

FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW 2010-2011

Proposed School Name: Veritas Preparatory Charter School

Grades Served At Full Capacity: 5-8

Number of Students At Full Capacity: 324

Proposed School Location: Springfield

Proposed Opening Year: FY2013

Public Statement:

Veritas Preparatory Charter School prepares students in grades 5-8 to compete, achieve, and succeed in high school, college, and beyond. Veritas Preparatory Charter School (“Veritas Prep”) will be located in Springfield, MA, will open with grade five, and grow one grade per year, and at maximum capacity will serve 324 students in grades five through eight. Founded on the belief that all students, regardless of race, class, or socioeconomic circumstance are entitled to a high quality education defined by high expectations, we provide a structured learning environment, rigorous college preparatory curriculum, and character education.

Mission Statement:

Veritas Preparatory Charter School prepares students in grades 5-8 to compete, achieve, and succeed in high school, college, and beyond.

Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:

School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment
First Year	5	81
Second Year	5, 6	162
Third Year	5, 6, 7	243
Fourth Year	5, 6, 7, 8	324
Fifth Year	5, 6, 7, 8	324

Mission, Vision, and Description of the Community(ies) to Be Served

Primary Strengths

- The mission Statement defines the purpose and values of the school and is succinct. (Section I.A.)
- Reviewers thought that the vision of the school to create a highly structured middle school built on a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, accompanied with targeted academic supports is compelling and serves as an organizing principle for the application. (Section I.B.)
- The application and applicant group discussed the reason for the selection of the community and provided a specific

Primary Weaknesses

- No primary weaknesses.

rationale for how this proposed school will enhance or expand the educational options for students and families in Springfield. They explained that they propose to “raise the bar on student achievement” by using replicable structures and practices generating success in existing high-performing urban charter schools. (Section I.C.)

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction

Primary Strengths

- The educational philosophy describes the founding group’s core beliefs and values; it asserts that the “focus is unapologetically academic” including high expectations, a structured learning environment, a curriculum focused on achievement outcomes, data driven instruction, a focus on literacy, character education, teacher quality and effectiveness and accountability. The philosophy aligns with and builds on the school’s mission. (Section II.A.)
- The application states that attention to outcomes, the measurement of academic achievement and a focus on differentiating instruction will meet the needs of all learners and all learning styles. In the interview, the applicant group reiterated the commitment to reach all students and discussed flexible ability grouping, extended time on learning, embedded tutoring time during the day, and trained staff to work with special student populations. (Section II.A.)
- The curriculum and instruction section are consistent with the mission and educational philosophy of the school. The application includes clear non-academic standards. (Section II.B.)

Primary Weaknesses

- While in the interview, the applicant group explained in greater detail the process and procedures used to report achievement data, to evaluate curriculum effectiveness, to inform professional development through “data days” and to facilitate ongoing development, improvement, and refinement of the curriculum and instruction, it’s still not clear how this will be actualized. (Section II.B.)
- While the application indicates that teachers will draw from many instructional methods, such as a gradual release strategy, flexible ability groupings to differentiate instruction, reading and writing across the curriculum, and daily tutoring, few actual methods are described. (Section II.B.)

Assessment System, Performance, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

Primary Strengths

- The promotion standards are clear. (Section II.C.)
- While this section does not clearly explain how achievement data will be collected and managed, it does describe a variety of internally developed assessments used to measure student progress, including daily exit tickets, weekly “show what you know quizzes”, common interim assessments, and comprehensive summative assessments. The use of standard summative assessments will allow the school to identify trends and compare performance as well. (Section II.D.)

Primary Weaknesses

- The performance standards are generic and outline the elements considered as part of a trimester or final grade rather than specific content or skill examples of standards of performance. (Section II.C.)
- It is unclear what the applicant group intends when the application explicitly states that “Students who have IEPs will be promoted to the next grade based on successful completion of IEP goals in alignment with...promotion policy.” (Section II.D.)

