

Dorchester, Dudley Square, and Grove Hall Preparatory Charter School

Questions as derived from Panel Review

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction

1. How will your educational philosophy be extended to the high school program? Are there any philosophical additions? Will there be procedures or practices that will be distinct to the high school program?

- Roxbury Prep was founded in 1999 to provide a pathway to college for kids. We have been serving smaller cohorts of kids; 55 to 70 eighth graders graduate a year. With the network, if we are graduating more 8th graders, it will get harder to find good high school options for all of them. We're most concerned about the students not getting into Boston Latin, Roxbury Latin or the pilot high schools. Therefore, the high school becomes a necessity to serve our mission.
- There are definitely different things we will do with the high school option. Having the opportunity to educate kids from 5th grade on, we can create a high school program that is more rigorous with options for electives (none in middle school), more levels of independence both academically and socially; independent study, and a study hall each day (so students learn how to manage their time). We won't have silent hallways in our high school; kids need to learn how to take a five-minute transition period, and get to class on time, students need to take responsibly for that. The middle school foundation will allow us to release some of our reins, so the kids can learn to develop more independence before they go to college.

2. How will ability grouping operate at the different grade levels?

- In middle school, flexible ability grouping is based on a skills test kids take when they enter the school. The idea is that kids can move around to different groups as they progress. All kids have access to same curriculum and even the same teachers. What's different is that teachers might use different pacing or examples for lessons.
- With a bigger cohort of kids in high school, we'll be able to offer more course options. We want every kid to have access to the AP curriculum, but there will be more variations. For example, a kid can take AP English, but not AP Calculus. This allows for more differentiation.
- The size of the high school becomes important, because it needs to be big enough to be financially sustainable. The board has been intentional about how to layer on this growth. We want the high school to be as effective as the middle school. We will start planning for it in 2013 for a 2015 opening.

Assessment, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

1. Is the same promotion policy utilized for middle school and high school students?

- a. 60% performance as demonstrating academic proficiency
- b. Do not receive credit for three or more classes = repeating all classes for that grade level (50% failure)

- Promotion policy will be the same for 5th through 8th grades. Students take 6 academic classes, and they need an average of 60% to pass. If they fail one or two class, they have to take the summer program and make up the comp. If they fail 3 or more classes, they repeat the grade.
- In high school, we can see the possibility where students fail a class and can retake the course, take another class in the same subject or potentially use independent study and study halls to catch up. We can also be a bit more creative about how kids make up work in the summer or in future years.

2. Please describe your summer school programming ('summer academic program') and how it addresses the needs of students in danger of not receiving credit or who are demonstrating difficulty developing academic proficiency.

- The summer school curriculum is dependent on the kids who will attend. In early June, we would create class list based on the kids who failed classes, and then make a corresponding class schedule. Teachers whose kids failed their classes would write individual learning plans for each kid. These teachers would work with summer school teachers to write the syllabus and exams. Group size will be from 3 to 6 kids, but each will receive a lot of individual attention.
- Every family gets a phone call every day about how their child is doing. We have a final exam week. In the past 8 years, only two students did not pass the final exam.
- There are students who passed all their classes, but we still require them to attend summer school. Parents are usually on board with this. Summer school is also recommended for kids who failed 3 classes and will have to repeat, but the extra time in the summer would help them to catch up.

3. How will adding high school grade levels to your school model change your high school placement programming?

- Right now, we're tracking our kids down in other high schools. From an efficiency standpoint, we can deal with our kids in our own classrooms, instead of having to track them down in 10 different high schools.
- A number of our students are not challenged or supported when they go on to high schools. They are not given the resources they need to stay on the college track. Having a high school will allow us to meet our mission of preparing kids for college and beyond.
- Graduate student services will continue to provide support for high school students. However, our energy will be more focused on developing enriching activities at our high school. We also support students as they go through college. Will educate students about what they might want to do with a college degree.
- Our students at high performing high schools don't feel integrated into their new environments. They come back and work with us in our nurturing environment. We'll be able to deal more effectively with these issues if we have a high school.

