

## **Salem Community Charter School**

Questions as derived from Panel Review

### **Description of the Community (ies) to be Served**

**1. How have you determined the level of interest for this type of educational program within Salem? What evidence do you have that students who have dropped out of school will return for this programming?**

- As the lead administrator of Bridge Academy, I have seen students struggling with diverse needs that resulted in their dropping out of school. Students who have dropped out in 10<sup>th</sup> grade have told me that they would like to complete their high school diploma, but that the school environment is not conducive for them. Some also talked about the length of the school day or the strength of relationships with teachers as being positive. However, dealing with a large high school environment is still too much for them.
- A high percentage of students in Salem are not completing high school in 5 years. There is a variety of reasons about why students drop out that has to do with factors – dramatic or traumatic – that students have to manage outside of school. The school is designed to serve this niche and will support students in ways the other high school can't.
- This is why we tried to bring in community agencies and social work agencies, because these students are experiencing a variety of problems. This program is designed to bring students back to school by showing them that if they come back, they are not completely on their own.

**2. Why have you pursued a Horace Mann charter school instead of developing this program at Salem High School as you did with the Bridge Academy?**

- One factor is the flexibility. The other factor has to do with the number of people we have been able to bring around the table on this idea – for example, social workers, probation officers, the chief of police, Salem State, workforce investment. There's a true community investment in these kids.
- If this is just another school program, the attraction wouldn't be the same for the kids.
- The charter would remove the bureaucracy of the school district and allow us to be separate from the Salem public school system. Would give us flexibility to try new initiatives and programming without having to get approval from the school committee every time.
- We want to do an innovative curriculum that is competency-based and not grade-based. Because of the start up nature of the school, we have to be nimble and be able to course correct right away.

**a. Why not another program in the high school?**

- There's a perception that at-risk kids are not competent. From my experience with them, they are creative thinkers and don't fit into traditional boundaries. They need the flexibility of a different school experience.

## **Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction**

### **1. How is your educational philosophy demonstrated in the proposed school's curriculum choices and instructional practices?**

- To work in an alternative setting means creating a new approach with students. We have a culture of transparency and rigor. We will use the capstone approach, where students can measure their competency from delivering curriculum-based products and projects.
- Each project will create competencies that enable the student to build skills to execute and present the capstone project at the end of their senior year. The curriculum is based around the students redefining themselves as learners.
- We will have a therapeutic setting, hands-on project learning, and small advisory groups.

### **2. How does a competency based curriculum meet the needs of at risk learners?**

- Students understand the content, but due to their home circumstances, they're failing out of classes. They check out very quickly under the traditional model. This new model would adapt to their needs more.
- Kids are spinning their wheels repeating a class for the third time; they get tired of going through the same materials they failed at time and time again. The competency approach would allow them to make progress at their own pace. We would have the ability to individualize instructions.

### **3. How will you support students with a wide range of needs?**

- Each student will have individual career/college plan. They will start out with initial assessment, given by the Workforce Investment Board, which will assess their skills. There will be remediation assessment to look at work readiness skills such as reading, math, and research. Kids will know what they need to work on, whether they are aiming for college or career. They will be supported by an advisor. There will also be a team approach to serving each student.
- At-risk kids don't know how to answer the question of what you need to do to get where you're going. The more you can concretize these steps for them, the better.

### **4. How are career readiness objectives or workplace skills integrated into the curriculum?**

- We'll conduct a work skills test to identify potential careers. Advisory groups are an opportunity to focus kids in specific directions. Individual teachers will be given this information to help students focus on their particular directions.
- The Chamber of Commerce is in support. Perhaps they can offer practical, unpaid experiences for students.
- The Workforce Investment Board is one of the leaders in state in this area of youth jobs. They've had a youth career center for the past 5 years. They found jobs for 500 young people a year. They have a structure in place already, so we would just partner with them and plug into it.
- On Wednesdays, we will have community meetings, where we can bring in partners like Salem State to do a presentation for our students.

- Ideally the capstone project will be the culmination of the student's experience. They will learn skills along the way to complete this project.

**5. How is curriculum developed, improved, and refined during the school year?**

- We're going to find a curriculum specialist to work with staff on a continuing basis throughout year to determine where kids or staff are falling short. This will be built into the work schedule of the school.
  - One advantage of having social service agencies involved is that they can let us know what other factors are at play for our students besides just academics.
  - In our classes, we would use the framework and rubrics, but we would still go back to personalization. Would track each student individually.
- a. Why have a curriculum coordinator consultant for 60 days?**
- No person in mind yet.
  - 60 days is a third of the school year when the person would be on-site to supervise tutors and teachers and to do assessments. As the school grows, we might need more support. If we find that 60 days is not enough, then we will have to do course correction.
  - 60 days is not a short time to support 5 teachers and 50 students.

