

UP Academy Charter School of Boston Executive Summary

This was prepared by the founding group of the UP Academy Charter School of Boston.

UP Academy Charter School of Boston is proposed as a new Horace Mann Charter School to open in fall 2011, serving students in grades 6-8. In addition to enrolling 162 incoming 6th grade students, UP Academy aims to, that first year, serve all rising 7th and 8th grade students previously enrolled in the Patrick F. Gavin Middle School, an underperforming district school that Boston Public Schools (BPS) intends to close after the 2010-11 academic year.¹ In total, the school will open its doors to nearly 500 middle school students.

Our Mission. UP Academy will ensure that its students acquire the knowledge, skills, and strength of character necessary to succeed on the path to college and to achieve their full potential.

Our Students. UP Academy seeks to educate students at risk of not reaching their full potential. The school aims to serve a population of students who, without our program, may have been substantially excluded from the path to college. We intend to initially enroll many of the students currently attending the Gavin, including the school's large population of Special Education students and English Language Learners. Going forward, we intend to enroll students reflective of the demographics and learning needs across the BPS system. We believe that our school program can provide all students with a tremendous middle school education that they may otherwise have gone without.

School Turnaround. Our founding team believes that partnering with BPS to close an underperforming district school and to "restart" it as a Horace Mann Charter School represents the most effective and efficient means to close the state's achievement gap. In collaboration with the BPS, which is continuing its efforts to improve student achievement at underperforming schools through new strategies and alternative approaches, and with Unlocking Potential, a non-profit school management organization, UP Academy intends to rapidly transform the academic outcomes of students who may otherwise have attended an underperforming school.

Our Vision. Through the creation of UP Academy, we will create an extraordinary school option for families and students in Boston and we will be part of the national effort to turn around the country's lowest-achieving schools. Within four years, at least 75% of the school's students will demonstrate grade-level proficiency in math and English, and thus secure a firm place on the path to college. Over time, UP Academy will aim to both support and learn from other district-led school improvement efforts being pursued throughout the city and state.

Our Program. To effectively fulfill its mission, UP Academy will utilize the practices of the highest-performing urban charter schools, BPS schools, and school turnaround organizations. Our team believes that any student can rapidly approach grade-level proficiency when exposed to an academic environment defined by the following programmatic components, which will infuse our school:

1. *Relentlessly high, consistent academic and behavioral expectations for all stakeholders, including our students, our families, and our staff.* Our expectations will be explicitly taught, meticulously enforced, and consistently supported by school-wide systems of incentives and consequences.

¹ Per state regulations, the proposed school will hold a lottery for all of the school's seats.

2. *Seamless and detailed operating procedures.* Our operating systems will be wide-reaching and encompass every imaginable aspect of school operations, and will be implemented with unyielding attention to detail. All routines will be modeled for, and practiced by, the appropriate constituents at the beginning of each year, and regularly reinforced thereafter.
3. *Rigorous, standards-based curriculum, instruction, and assessments.* Our educational program will be designed to help students master core basic content and skills by the end of 8th grade, while simultaneously preparing them for the intellectual demands of a college preparatory high school program.
4. *A wide-reaching network of supports designed such that no child is left behind.* Our school will employ an extensive network of whole-school and individualized supports to catch struggling students before they fall behind. When faced with a student who is not finding success in our program, we will seek to identify the underlying skill deficiency and then provide systematic supports to address the issue.
5. *An obsession with regularly and effectively using data.* We will regularly analyze academic assessment data to understand which concepts students have and have not mastered, using this analysis to build tutoring plans and to make adjustments to our program. Data detailing student performance on non-academic goals will also permeate the school and drive individual and school-wide improvements.
6. *An atmosphere of enthusiasm and joy.* Our program will be designed to ensure that teaching and learning become exciting and fun.

Our Philosophy. The above programmatic components will be implemented in parallel with the school's two guiding philosophies. To accomplish UP Academy's mission effectively, (1) all stakeholders should work with urgency in all that they do and (2) all stakeholders should not make or accept excuses for anything less than excellence.

Our People. We know that without a mission-aligned, philosophically-aligned, smart, relentless team, nothing else will matter. Thus, we are prepared to work tirelessly and invest significantly to recruit and hire the most talented and driven staff members from within Boston and across United States to work at UP Academy and serve our school's students and families.

Our Community Support. Our plans have been embraced and welcomed by the Mayor of Boston, the BPS Superintendent, BPS families, BPS teachers, and many other community stakeholders, all of whom recognize the need for Boston's underperforming schools to be transformed by those with a strong track record of success in serving the city's students and families.

Our Capacity. UP Academy has the capacity that is required to achieve its mission. The school's founding team will contribute insights from having managed, governed, or worked in some of the highest performing urban public schools in the United States. For example, the school's Lead Founder, Scott Given, spearheaded a dramatic school improvement effort between 2005 and 2008, ultimately leading the school to become one of the state's highest-performing public middle schools. UP Academy's proposed founding Board of Trustees possesses a wide variety of critical qualifications, including charter school governance experience. The balance of the school's founding team shares a commitment to the school's mission and the attributes necessary to turn the vision for UP Academy into a reality. Further, BPS will contribute many district-wide best practices, including those prescribed to serve the city's most at-risk learners. And, not insignificantly, UP Academy has the commitment of large philanthropic organizations that will ensure that the school has the financial resources necessary to succeed.