School Characteristics

1. Please describe the components of the official school day. Please elaborate on the nature of before and after school additional programming. Are there differences for the middle school and high school? (the following is the MS program)

- We have organizing principles for the high school. It will be an extended day. Will not be as rigid as the middle school in terms of the schedule. Will look to Uncommon Schools for successful high school models.
- There will be a capacity problem in Boston. We will provide a high school education that is aligned to college preparatory work. We have rubrics, ideas, and passion, and we will meet the challenge of running a high school. We will systematically mitigate all the risks.
- Certain aspects of the day and the fabric of personal, social, and community responsibility will be upheld at the high school too.
- What makes a good school? We need leadership, good teaching, and wraparound services. We'll be thinking about developmentally appropriate approaches for high school. We'll encourage the high school kids to be independent.
- We are clear about our goal of building and sustaining a culture of achievement. What educators often missed is what the students have to say. Our practices around a spirit stick and the creed grew organically out of students' feedback; we did not get these from a book. As educators, we set the vision for the school culture, but the nuts and bolts have to be responsive to the reality on the ground, to the students and the families. One indicator of whether students will be successful in the future is the extent to which they can articulate their needs.
- Even with the middle school replications, each school will not be an exact analog of Roxbury Prep. We'll allow room for the culture to grow organically.
- The school day structure will be similar to the middle school, but we will have analogs of activities or practices for the high school students.

2. Please discuss the importance of parent representatives serving on the board of trustees.

- Looking a parent in the eyes gives you a level of context you don't get in other ways. You hear things differently. If there's an issue that comes up with students, we would know right away.
- Having parents on the board is representative of our commitment to the families as partners. Parents do have a vote on the board.
- As the school grows, we will look at flexible models around representing parent voices. From a governance perspective, we will continue with a minimum of two parent trustees on the board. The school has a commitment to cultivate parents' awareness and understanding of what the school does and wants to do. .

3. Describe the 'community network' aspect of your mission that supports students. How do you evaluate its effectiveness?

- Our community network is illustrated in how we have kept the school structured well enough so that every teacher is responsible for every kid in the school. We cultivate families as the next layer of this important network. Every family gets a

call every other week. We're now looking to external partnerships, such as one with a tae kwon do group or with Mass ART graduate students, that our kids can benefit from. We've focused on the first two layers, but it's increasingly important to develop that third layer.

- We know our core competencies. We know we can't serve the needs of every single kid. So, we now leverage community partnerships to serve more of our kids.
- The board has a role too in providing the resources and networks. The school has the ability to identify opportunities for the students and to connect them to relevant resources.

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?

- We care deeply about both these populations. We do a fantastic job with our special education students.
- We are concerned about our English Language Learners, as everyone should be in Boston. Most schools have 33% ELLs, and we have a low percentage of these kids in our school. We've had a barrier to attracting these students. We are committed to attracting and recruiting these students. But now, we're working on disseminating information about ourselves in different languages.
- 30 to 40% of our families speak another language at home, but only 5% are considered Limited English Proficient (LEPs). Our processes to identify these students have been approved by the department.
- At Roxbury Prep, our teachers have completed between one and four SEI module trainings. By the time the new school it opens, teachers will have all four modules completed.
- Right now, 16% of our students have IEPs. We have a robust special education program to take care of student needs. We had a really successful federal programs review in 2008 and CPR in 2009. For one blind student, we hired a TVI specialist and a paraprofessional who translated our curriculum to Braille. This shows how nimble we are in serving special needs.

a. When is pullout scheduled?

- We'll use a hybrid schedule where kids can still take a couple of enrichment classes a week and alternate with working with their individual needs specialist during this time. We make sure that the ESL certified teacher is able to spend the appropriate amount of time with these students.
- We have modified the schedule for Level 1 ELL students. We will catch them up with content materials once they become more proficient in English.
- We are doing sheltered English immersion training.

- 2. Explain your ‘Individual Needs Team’ staffing and how it reflects your ability to adapt to the needs of your student population. (same plan for all three schools)**
 - At Roxbury Prep, everybody has multiple certifications and roles. Right now, we have an ELL administrator who spends between 50 and 75% of time on serving this population at full enrollment. If we learn that we have 10% LEP students, we’ll have to hire a full time ELL administrator. Because of our fiscal control, we now have the ability to be flexible in these matters.
 - Having the other middle schools and a high school will give us the opportunity to benefit from economies of scale. If we lose students in the middle of the year, we lose revenue. Having a high school will help us to fill those seats.
 - The network will help with economies of scale. For example, we have a speech therapist that comes in two hours a week. This is a difficult niche to hire for, but this is our need. In a network, we can share the same speech therapist across all our schools.

- 3. Have all the teachers at the existing school received SEI Category training?**
 - a. How quickly will you be able to complete levels of category training for new teachers?**
 - All Roxbury Prep teachers have done the SEI 1 training. We do this training in a cycle. Over a 3-year period, all teachers would be trained in all categories.
 - We give two days of curriculum training to sheltered English immersion. We have given teachers the option to do SEI trainings in July even and compensate them for the extra time.
 - The best tool we have for student recruitment is the student list from BPS. We sent out 2 mailings using this list. The first mailing introduces who we are; the second mailing in January was done in English, Creole, Portuguese, Spanish, and Chinese and included pre-applications. As of today, we have received 80 pre-applications for Grove Hall Prep; of those, 12% are in a foreign language.

