

# Veritas Preparatory Charter School

## Executive Summary

*This was prepared by the founding group of the Veritas Preparatory Charter School.*

### **Mission**

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

### **Vision**

All students are entitled to a high quality public education defined by high academic and behavioral expectations, regardless of race, class, or socioeconomic circumstance. We propose to provide a highly structured middle school built upon a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, accompanied by daily academic supports students need to achieve and targeted character education that stresses hard work and the **DRIVE** to succeed. Partnering with Proven Provider Building Excellent Schools, Veritas Prep builds its school design upon the highest performing urban schools in Massachusetts and across the country. We propose to replicate what works - under trained and prepared leadership - to ensure that all Veritas Prep students, regardless of their incoming academic profile, are by the completion of eighth grade set on a course to succeed in high school and on their way to college.

With focus on student outcomes, measurement of academic achievement and differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all learners, Veritas Prep educates middle school students within a highly structured college preparatory program. Frequent assessments allow us to know students well and plan our instruction and supports to meet their needs - particularly important for special education students and English language learners. While there is no single approach or individual solution to preparing students for college success, the following core principles define our educational philosophy.

- 1. High Expectations.** All students are college bound – every one. We expect our students to behave well and work hard. We expect students, families, and staff to be accountable to each other for maintaining high expectations.
- 2. Structured Learning Environment.** Before effective instruction can occur, a school must establish a structured and respectful school culture. We teach and hold our students to a fair and strict code of conduct with clearly defined actions and consequences.
- 3. Curriculum Focused on Achievement Outcomes.** The road to college and higher-level work begins with the ability to read well, write well and compute accurately. A future of academic success is built on a strong foundation of literacy and mathematics.
- 4. Data Drives Instruction.** Continuous assessment of student progress is critical to student success. With testing, and with trained staff to respond efficiently to assessment results, we gauge our student’s academic needs, and meet those needs effectively.
- 5. Focus on Literacy.** Teachers use common reading and writing strategies and students are given explicit and continuous instruction to become active, voracious readers and reading strategies to maximize learning in all of their subjects.

- 6. Character Education.** We develop the character needed to build and sustain achievement. In daily advisory classes, weekly community meetings, and cyclical rewards, we build students' **DRIVE** (Determination, Responsibility, Integrity, Vision, Enthusiasm) for success.
- 7. Teacher Quality and Effectiveness.** We recruit, retain, develop, and compensate highly effective teachers. We attract the best and brightest educators and offer them a professional environment in which all staff members are mission-driven team players.
- 8. Accountability.** Our instructional program and educational principles are informed by practices of high performing schools serving similar populations. We establish measurable academic outcomes, and compare our students' performance to the highest performing schools in the state.

### *Need*

Veritas Prep's mission and educational program are created in response to the compelling need in Springfield for a public middle school that prepares students to achieve in high school and college. With a high school graduation rate of 54%, Springfield students are not prepared with the skills and competencies they need to move forward. Long before high school, Springfield students begin the process of dropping out of their education – and the promise of their and our future - prior to the successful conclusion of twelfth grade. The source of this process for many of our most underachieving students has its roots in the middle school years.

Springfield's middle schools are characterized by a marked decline in math achievement and a limited gain in ELA achievement. In 2009, MCAS scores show that from fifth to eighth grade, students proficient in math dropped from 23% to 9%, and those proficient in ELA increased from 33% to 45%. The academic gap between students in Springfield and those across the state averaged 15% and widened by eighth grade between the number of students proficient in ELA at the state level compared with that at the district level. There are seven middle schools in Springfield, serving students in grades six through eight. None demonstrate overall proficiency rates for English above 50%, and none have overall proficiency rates for math above 30% as measured by the 2009 MCAS.

### **Capacity**

Strong leadership – visionary, uncompromising, and trained to execute on a clear mission - is a critical component of a high-performing school. This includes strong day-to-day management by the Executive Director and oversight by a highly competent Board of Trustees. The founding group of Veritas Prep is an extraordinary team of individuals capable of governing and managing the school, and able to execute on the mission and vision, as well as to establish policies that protect the school's organizational and academic success over time and ensure its success into the future. The founding group, supported by Proven Provider Building Excellent Schools, is further honored by the many business and community leaders who have offered their strong support and stand ready to assist Veritas Prep in the planning, development, and sustaining of a no excuses charter school in Springfield.