

Boston Green Academy

Questions as derived from Panel Review

Mission and Vision

1. Define “green” as it relates to your school. What is a green education? What is a green leader?

- The “green” aspect of the school is about embracing the natural world and the environment and incorporating it into classroom learning. Because of our location next to Boston Harbor, we can use the harbor as an outdoor classroom.
- We have a lot of partners also engaged in greening our city and green technology, right in South Boston (where the school will be).
- We’re not simply talking about adding recycling to the school or doing an energy audit. We will be using “green” as way to engage and excite our students. To open the doors for them to the green economy.
- The problems of the world need solving, and we want graduates of our school to be poised to do this. Leadership, global citizenship and science are the focus. To access all these exciting things going on in the world, students need skills and knowledge. We will infuse “green” in all our classes – the humanities, hard sciences, and math. The heart of our teaching is about real world problem solving and preparing our students for college and the 21st century workforce.

a. How will this school prepare students for careers in the green economy?

- The design will be to have students work as much as possible beyond the confines of the classroom through internships and projects-based learning. Taking the Fenway high school approach.
- The Venture Program is an opportunity for students to be released to do an internship in the community as a core component and requirement for graduation. Our South Boston location affords access to public transportation for students.
- There will be project weeks for students to go out to places. There will be time for professional development for teachers, where students can do outside work too.

2. You have indicated, since the original application, that instead of opening in 2012-13 you would like to open in 2011-12. Have decisions been made about an opening date?

- The timing shift is entirely responsive to the district’s needs. As things have changed, the district has thought to merge the South Boston education complex. The district would close Odyssey and reopen it as Boston Green Academy. The district would be eager for Boston Green Academy to open fall 2011.

a. What challenges do you see with this limited preparation time?

- The board has discussed these changes. We had planned to open with only grades 6-9, and now it will be 6-12. We will have to develop curriculum for the later grades.

- The other challenge is about inheriting former students at Odyssey. We are not purely recruiting students who are attracted to this green concept. We are excited about building a new school culture at Odyssey.

Description of the Community (ies) to be Served

1. How did you determine parent, teacher and staff support for your proposed school?

- It was Superintendent Johnson's decision that our school design would be superimposed on the existing Odyssey high school. Because of that, we didn't have a chance to develop family interest. However, the existing program at Odyssey does have some green elements, such as a roof that is slated to be greened.
- The district plans to conduct conversations with families about this transition. The current Odyssey leadership has no resistance toward the transition. We have a series of events planned in the near-term to talk to current students. We are committed to students who are there right now.
- In terms of staff, we will have to talk to them on a case-by-case basis. To the extent that existing staff meet our criteria, we would be happy to keep them on. However, we do want to retain our hiring autonomy.

Budget

1. What services is the management fee to the district paying for?

- The budget was written this way because of existing budgeting procedures at BPS. This is our estimate of the total income based on dollars/pupil. BPS takes fees for services off the top as in-kind contributions, and then put the remaining monies in the bank account for the school.
- Additional in kind services from the district include the building, custodial services, payroll services, police services, and general overhead and insurance.

a. Central administrative support?

- This is the standard non-discretionary fee charged to all schools regardless of its being a traditional, pilot, or Horace Mann school. For example, a sliver of the superintendent's salary is in there; prorated labor relations expenses are also in there.

b. Instructional services ‘buy back’?

- We purchased “buy back” service from BPS, so that our students may be able to go to BPS summer schools.
- Shared expenses are probably lower now that we're at Odyssey instead of being at our own freestanding school. We would be sharing expenses – for safety, food services and a library – with (BPS') Excel high school.

2. Will you be retaining supplies from the school that is closing or from BPS?

- Desks, chairs and infrastructure will be left for us.

- The current leadership has even said he will refrain from spending large amounts of money in the second semester without consulting Boston Green first.

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction

1. What are the successful practices of Fenway High School?

- Fenway was designed for failing students from BPS, so there are a lot of designs to support students, such as advisories, projects-based learning and looping. There is also a senior institute where you can achieve through merits and self evaluation.
- At Fenway, it doesn't matter what you teach; it matters what students learn. We have graded seminars at the school where students have to come to class prepared to fill different roles as they are discussing a theme or question. This is about teaching habits of mind. We ask students to give evidence for their perspective and just not say that they're wrong.
- Collaborative learning and projects-based learning are where students get together to prepare and present projects to a group of peers and/or teachers. The city is your classroom, and you learn from people your age, from older people, from business people, from nursing home people. These experiences help students to navigate the world around them.
- It's important to create opportunities for students to learn. Teaching habits of mind and emphasizing the importance of the learner role have huge implications for how students, teachers, and parents learn, teach and support.

