

Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School

Executive Summary

This was prepared by the founding group of the Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School.

Mission Statement

The Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School (PFSJCS), located in Holyoke and serving the towns and cities of the Pioneer Valley, offers a secondary school alternative dedicated to: academic excellence, social justice awareness and practice as espoused by Paulo Freire, leadership development, and community and global connections. PFSJCS will promote powerful, transformative teaching and learning for the development of the whole student, who will graduate: intellectually adept, socially responsible, actively involved, and dedicated to a just and sustainable society.

Vision Statement

The Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School will: provide a strong intellectual and ethical foundation, instill academic excellence, enhance self-esteem, increase community and global understanding and involvement, and inspire future leaders for our society. The School will provide a continuous program of growth and development for students, faculty and staff, family members, Board members, and the surrounding community. Paulo Freire will have programs throughout the school year, an extended day, virtual learning programs, adult literacy classes, a summer academy and community building activities.

Communities to be Served

Students in Holyoke Public Schools are disproportionately from families that are low income, Latino, single parent households, and have low parental educational attainment. The students themselves are more likely to be homeless, to drop out, and to become teen parents. Among the educational needs of these students are strong preparation for standardized tests, expert support for English Language Learners, and an environment where student and family knowledge is respected and utilized as a foundation for curriculum. The school will focus on responding to these needs, and we recognize that student sub-groups from the surrounding communities, including Chicopee and Springfield, may also require special focus. PFSJ Charter School will develop curriculum using critical pedagogy, which will provide connections that are crucial to preventing students from becoming disaffected and dropping out. The school will also maintain the high standards and structured support necessary for high achievement.

Providing wrap-around social services will help families see and use the school as a community center and insure that social needs are met before they become a barrier to education. A school that is committed to social justice in curriculum, pedagogy and governance will be inherently responsive to the needs of the community that it serves. A commonwealth charter will allow the school to remain a size that is congruent with creating real community and ensuring the participation of all members. The school must draw students from communities other than Holyoke because a social justice high school option is not currently available anywhere in Western Massachusetts and because in

order to serve Holyoke as a community, PFSJ Charter School must not disproportionately affect the state revenue stream for Holyoke High School and Dean Technical High School.

Educational Philosophy

The educational program will be centered on the following three areas: Individual Excellence, Community Membership, and Global Intention. The curriculum will utilize the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the newly adopted Federal Common Core Standards, a scope and sequence, common themes that integrate subjects, and exciting topics of study that integrate academic, developmental, social, and political standards. The classroom curriculum will use a variety of teaching techniques including hands-on activity/project-based learning. Scheduled assessments will include: individualized goal setting, portfolios, self and peer assessments, written and verbal assessments, and standardized testing. An extended learning time will provide support for all students to reach their highest levels of achievement.

School Characteristics

The culture of Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter Public School will be built around the core values of Global Intention, Individual Excellence, and Community Membership.

The process of building this culture will begin long before the first day of school. All teachers new to the school will be trained in the educational approaches and values of the school. Incoming students will attend a ten-day summer academy, part of which will be devoted to modeling participatory democracy and social activism. The culture of the school will be explicitly taught to students and parents during mandatory orientations, and the distinctions between the school culture and that of home and previous schools will be explored in these orientations and in the summer academy. An integral part of the philosophy of Paulo Freire and consequently PFSJCS is to honor the gifts of all members of the community. Consequently, the general education classroom will be designed to welcome and support all learners. Whenever possible every student will be placed in the general education setting 100% of the time.

Organizational Viability

The challenge for a school based on the concepts of social justice and Freirean pedagogy is to create a governance model which supports and mirrors these concepts and allows for strong, clear leadership for those duties required by Massachusetts regulations and dictated by common business sense. Consequently, we are proposing a “true” representative form of governance where faculty and staff, parents, and students each have designated seats on the board of trustees. Such a form requires time and support to be effective. The school will provide time on Friday afternoons and during all school meeting for faculty to meet about school governance. Faculty advisors will work with students to insure that students get the educational support they need to be knowledgeable and effective leaders and to play a positive, integral part in governance. One evening per month the school will provide a dinner meeting for parents where the Executive Director will present topics from the upcoming Board agenda and support parents in formulating additional items they want brought before the Board. It will be the responsibility of the

Board of Trustees to insure that these three constituent groups (faculty, students, and parents) are meeting effectively and receiving necessary support.