Enrollment and Recruitment

- 1. How have you gauged parental support for your educational programming in Boston? What evidence do you have that supports your projected enrollment?**
 - Two months before the lottery, we already have enough parents who indicated the desire to come to our school. Roxbury Prep has over 200 pre-applications, and Grove Hall Prep has 80. This speaks to the demand for Roxbury Prep out there in the community.
 - We talked to our families, Boston Rising parents, and focus groups and learned that there is a high need for middle schools and high schools. There is a capacity issue in Boston, and families need to send their kids somewhere. Families also want longer school days.
 - Our school is safe; this fact has profound impact on the physical and emotional safety of our kids.

- We probably need 700 applications every year to fill our projected enrollments. But we do not anticipate a problem hitting this number.
 - One of most difficult things we do every year is to reject families. Roxbury Prep has a particular place in the community, and we are overwhelmed by support from parents and families. As a charter school, we have to drive demand through our results and word of mouth from current families.
- 2. Please clarify when each of the three proposed schools plans to open their doors – the enrollment narrative presents the same chart within each application.**
- Grove Hall Prep will open in 2011-12 with a 5th grade class. This class will be opening class for our high school.
 - Dorchester and Dudley Square Prep will open in 2012-2013.
 - Roxbury has applied for an amendment to the charter to add 5th grade in 2012.
 - In 2013, Roxbury Prep will contemporaneously add a 5th and 6th grade class. The 6th grade class will join their peers at Grove Hall to be the first entering class at the high school.
 - Planning for the high school starts in 2013 to be opened in 2015.
- 3. Does Uncommon Schools have experience with this “funnel model” or any large high school model?**
- At the 30,000-foot view, the high school looks very similar to the middle school. We will have an emphasis on reading and writing, just like in the middle school. The teaching methodology involves the teacher teaching for 15 minutes, the students doing work together for 15 minutes, and then students do independent work. There will probably be more time for independent work in high school. Kids in high school still need a reward structure, and detention is an option even if there is no demerit system. We have also found that in high school, kids crave sports, electives, and competition.
 - Uncommon Schools is running a 150-student high school in Newark. We’re finding that it’s not sustainable at this size. We need at least 450 students in a high school to be financially sustainable.
 - New Jersey grants one charter for multiple campuses. In New Jersey, we have created feeder middle schools to feed into the high school.
 - In Brooklyn, we will have 12 separate middle schools funneling into 2 high schools, 1,200 kids each. Currently, we have one middle school.

Capacity

- 1. Please discuss the feasibility study conducted by the Roxbury Prep board prior to determining to pursue a network of schools.**
- The board decided that expansion was feasible, but the opportunity wasn’t there before with the charter caps. There is a tension between the desire to grow and having the infrastructure to support that growth. We also want to turn teachers into school leaders, which is difficult to do.

- The feasibility study points to an opportunity for growth. The board considered this opportunity in three broad categories: 1) infrastructure building and fundraising; 2) finding teachers and school leaders; and 3) governance and how to leverage a board.
- We did our strategic plan, invited Evan from Uncommon Schools to talk to the board, and sent our trustees to New York to see Uncommon Schools. The feedback was that it was like looking in the mirror. The core elements and basic structure that characterizes the experience in these schools are the same at Roxbury Prep. Kids come to class and are immediately busy. Teachers are energetic and passionate.

Governance and Management

1. What challenges do board members anticipate in overseeing four schools (though technically five: four middle schools and one large high school)?

- We have thought about this issue and we considered the option of breaking into subcommittees to do the work.
- We do understand that the trustees hold the charter and have responsibility to the students, their families, the community, and the state. We anticipate changes to how the board operates.

a. What structural or procedural changes does the board of trustees anticipate?

- Will probably need to expand the board, maybe adding more parents or trustees with particular expertise, such as real estate.
- Working with a consultant to help us think about different structural models.
- When you think about risks that can derail a school, you think about financial problems or the inability to recruit excellent teachers. Will we as a board find the right amount of data and metrics to gauge success? We have not run a network before, so it is a learning experience, but we tried to mitigate the risks coming in.
- We're not going to be the group of trustees that's going to ruin Roxbury Prep's stellar track record. We are very intentional about what we need to do. We want to give the other schools the organic opportunities that Roxbury Prep had to grow and be excellent. The risk for us is getting in the way and wanting to institutionalize magic.
- We know we can finance the expansion effort; Uncommon Schools has shown that they can help us with that.
- We will hold everyone accountable. We have procedures for assessing behaviors of the board, school leaders, and teachers. We will know where people fall short. Will interject ourselves in the process if the results are not measuring up.