2. What is this school's educational philosophy? Core beliefs? Priorities?

- Boston Green will be a trauma-informed school, so that there's a seamless web of support for students during the school day. We can train our people in community-based health interventions, in how to support a student who witnessed a shooting over the weekend. Our staff will have a 2-hour intervention training and a 7-hour certification training. When you have that seamless web, community organizations can also give data to the school about the students' needs in real time.
- The design of the school environment will be trauma sensitive. Link between Universal Design for Learning and trauma sensitive supports. There will be color coding in the school – the physical environment will be coded to help students access resources and locations within the school. Want to design everything in the school to be completely accessible. Teachers will be made aware of design principles to help them develop materials where these strategies are imbedded in students' assignments and assessments. Responsibility of teachers to use materials that assist all students in accessing the curriculum and the physical environment of the classroom and the school. A founding team member will assist with the development of tools and staff to implement this type of programming.
- Tremendous amount of professional development time and money will be spent on RTI (tiered supports,) UDL and graphic design to assure that all of our courses reflect these approaches. The more we individualize learning, the more we can reach the students who struggle.

3. What progress have you made in your curriculum development?

- We've made a lot of progress. 1) We have the benefit of an existing school where we can transfer information, support and training. We have subcommittees in all content areas. Each of those teams is charged with working with their Fenway counterparts to identify and fill gaps. 2) We will look at Odyssey's curriculum to see what's being taught there already.
- We adopted the CME math curriculum. Our humanities curriculum is extremely strong. Science is where the team will have to make adoption decisions about which curriculum or pieces of curriculum to take on.

4. How will teachers be evaluated? How will the school determine the professional development needs of the staff and when will it take place?

- The assistant director of curriculum and assessment has the responsibility for supervising teachers. In the early years, the headmaster will be very involved with the management of teachers.
- Our goal is to evaluate the teachers and headmaster annually.
- Professional development needs include trainings in first aid, ELL categories, Universal Design for Learning, portfolio learning, and habits of mind. Will have to do an audit of staff to determine what they already know and then prioritize needs.

Assessment, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

1. Please explain promotion requirements.

a. How are non-academic goals monitored and assessed?

- We will do a sampling of students and families for feedback on goals around citizenship and such. Collecting parent feedback through parents/family council and student feedback through advisories.
- There are traditional measures of non-academic successes. Want to track not only negative but positive behaviors as well. How we use the data will be to look at trends across advisories.
- Have a junior year review where students demonstrate the things they've learned in the last 3 years.
- Use socio-emotional behavioral assessment, such as measuring self awareness by monitoring one's social and emotional reactions to things.
- Give students opportunities to express themselves such as through the sophomore spotlight.
- There's a non-quantifiable aspect to this as well. For example, we need to ask ourselves does the school look like it's a place where people have caring relationships.
- Self awareness for both teachers and students in terms of their learning styles. The goal is to create rubrics to let students see to what extent they can control their own behaviors.

2. The application states that the school will “intervene with struggling students long before they fail a course.” Please describe the interventions.

- We will have looping, small class size, and the house system where adults will be responsible for a smaller number of students; will also have a guidance counselor.
- The advisory is where academic and social measures can be observed. Will meet 3 times a week for an hour.
- The focus of Boston Green Academy teachers is to pay attention to data to help inform teaching.
- We will have a homework completion process, where students can turn in a first draft, receive comments, and then finalize their work.
- The summer academy is an opportunity for intensive intervention as well.

School Characteristics

1. Please briefly describe some of the many different programs that you propose:

- a. Service Learning, Ventures, Advisory, Graded Seminar, Summer Academy (all 9th grade students), Senior Internship, Peer mentoring, House Teams, and Circle of Inquiry- for teachers, etc.

b. What is your timeline for implementation?

- We are in the process of working out all the details. We are digging into the data about Odyssey students and trying to figure out how to maximize time spent on meeting the needs of our students.
- The things mentioned in the question are rituals, practices, and procedures. Some things are more symbolic and some would need to be deferred.
- My priority is to make sure all staff are effective advisors and are competent in the area they teach. We are fortunate in that Odyssey’s leadership has already started the work of establishing a healthy school culture.

2. This school is intending a dramatic shift in an existing school organization and culture. How will this transformation in the school culture occur for students and families? How will the school culture be promoted and maintained after the orientation at the beginning of the year?

- Have to have the hearts and minds of the adults.
- Want to do home visits for incoming 9th graders.
- We need to repeat continuously the school culture from the principal down. Whatever the leadership models with the teachers, the teachers will model with the students.
- Our goal is if there are 9 providers in the community serving our students, we’ll have relationships with all of them.

