care and concern to help children succeed.

2. What happens to students who are not on track to meet benchmarks in February, how does staff collaborate to implement intervention strategies?

- We do constant evaluation to determine who need special services. Director of student services will keep track. Goal is to get every child to be proficient, even to mastery in whatever topic. Intern teachers would provide tutoring. Perhaps some students only need reinforcement at home, so we would send them home with flash cards. Special education teacher also there to provide services.
- The board has an academic excellence committee to review student scores among other things. Would also invite external experts to review student data and address discrepancies.
- Collaboration with others is a big deal. We're committed to going the distance for the students and will collaborate to open every door we can.

3. How will some of the social benchmarks be able to be measured – “readiness to lead by example” or “community spirit”?

- These social benchmarks will be inculcated at an early age, so students know what's expected of them in terms of behavior. During first two days of the school year, students will know how this school runs in terms of behavior.
- By 7th grade, children would become confident in public speaking. Ultimately, we want to see children become advocates for themselves, not only for their needs but also for their strengths and talents.
- A student lining up appropriately is example of leading by example. We will point this out to the students.
- Teachers do need to meet before school starts to set up a rubric for how to interpret these social benchmarks to make it as objective as possible. Advisors can talk with students and reinforce accountability at all time.

School Characteristics

1. How will the school's unique educational programming be implemented throughout the school day? What's the purpose of I-block? Advisory?

- The purpose behind I-block is the sense of knowing that all kids on any given day or week are not all behind in the same area or fascinated by the same thing. It allows for differentiation. It can be used to do enrichment or remediation.

- In terms of managing, would use intern teachers, special education teachers, administrators, and even technology. Similar to a center model. Kids will get a folder that day indicating whether they will use the computer or working with the intern teacher on the dipthong.
- We won't have actual group meetings for advisory in the early grades; will mostly be through parent relationships. In later grades, we will block in time for advisories to meet.

2. How will the afterschool program be coordinated to meet the students' needs? Why is afterschool mandatory for 5th through 8th grade? Why is it considered "afterschool"? What will staff look like?

- Staffing done by interns, supervised by principal and dean of students. Department of Children and Families will be involved with training for interns to spot certain issues not noticed during regular classroom day.
- Reason for having the afterschool program be optional for earlier grades is that some parents of younger students feel that a school day beyond 3 p.m. is too long. At the same time, other parents need childcare until they get out of work.
- Afterschool is great time for enrichment and even for play, which is missing for lots of kids. Competitive sports are important to our students – it has proven to be really good for them, for exercise, for sportsmanship.
- Between 5th to 8th grades is a challenging period for kids. This is the time when kids begin to explore gangs and sexual behaviors. Keeping them engaged at schools is good for them.
- It's about establishing an ethos where school is the place where you're safe and cared for and that there are constructive things for you to do there.

3. Please describe the intern teacher program that you propose. What would a typical intern's responsibility be?

- It's a service program for students right out of college. Some have education background, or math background, or simply want to teach. The pay is low but we take care of all living expenses (housing, health insurance). AmeriCorps provides stipends for school loans. We budget for housing, health insurance.
- We have a lot of interested applicants. They work long days. They're in the classroom helping to serve as student teachers. They have direct contact with families. There's a partnership with Boston College to get a master's degree.
- Interns have mentors and meet with the principal every week. Training happens for a week before school starts. It's a lot less about teaching lessons and more about interacting with kids. From students' perspective, the interns help to bridge the gap since they are a little closer to the students' age.
- Our intern program is about young adults who want to be in urban education. 80% of them stay in urban education.
- Intern program at Bridge hopes to replicate experience and successes at Epiphany. One of the great outcomes of intern program at Epiphany is that we've been able to attract great male teachers of color who have come and stayed. They serve as role models providing for the students.
- Measure of success is our students coming back to work as interns.

Special Student Populations and Services

1. How will the school provide supports for English language learners from the first day of school?

a. Please discuss staffing and instruction. Why does SEI begin in first grade? Are you aware that SEI is required at all grade levels?

- We don't know exactly who we are going to get at the school. We don't know what level of language ability students will have. As we understand it, there are slightly different regulations about what you need to do at each grade level.
- At least one of our teachers will be a certified ESL teacher. We see kindergarten as an immersion program. Though we will be there supporting children learning the English language, we see that many of the things that go with Universal Design and literacy development for students who are pre-literate, like multiple representations of materials, clear lists, labeling...support English language learning for children.
- We will draw on members of our community to provide the language support for students with needs. This is an area where we will need to adjust programming according to what the student population looks like.

2. How will general education and sped teachers collaborate?

- There is one special education teacher who operates more on referral basis. Will look at data on specific students. Special education teacher will make sure IEP is adhered to. Students won't be separated, but integrated as much as possible.
- Philosophically, we feel strongly that students should stay in classroom. I am a certified special education teacher. There will be time for OT and PT when a child may be removed, and there will be opportunities when an OT will come in to work with children if necessary.
- Special education teacher will have set collaborative planning time with teachers. Will be a protected and sacred time block.

3. Why is the nurse part time for the first four years?

- Because we're starting small, the nurse can give care at time when he/she is in building and can train someone to handle things when he/she is not there. As the student body grows, we may want to think about a full time position.
- We built in flexibility in budget for full time nurse if necessary.

Enrollment and Recruitment

1. How do you expect attrition to impact enrollment numbers?

- We expect that we would lose up to 4 students a year. This is a very liberal number. This is because we will do anything to keep you.