2. Why have you chosen to contract with Uncommon Schools?

- To leverage their Human Resources services
- To tap into their real estate expertise

- To pursue student achievement. We worry that school growth would compromise student achievement. Uncommon Schools has had 6 high school graduating classes with 100% college matriculation. Their student's retention rate is 6 times the national average. The North Star network high school is at 200 students. Early results are strong, and Uncommon Schools has virtually closed the achievement gap.
 - To leverage financial and back office services
 - To leverage its professional development program
- a. Why is a 1,200-student high school going to work?**
- Students are going to come in knowing how to read and write well.
 - We have examples of what works and doesn't work in high school. High school kids still need a basic structure. It starts with leadership and quality teaching along with an extended school day.
 - We want a big high school for the financial sustainability, plethora of programming, and ability to offer electives. We'll still want to offer the close relationships to ensure that kids are progressing on track to college.
 - This school will work because we can retain our 8th graders. We would have the advantage of knowing exactly what they need.
 - Also, this is an opportunity for growth for teachers and instructors.
 - This experience will provide greater proof points for why what we do works.
 - We have access to the Boston community – to the resources in the charter school network and in public schools that want us to succeed.
- b. What is the status of the contract?**
- Our lawyers are talking on Thursday.
- c. What have you and Uncommon Schools determined as an alternative plan in case you do not receive all additional charters?**
- If we get half of what we asked for, we'll have to rethink the decision to hire Uncommon Schools, because the schools may not be financially sustainable. There's a reason we asked for what we asked for.
 - From Uncommon Schools' perspective, we can't run a network of two schools. Four is doable, but three is questionable. We can't make a network sustainable in the long term with three schools.
 - From the staff perspective, it's a huge risk for Roxbury Prep to grow. The only way to mitigate that risk is to have huge social impact through multiple schools.
 - We are fully intentional about running this network on the public dollar. If we don't do this, the financial model will begin to unwind. We have thought about this issue very deeply.

d. Please specify the services received from Uncommon Schools?

- Uncommon Schools never had the desire to be the biggest CMO out there. We want to be deliberate about what we do. In the first four years, we only grew 4 schools a year. We have experience with scaling, and this has not impacted student achievement negatively.
- We have amazing managing directors to coach principals at the schools. Once a month, the principals inspect each other's schools and give feedback. Operation leaders will take care of operational issues so that the principals can focus on instructions.
- Uncommon Schools host fellowships for principals and operation leaders.
- Uncommon Schools raise money for all our schools. We raised \$21 millions last year, including \$6 millions for North Star network to grow.
- We have real estate expertise to put together financial deals to finance buildings.
- We have an 11-person recruitment team to scour country for talent; one person is stationed at Roxbury Prep.

e. How will the board hold Uncommon accountable?

- The board thinks about accountability in three categories: compliance, leadership development and succession planning, and school performance. We have a robust director evaluation every year. Over the years, we have developed a set of key indicators about student achievement and financial status that will be used with the network.
- Uncommon Schools will plug into our evaluation structures and shoulder some of the accountability.
- We're going to have Uncommon Schools report to us at every board meeting. Will be taking in data that give us visibility into the different school leaders. Dana Lehman, now an Uncommon Schools employee, will be speaking to us from a point of experience with Roxbury Prep.
- The contract is now a relationship that is at-will. We can both walk away if things don't work out as we thought.
- As a board, we will maintain the integrity to look carefully at each school and each school leader. With a network, we would also have more data points across the different schools.

3. Please explain the network organization.

a. How will the network be managed?

- Without knowing exactly the number of schools, it's hard to design a plan for network management.
- We're essentially hiring Uncommon Schools to be the network. They report directly to the board. We give them 10% of our per pupil revenue.
- As managing director of the network, if we get everything we asked for, I will spend one day a week at each school, meeting with principals to go over results and review teacher evaluations and providing professional development. I will manage the academic programs of the schools and

play a vetting role for the school leaders. Will also handle special education services.

- Uncommon Schools will have a set of employees in Boston. Specialists and teachers will be contracted directly by the individual schools.

b. How will network management look like with 2 schools?

- In the short term, it will look like what Dana just described. In the long term, it might be different. Our hope is that we would be able to grow the network eventually.
- If there are only two schools, we would not charge the 10% per pupil fee and would push some direct costs down to the schools.

Budget

1. Are these items all for Uncommon Schools?

- a. Administrative purchased management services (line item 28)
 - b. Instructional purchased management services (line item 43)
 - c. Other student purchased management services (line item 52)
- This is a function of state budget worksheet. These items are all attributed to Uncommon Schools and are included in the 10% per pupil fee. We had to break it out in this way because of the state's excel worksheet.