**Assessment, Promotion, and Graduation Standards**

**1. Please explain the requirements for graduation.**

**a. 75-100% proficiency in all competencies, MCAS, and capstone project**

- It seems daunting to achieve this level of competencies if you make the assumption that kids come in as blank slates. But the fact is they have had 9 years of schooling already to develop competencies. We wouldn't be surprised that students come in with very low or high competencies.

**2. How are students kept on track for graduation?**

- The head teacher has every student's information. The special one-on-one relationship is imperative. Advisory groups and weekly community meetings are opportunities to remind students about graduation credits and to generate discussions among the students about what they need to do.

**3. How will grading/report cards work? Clarify the communication system of student performance to families and students.**

- One teacher is connected to 10 students. It is this teacher's responsibility to make phone calls home to parents and talk to them about their child's progress. It's about attracting the right teachers to see that there is a lot of good in these kids even though they may be troubled. Those relationships with the kids and their families are important.
- The competency-based approach is a divergent from what the Department, under NCLB, requires. I think this approach is a more authentic assessment of students' progress rather than letter grades. We don't have a report card format for this approach yet. The most important thing you can tell parents is what their kids

know of what they're supposed to know to show they're on the path toward graduation.

- Will use transparent rubrics and academic review teams. Students will understand what is expected of them. When a student is not doing well in something, the teachers will let them know and designate a three-week follow-up meeting. In those three weeks, the student is expected to try to improve. This approach is developmentally appropriate for teenagers.

**4. How will non-academic objectives, such as habits of mind, be monitored and assessed? Are certain levels of competency related to these objectives required for graduation?**

- The idea of the capstone project came from Boston Day and Evening Academy. Part of the project will include some community involvement. The capstone project requires students to assume a certain persona of authority to present to a group of peers or adults. There's real possibility for huge growth when students take on the responsibility of organizing a presentation and presenting information.

**5. How will assessment data be collected, managed, and analyzed? How will teachers be supported in effectively using data to improve curriculum and instruction?**

- We have student databases already in place for reporting grades K-12. Using the competency-based curriculum, we would probably require different software. Would work with IT to figure this out.

**School Characteristics**

**1. Please update us on the status of your proposed community partnerships that will provide "wrap-around services." How will the programming be administered, monitored, and evaluated to assure effectiveness?**

- It will be principal's responsibility to manage relationships with community partners. We have a range of social services partners, including counseling, housing and homelessness, and fuel assistance.
- We have started conversations with these community partners.
- Everybody on our partner list is already providing services to the schools. The Department of Children and Families said they are committed to sitting on our advisory board if we need them. The YMCA is committed to providing free memberships to students and helping them with job placements.

**a. How will these partners be involved?**

- We will have team meetings to discuss students who have cross enrollments in our organizations. Will use these meetings as referrals for services. Will share information.
- The collaboration we envision comprises of weekly meetings composing of different people different weeks.
- Be very open with students during the enrollment process. Be proactive in making sure counseling is in place in the school. If the counselor is not

able to engage with a student, we would find another one through our partner South Bay Mental Health.

**2. How will it be determined which students will attend morning and which students will attend evening? How will staffing needs work within this flexible schedule?**

- A big piece of what we do is guiding the student's goals. We would interview both the student and the family, and a needs assessment would occur at that meeting. We would inform the students of slot availability either in the morning or the evening. It's key that the goals for student-driven, parents-supported, and teacher-advised.
- A lot of our students have child care and work needs. If a student has a morning work shift, they can still work in the morning and come to class in the evening.
- The math teacher would teach a block in the morning session and again would teach another class in evening block.

**3. Why would students who dropped out of school choose to attend school for 11 months of the year?**

- The only issue with attendance is that the students fall off here and there, but generally, they do consistently come in every day. We don't think this would be a major problem.

**4. Tell us about the daily school schedule.**

- Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday are full academic days.
- Students come in at 9 a.m. and have classes. There's a lunch period. Advisory group period would take place once a week on Wednesday, along with demonstration activities.
- Wednesday is a condense schedule for students (advisory, lunch with advisors, and a presentation, from students or community partners); the afternoon is the professional development component.

**a. How often do core academic meet and for what length of time?**

- We have an extended day and extended year. 990 hours is the high school requirement for time on learning.

**5. Describe the discipline system that will be implemented and how the staff will be trained in implementing it.**

**a. How will you deal with the issue of truancy?**

- The model of discipline that we use for a large high school of 400 students won't fit our school. We think discipline has to come from within you. When your needs as a kid are not being met, you explode, and that's the reason for behavioral issues.
- The ideal scenario to address truancy is to conduct home visits with families. Discipline is not a can approach. Would also use the community to address issues together. Discipline is about character development, and we need to know what's going on with students.