3. You have a lengthy list of partner organizations. Where are you in developing these partnerships? What will they do and how will they be implemented?

- Prose on pages 102 and 104 reflect commitments that organizations have made already. We have checked back with them recently and they're still on board. Some of these partnerships are not geography dependent, so they'll stay on.
- We have a mutual interest in being partners. For example, take the Tufts partnership. Their mission is to create a cadre of urban educators and we need educators. This partnership won't cost money. Another vehicle to recruit teachers is through the partnership with Boston Teacher Residency. Now that we'll be close to UMass Boston, we will talk to them as well. Some of these partnerships will cost money, and for those, we will investigate development opportunities together.

Special Student Populations and Services

1. Please describe the relationship with the district regarding services for special student populations.

- We are responsible for educating all students along a continuum of services. We have a strong working relationship with the district and are growing the relationship around the professional development for teachers. Inclusion will be the operative setting. The district will provide expertise around specific disabilities. Odyssey does have an autistic population. It's not that we're going to contract with BPS for specific services, but that we have a strong relationship with them on a case by base basis. We also have a high level of in-house expertise with special populations.

Enrollment and Recruitment

1. How does the enrollment policy differ at Fenway High School than at the proposed school?

- There are not enough good schools in Boston. We have relationships with a number of schools, and their students would write essays prior about why they would want to get into Boston Green. We then do a lottery.
- In addition to serving the current student population, we're also recruiting students we want to serve. We are committed to recruit at-risk kids and kids from underserved communities. Our teams are going out and recruiting in those communities.

Capacity

1. Who is on the proposed board of trustees? (list in body of text and attachments does not match) Is this group considered the “community/partner” members of the board?

- Since I (Jeff Liberty) am not officially the headmaster yet, I still hold a spot on the board. If I were named officially to the position, I would drop off the board.

2. What data will be used to evaluate the Headmaster? What is the process for establishing goals?

- The board will review the headmaster through information from staff, parents, teachers, and partner organizations. Will be a 360 review process.

Governance and Management

1. What is the responsibility of the board for charter school?

- We want to be the best possible leadership. Board will look at human resources practices and review budgets, all with an eye toward supporting student achievement.
- The board creates policies.
- The board recognizes our fiduciary responsibility under the statutes. Have accountability for operations, not only academics but financials.

2. What is your rationale for this governance structure? Will there be committees?

- If we're going to err, we're going to err on the side of inclusion.
 - **Will parents and students have voting rights?**
 - Yes, we want parents and students to have a vote.
 - **Why do partners on the board have no term limits?**
 - In my experience with institutional partners like the Red Sox or the MFA, once you get them in, you want to keep them as long as you can. It's a question of getting resources into the school.
 - **Have you gone to the State Ethics Commission about potential conflicts of interest?**
 - We do expect to consult with lawyers through our contacts to review these ethical issues.

3. Please give examples of board verses administrative level policy decision-making.

- The board elects officers and names the headmaster. We want to be ginger with HR decisions because those will need to be figured out by the people closer to programming. We are responsible for fulfillment of obligations to BPS (through the MOU).

4. As a founding board, how often do you anticipate having board meetings?

- As we anticipate start up challenges, we will meet more regularly. We would hope to establish a once every 6 weeks meeting schedule.
- We have bylaws authorizing the executive board to make decisions in between meetings as needed. There will be a limited scope of actions and decisions this executive board can make. This allows us to be more nimble.

5. Explain the function of the school site counsel. How is that distinct from a charter school board of trustees?

- Fenway merged the board of trustees and the school site counsel with the permission of the Superintendent. This is about transparency of decision making, required by the 1993 education reform law.

Facilities and Transportation

1. How many students does the existing facility accommodate?

- Overall, the South Boston education building accommodates 1,200 students. Odyssey is under-enrolled. Third floor capacity is around 300 students.

2. What are the challenges of a split campus?

- The split campus model has been done by BPS, often resulting in reunification after a short time. Not impossible to replicate school culture or professional development across buildings.
- The challenge is to define with BPS what the long-term plan is for the school campus.

Accountability Plan

1. What is the green lab? Where is the money to develop it? Who is responsible for it?

- Green lab is part of our commitment to sharing what we learn about educating urban youth. We have learned from Fenway high school. Fenway has opened its doors to visitors all over the world. Green lab will be like that. We want to talk about what it's like to start a school. Green lab will be the place to package and store that knowledge for public consumption. Down the line, we hope groups will come and engage in workshops to share practices.
- We hope to use a community-based participatory approach where students can document their experiences as well and share back into their community.
- See green lab as an incubator. Nationally, in-district charters and regular charters are being pushed by the state and the federal governments as opportunities to bring change to education.