- Example: a student was moving to Chelsea to be in foster care, and we did our best to keep the student at our school though he was moving and changing family. If you're committed to do this work, the kids will stay. It's a tough area of work for charter schools, but this is what charter schools should be judged by.

Capacity

2. If chartered, what will happen to Epiphany once seven key administrators, teachers, board members, and/or volunteers focus their efforts towards the start-up of Bridge Boston?

- Epiphany is seeking to expand. Epiphany is extremely strong and it is in good hands. Bridge is a separate school from Epiphany.
- It's an important opportunity to work with K – 8 and with families for 10 years. We have let go of Epiphany. Now Epiphany has another board president doing perfectly good job and has experienced good continuity.
- Great to have experienced past board to bring knowledge to new school.

3. Have you gone to the State Ethics Commission regarding some of the potential conflicts of interest that were indicated in the application?

- No, but founding board is cognizant of it and will check.

4. What specific challenges do you expect to encounter with a significantly larger school and different grade span? What expertise do you have that will help you effectively address these challenges?

- One challenge is growing philanthropic giving. I expect we can meet or exceed this challenge. There are lots of folks who looked at Epiphany and said if it were to exist in the public sphere, they would help.
- We have relationships with foundations and individuals who are excited about this school and mission. Want to create awareness of Bridge and its distinction. Want to build an external community of Bridge to support the internal school community.
- Excited to meet the challenge of fundraising and to leverage the people resources, for example volunteers or interns.
- Another challenge is to provide full service for 300+ kids – which will be hard to turn off for people working in school. We're starting small and building up. We will have families for longer, so we will know students and their needs and won't be as overwhelmed. This spring, hiring 5 teachers and 5 interns.
- We're deliberate and purposeful about wanting to draw in the neediest kids, so this is what we're preparing for.
- The bandwidth is here. We're going to start small and will work as SWAT team to handle new challenges, but the group is here.
- Going from a private institution to a public one is a challenge. There's a piece of the school that goes beyond educating the child within four walls. Epiphany really embraces the community it lives in. We want to be respectful of where we are moving into. Want to treat existing organizations there as allies.

Governance and Management

1. How did you arrive at this salary structure?

- \$55,000 as starting point for teachers who will be substantially experienced. The charge to the principal is to hire the best teachers.
- Special education and ELL teacher would be in the same pay scale. We intend to have published pay scale, so that people know they are being treated fairly.
- We looked at other charter schools (Neighborhood House, Renaissance) and drew knowledge from one of our board member's master teacher training program.
- We're not expecting to pull experienced teachers from BPS, but we have been getting great teachers.
- We feel there's more than dollar figure to keeping people in an organization, and we're strongly committed to developing that environment.

2. Since the application, you have selected a potential Executive Director. What are the qualifications you are looking for in an ED? What process did you follow to select Dr. Williams?

- In an ED, we are looking for someone with experience in managing an organization—a school, a health center, or nonprofit—so they understand system and structure. Someone who can build a common culture; who has a can-do attitude who instills a sense of confidence in the staff.
- Recognize that some leaders are stronger in some areas than others; therefore, the board will be crucial to support, supplement and provide oversight.
- We hired Jennifer Daly as the principal, and we know her very well. Have worked with her for 15 years. We have terrific leader in Jen. Give us leverage to find someone to round out Jen's capacities.
- Although Dr. Williams is currently acting ED, we are concurrently looking for a permanent ED. She has been board president for the YMCA and a school. Has fundraised for different organizations. Role of ED is to make sure our charter is secured, that we're serving our families, hitting all regulations etc.
- Dr. Williams has started reaching out to providers for insurance, food service, furniture. We want to have policies in place already, so that the day after the school is chartered, we can start with a board meeting to approve these policies, which have been thoroughly discussed.

Budget

1. How will you achieve your fundraising goals? Will you be able to sustain the fundraising necessary? What is your track record for fundraising? Are you concerned about existing donor burnout?

- Not concerned about existing donor burnout. We raise \$2.5M a year every year for Epiphany. A lot of people have told us they're interested in this school, but can't support private schools.
- People get why Bridge is a valuable school and they want to be a part of it. We've visited foundations and such. We're only looking at \$175,000 for the first year, and that's manageable.

- Sustainability is really important. The way you sustain something is through small concerted development action plans. We need to do work to invite people to understand what Bridge is about.
- I don't think we'll be running into competition with other charter schools, since they are not full-service. We have a good and unique idea in wanting to serve the neediest kids. We're going to provide full-service mission with partners in the community. Not going to be about increasing the budget in philanthropy dollars.
- Public source of funding is the most compelling. Anything beyond that is icing.

2. What full-service programming does Epiphany provide students? What portion of those services do you plan to replicate @ Bridge? Will all the cost of full-service programming be absorbed by the agency partners/service providers or fee for service from families?

- We have 7 or 8% of our budget for full service programming. That is extrapolating from Epiphany's experience.
- Separate item for contract service provider – half of our special needs kids will need this.
- 50-60% of expenses for the Director of Student Services will be to take care of full-service programs. This is actually more about time allocation than actual expenses. Most of our families have insurance to pay for things they need, but they just don't know how to access it. So it becomes human hours to work with families to chase down paperwork.
- Full-service means connecting students and families to needed resources. If the school can become that central node where all these services can come together, the ripple effects would be profound. If school delivers what it says it will, and other partners deliver too, the sense of trust will be developed.