- Discipline issues that relate to safety or school facilities would be dealt with as you would deal with them anywhere else. However, due to the involvement of social agencies and law enforcement in our school, we will be able to come up with innovative solutions for our students.

**6. What specific strategies will be used to facilitate the development of a school culture?**

- The principal will have to set the tone for the culture – one that takes a collaborative approach.
- Community meetings are at the core of it. This is where you will get the sense of restorative justice. If you get the kids to buy into the culture, then discipline becomes about all of us, not just one perpetrator.

**Special Student Populations and Services**

**1. Please describe the process and procedures for working with students in need of special education or ELL services.**

- Ratio of students to teacher would be 12:1. (7:1 overall) Affords the opportunity to work with different students.
- We only have 4 teachers, and the goal is that they would be dual certified in a content area and either special education or ELL.
- Professional development for teachers will come from Salem State and Cyberspace to develop expertise. Opportunities to develop techniques to individualize instruction.
- Observed best practices at Bridge Academy and Salem HS, there are folders which contain information about the knowledge and/or skill gaps of students and they can access and monitor their progress daily and exercise the skill set daily. Using IPASS and Accuplacer, use computer programs to show progress to students.
- If it's necessary to have staff from the district come in, it would be during the learning day. The district will provide assessment services for ELL and special education services.
- Students would participate in mainstream courses, but computers could be used in the classroom to differentiate and individualize instruction.

**Capacity**

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

- Have gone to state ethics commission to check this out.
- a. **Linda Saris, Salem Cyberspace**
  - We provide afterschool support, homework help, ELL support, and digital design. Will be available to students here as well as all students in the district. No cost to the school.

- Salem Charter would put in a design lab for kids who want to opt into that. We would go into a competitive bid for the provider, so not necessarily Salem Cyberspace.
  - We would like to participate in college counseling. We would become the surrogate parents for kids to go through the college application process. We would have to find grant funding or other resources to support this.
  - No formal agreement with Salem Cyberspace yet.
- b. Deborah Amaral, Salem YMCA (will the YMCA be providing services for a fee?)**
- The Y is committed to providing the kids with free memberships. Will provide them with volunteer job placements.
  - Anything else that comes up will be bid on through an RFP process.

### **Governance and Management**

**1. What kind of outreach are you doing for other board members?**

- I've had conversations with people in the community and with the mayor. We want somebody with financial management background. We have tried not to load up the board with public employees or department people. We thought it was crucial that the school committee has a representative on the board of trustees. My role would be transitional, because I'm not sure if it would make sense for the superintendent to be on the board.
- We want representation in terms of the population in the community as well as specific expertise.

**2. Please give examples of board versus administrative level policy decision-making.**

- The single most important decision for the board is to hire the principal.
- The board needs to submit a budget to school committee for approval.
- The board and principal would work together to think about staff development and student recruitment.
- The board is the representative face of the school to the community.
- At this point, we see having the superintendent and a school committee representative on the board as a strength. We collectively recognize that the traditional school is not working for this type of at-risk students, and we need another more flexible model.

**3. What are the qualifications you are looking for in a Principal?**

- We intend to do a search for the principal. We don't have a candidate selected and the board wants the broadest range of options for that important job.

**4. How will four full-time teachers teach both morning and evening student schedules?**

- There's an existing model like this in the regular school. We are in discussion with the teacher union, and they have no opposition. What it would mean is staggering the teachers' schedules. The contractual work day for teachers is 7.5 – 8 hours/day.

## **Facilities and Transportation**

- 1. Have you identified a facility?**
  - No, we're looking. We do have potential locations.
- 2. What is your transportation plan for all students? Will students be provided with public transportation passes?**
  - The high school currently doesn't have transportation guaranteed, except under an IEP.
  - Students have the right to pay for transportation.
  - The district would provide transportation as an in-kind service.

## **Budget**

- 1. How did you develop your assumption about per-pupil tuition? (\$18,871 per pupil)**
  - We took \$ 938,000 which is total expenses (excluding grants and in-kind donations) and divided it by 50 students.
- 2. Please explain the "in-kind" district services.**
  - Instructional services include ELL, special education specialists.
  - Administrative services include payroll, legal services, information technology management, technical support, job posting.
  - Student services include food.
  - Fixed charges include fringe benefits.
  - These are described in Section 4 of the MOU.
- 3. What fundraising expertise do board members possess?**
  - For the first year, we would need to put in a bit of investment to get the fundraising off the ground. The Essex County Community Foundation has expressed interest in supporting charter schools.
  - We believe we have people on the board who will fundraise. It will be easier to raise money once we demonstrate what we can do. This is not a wealthy board.
- 4. Do you have a formal contract with Salem Cyberspace to provide computer instruction?**
  - We don't have a contract with any provider yet.
  - That money is not for Cyberspace. It's probably for professional development.