

Collegiate Charter School Executive Summary

This was prepared by the founding group of the Collegiate Charter School.

Collegiate Charter School will be a high quality, innovative school serving students in grades 6-12 in Springfield, Massachusetts, and surrounding areas. The school's mission is to prepare first-generation and other underserved students to be successful at institutions of higher learning by giving them the opportunity to earn a high school diploma while simultaneously earning college credits through American International College. Students will be afforded a chance to earn up to two years of college credits at the secondary level. Through this model, students will gain the skills and attitudes to thrive in our increasingly technological and global economy. CCS students will be educated in a caring environment that recognizes that all learners are unique and strives to tailor educational experiences to embody that concept. Using the resources of the school, American International College, students' families, and the community, CCS will build supportive teams that encourage all students to set high academic and personal goals for themselves, achieve those goals, and proceed to further post-secondary education with confidence and college credits in hand.

CCS will enroll a student body that is urban, historically underserved, and frequently underperforming. The school holds as its core the fundamental values and practices of the Early College High School and Middle High School models. Those values include: providing a small school environment in which students are known and valued; creating a collaboration among school, higher education partner, and the community—all of whom share responsibility for student success; developing an integrated curriculum that allows secondary students to earn up to a full year of transferable college credits; and offering a comprehensive support structure in school to ensure academic and social skills necessary for college access and success.

The vision of CCS is to increase the rate of college entry of first-generation and underserved students in Springfield and the surrounding area. CCS will address clear needs existing at both a national level and at the local target level---Springfield and its surrounding area. In the wake of the No Child Left Behind Act and other national and state mandates, many urban schools are struggling to attain the new standards that have emerged from recent research and study groups. This struggle is particularly visible when one looks at the target population for CCS: first generation students, underserved populations, and those who lack sufficient financial resources to navigate college costs. Additionally, transforming the culture of low-achieving urban schools from a culture of failure to a culture of college going is a necessary process if post-secondary access and success are to be open to all. Research on successful transformations of urban schools suggests the necessity of innovations beyond simply academic reform in order to achieve secondary and post-secondary success. Students and their families need direct programming that provides information, encouragement, and support in seeing college and career attainment as necessary and possible. Underserved students need to be invited and trained to join the ranks of mentors, school leaders, civic participants, and community volunteers in order to recognize their talents and build their college and career portfolios. Research demonstrates that such students are less likely to have access

to situations in which they can develop and practice leadership skills, take part in volunteer and civic activities, attend events on a college campus and engage in enrichment activities, in large part because of issues such as transportation, GPA, finances, lack of networking, and safety concerns. Therefore, a school such as CCS can be the key change agent in providing equity. The most recent demographics of the target area for CCS reinforce the need for such a school. The student population of the Springfield Public Schools as of June, 2009, was 25,360, with 5,634 middle school students and 7,067 in grades 9-12. The population by ethnicity is: 23.2% African American; 2.2% Asian; 54.8% Hispanic; 15.7% White, 4% Multiracial; and .01% Native American. The Special Education population is 22.9%; 13% of all students are considered Limited English Proficiency, and 23% do not speak English as a first language. The percentage of all students eligible for free and reduced lunch is 81.6%. According to 2008 statistics, only 15.9% of residents held a bachelors degree and 5.9% a graduate degree. The dropout rate is high compared to the state average, and Black and Hispanic students, particularly males, are at even greater risk. Just 54.4% of students in the target geography graduated from high school, according to 2008 statistics. The rates for attendance at a four-year college in the Springfield, West Springfield, and Chicopee districts fall below the state average. The populations of potential first-generation students in Chicopee and West Springfield also are high, with only 17% and 29% of residents respectively having attained a bachelor's degree or beyond. CCS is proposed to open in the 2011-2012 academic year in Springfield. During its first year, students in grades 6-8 will be served. In each subsequent year, at least one grade level will be added until the school enrolls grades 6-12. In keeping with the value of a small school environment in which students are known and valued, no more than 100 students will be enrolled in any one grade.

In order to successfully achieve the school's mission and vision, CCS has built a core educational philosophy that is translated into six specific practices. Those are Early Career Awareness, Tailored Instruction, College Expectations, Relational Learning, Service Leadership, and Families as Partners.

All students will be expected to engage in personal, career and academic goal setting; take part in service activities; demonstrate leadership in their school and community; prepare for post-secondary access and success; and be active, positive members of their school. Family and community will be welcome into all aspects of the school's life, and the AIC faculty, staff, and students will be valued team members who will make possible the goal of all students leaving high school with not simply a diploma, but college credits in hand. CCS distinguishes itself in making assumptions about the inherent potential of its student population. Rather than seeing a few students as natural leaders, all students are asked: **What kind of leader are you going to be?** Rather than viewing some students as "college material," all students will be able to answer: **How will you use your strengths, talents and interests to develop a path to college and career?** In expecting that all students can develop agency and self efficacy in meeting their college and career goals, they explore the question: **What are the roles that you can play in developing academic goals, monitoring them, and achieving them?** Finally, each

student is continuously prompted to evaluate his/her answer to the query: **What have I done to be a positive member of the learning community at CCS?**

CCS students will study core subjects such as Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, and Science; they meet the requirements of a traditional middle and high school curriculum while enrolled. However, the structure of their day—which is extended until 5 pm—includes many additional experiences developed to ensure that the expectations above are met. They begin each day with a core group—a small group of students assigned to the same faculty or staff member; the group functions as both an advisory group and a “family” group. After core subjects and lunch/recess have been completed, students move into Enrichment Period. During this time, guest speakers, college personnel and students, prospective employers or others may present programs; students can meet in interest groups or clubs; college preparatory activities can take place; and School Improvement Committees (to which each student belongs) gather to make plans that will improve all aspects of school and community. During this time, leadership and peer mentor training can occur, as well as service activities. Teachers and staff take turns facilitating the various activities. The day ends with Achievement Center, in which students can receive tutoring or mentoring, get help with or finish homework, use computers, or—in the case of upper grade students, work on college courses or participate in community-based internships or jobs. The high school will function on a dual-enrollment system. As high school students are deemed ready, they enroll in courses through AIC or another higher education partner, thus getting a head start on earning credits and mastering the requirements of college-level work.

CCS is an inclusive school, in which students with special needs and those with limited proficiency in English will be served by the Director of Student Services. A vast array of supports in such areas as reading, writing and speech are provided. Beyond following the required protocols for such learners, s/he will convene teams that include teachers, staff, parents/guardians, and, when appropriate, students, mentors and other key personnel. Assessment and modification of each student’s individualized plan are ongoing. Additionally, special students are integrated into the full experience of the school community through the expectation that they will take part in mentoring, service, leadership and career planning.

CCS also strives to be a community school. In determining the need for a school such as CCS, founding members conducted a phone survey targeting the largest of the potential communities: Springfield, West Springfield, and Chicopee. Analysis of data showed that respondents not only saw the need for an early college charter school in the area (Springfield, 89%; West Springfield, 94%, and Chicopee, 92%), but had substantial interest in sending their own school-age children to such a school (Springfield, 79%, West Springfield 72%, Chicopee, 82%). The combination of an enthusiastic college partner in AIC, community interest, and demonstrated need make the site a logical choice. In promoting family and community collaboration, CCS will invite those partners to take part in celebrations such as First Night’s Eve and Recognition Breakfasts; serve on committees; attend professional development trainings; conference quarterly

with students and staff; and use the resources of the Family Coordinator and dedicated Family Resource Center at school.