School Characteristics

Primary Strengths

- The application and applicant group described how the school educational program will be implemented for students and faculty including advisory, tutoring, “focused enrichment,” flexible ability grouping, homework center, and Saturday Academy. (Section II.E.)
- The school’s plan to involve families is clear and targeted to maintain family-school partnerships that focus on strengthening support for the school’s goals. (Section II.E.)
- The application includes many letters of support from potential community partners including: Behavioral Health Network, Partners for a Healthier Community, Inc., Urban League of Springfield, Square One, and Smith College. These partners are collaborating with the applicant group on recruitment strategies, afterschool and summer programming opportunities, curriculum and teacher development, and student supports. (Section II.E.)
- The application describes the proposed school’s culture and a clear plan to

Primary Weaknesses

- See Curriculum and Instruction.

establish and reinforce the culture. It includes an extensive behavioral philosophy and disciplinary plan that is aligned with the proposed school's mission and vision. (Section II.E.)

- While it is not clear the exact methods or strategies that might be used to support students with a wide range of needs, the application and the applicant group stress that structured tutoring and “enrichment” are times for individualized support. They also explain that teachers would meet with the director of student services to create action plans for students who are struggling. Staff would implement plans for 2 to 3 weeks and reconvene to evaluate plans. (Section II.E.)

Special Student Populations and Student Services

Primary Strengths

- The application describes providing Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) training to general education teachers during the summer institute and during professional development activities scheduled on Fridays and some of the twenty full professional days during the school year. (Section II.F.)
- During the interview, the applicant group clarified information regarding their English Language Development instruction during the school day. (Section II.F.)
- During the interview, the applicant group indicated that they can be flexible in their hiring plan to meet the needs of students. (Section II.F.)

Primary Weaknesses

- The application contains inaccurate and/or incomplete information regarding English language development instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs), and the initial ELL identification and annual assessment process. (Section II.F.)
- There is very little information about the methods that will be used to serve students in need of special educational services. During the interview, the applicant group was able to address some of these concerns through a discussion of the small class sizes (11:1) and a workshop model of instruction. (Section II.F.)

Enrollment and Recruitment

Primary Strengths

- The application provides a clear rationale for having a small school of 324 students with a slow growth model. (Section III.A.)
- The enrollment process includes a plan

Primary Weaknesses

- No primary weaknesses.

for a public lottery, is open, fair and is in accordance with the charter school statute and regulations. Although the proposed school intends to open in FY13, they have already developed a draft enrollment policy. (Section III.A.)

Capacity and School Governance

Primary Strengths

- The founders and proposed board members have a range of experience and qualifications, including charter school leadership, finance, management, social work, real estate, and law. (Section III.B.)
- The proposed school leader, Rachel Romano is participating in the Building Excellent Schools (BES) fellowship, a full-time comprehensive training program in charter school creation and leadership development. If chartered, BES maintains a formal and supportive relationship with the school, providing a range of services including but not limited to leadership coaching, governance training and support, and finance and operations support. (Section III.B. and III.C.)
- The governance model presents a clear workable structure and encourages an appropriate relationship between the board of trustees, school leader, and administration regarding governance and management of the school. (Section III.C.)
- The application identifies clear criteria for the selection and evaluation of a school leader. (Section III.C.)
- While it is not clear that the board will evaluate itself, the application establishes a viable process for policy making and ongoing board development. (Section III.C.)

Primary Weaknesses

- No primary weaknesses.

Management

Primary Strengths

- While it is not clear why the Executive Director evaluates all staff members, it is clear that s/he does. General teaching goals are articulated and teacher supervision and evaluation procedures are outlined. (Section III.D.)
- Professional development is clearly described in this section, including the summer institute and frequent opportunities during the school year with a classroom and school culture strand and a curriculum, instruction, and assessment strand. (Section III.D.)

Primary Weaknesses

- The organizational chart does not accurately reflect the staffing plan. (Section III.D.)
- No plan was provided for advancing and retaining teachers. (Section III.D.)

Facilities, Transportation, and Finances

Primary Strengths

- While the proposed school does not intend to open until FY13, the final application describes a viable process (based on reasonable assumptions) for conducting a facilities search (Section III.E.)
- The application provides a structure and process for managing school finances with a good outline of fiscal controls. There is a clear plan for how the school will track finances in its daily business operations. (Section III.E.)

Primary Weaknesses

- No primary weaknesses.