

FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW 2011-2012

Proposed Regional School Name:	Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School
Grades Served At Full Capacity:	9-12
Number of Students At Full Capacity:	500
Proposed School Location:	Holyoke
Proposed Opening Year:	2012-2013
Proposed Sending Districts:	Holyoke, Chicopee, West Springfield, Westfield, South Hadley, and Northampton

Public Statement:

“The Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School (PFSJCS) located in Holyoke focuses on academic excellence and social justice awareness, and will provide a strong intellectual and ethical foundation to: prepare students to attend and succeed in college, increase community and global understanding and involvement, and inspire future leaders for our society. PFSJCS will serve the public school sending districts of Holyoke, West Springfield, Chicopee, Westfield, South Hadley and Northampton. At full enrollment the school will offer grades 9-12 and have a maximum enrollment of 500.”

Mission Statement:

“The Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School (PFSJCS) is a public high school preparing students for college success while inspiring them to be active and effective citizens. We achieve educational excellence and social responsibility for all our students through high expectations and a rigorous academic and social justice curriculum. Our students graduate with strong intellectual and ethical foundations necessary for future leaders of a global society.”

Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:

School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment
First Year	9	145
Second Year	9 and 10	255
Third Year	9, 10, 11	355
Fourth Year	9, 10, 11, 12	455
Fifth Year	9, 10, 11, 12	500

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

Primary Strengths

- Reviewers thought that the mission of the school with a focus on educational excellence, inspiring active and effective citizens, social responsibility, and graduating students with strong intellectual and ethical foundations is

Primary Weaknesses

- Reviewers had concerns that the envisioned school would prioritize and implement the social philosophy and social justice components of the educational program over high academic standards and student success. During the

reflected throughout all sections of the application.

- The application and the applicant group describe a vision that is compelling and multifaceted. The applicant group demonstrated a passionate understanding and connection to the proposed mission and vision during the interview. (Section I.B.)
- The application described how the applicant group assessed parental support within the proposed sending districts. The group conducted outreach with community groups, held over a dozen meetings to listen to the needs of parents/guardians, students, and community members. This support was also reflected in the public hearing conducted in Holyoke on December 2, 2011. (Section I.C.)
- The social justice educational model proposed by the application and applicant group would expand upon educational options in Western Massachusetts. The application makes a case for an alternative high school in the region. (Section I.C.)
- This charter application has received letters and/or written testimony in support during the public hearing and public comment process, including but not limited to material from Congressman J. Olver, parents and other residents of the region, teachers, higher education administrators, non-profit leaders, and individuals affiliated with Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter School (PVPA). See public comment. (Section I.C.)

interview, the applicant group expressed the commitment that students at their proposed school will be ‘active, engaged learners’ who will ‘not only be accepted in a good college but to also be successful in that college and graduate.’ (Section I. A.)

- Based upon the two proposed school leaders’ previous leadership positions at Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter School (PVPA), it is unclear that the founders have experience serving this targeted student population. During the interview, when the two proposed school leaders were asked about this perceived lack of experience with a student population similar to Holyoke, one of the proposed sending districts, they asserted that they do have experience and have demonstrated success. They stated instead that a legitimate criticism would be that they don’t have experience with the comparative populations in terms of percentiles. (Section I.C.)

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction

Primary Strengths

- The educational philosophy describes three clear and robust core beliefs: personal excellence, supportive communities, and social responsibility which are connected to the proposed school’s mission. (Section II.A.)
- The application provides specific examples of how the applicant group

Primary Weaknesses

- Though the educational philosophy is based on widely held beliefs, the application offered limited research on the educational philosophy and the proposed social justice curriculum. (Section II.A.)
- While in the interview, the applicant group was able to articulate the priorities for planning and implementation, the

intends to weave social justice themes throughout the curriculum in alignment with the proposed school's mission and educational philosophy. (Section II.B.)

- The application clearly outlines constructivist instructional methods that the school intends to use to support achievement for a diverse student population and provides research on these instructional methods. In the interview, the proposed board members and school leaders spoke in detail about the implementation of such strategies at the proposed school. (Section II.B.)

application is not clear about how all the core beliefs and values will be implemented into a comprehensive educational program. (Section II.A.)

- Though the applicant group describes a generalized system during the interview, neither the application nor the interview provided a clear plan or the curricular components to develop, implement, improve, and refine curriculum. (Section II.B.)
- Though the social and emotional non-academic themes are woven throughout the application, the non-academic goals are imprecise and it is not clear how the school plans to measure student progress towards attaining non-academic goals. During the interview, the applicant group indicated that it was developing non-academic standards, such as social responsibility, that would also be assessed in all courses. (Section II.B. and II.D.)

Assessment System, Performance, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

Primary Strengths

- The application indicates the proposed school will perform initial assessments during the summer academy to develop information about the student's proficiencies, personal strengths, and learning needs. In the application and interview, it was emphasized that this information collected before the summer program, as well as past school records and input from student and family, will help to create an Individualized Student Success Plan (ISSP) that will evolve over time to record and monitor the student's progress for all stakeholders to access. (Section II.D.)
- The promotion standards and graduation requirements are explicitly outlined and seem clear and easy to understand for teachers, parents, and students. (Section II.C.)

Primary Weaknesses

- It is unclear from the application how ISSPs would be linked to curriculum, be used to facilitate decision-making about adjustments to the educational programming, and be used to support the goal of improved student learning. In the interview, it was clear that the plans would be discussed during regular weekly teacher meetings. (Section II.D.)
- The assessment system proposes to implement multiple diagnostic tests, school-developed tests, student self-assessments, writing portfolios, and MCAS preparation to support student growth and development. It is unclear what systems will be in place to effectively monitor student progress across these varied assessments and to implement programming changes as a result of achievement data. (Section II.D.)
- The proposed school provides an example of performance standards for the 9th grade, but it is unclear how these three

rubrics are linked to the content and skills outlined in the curriculum and the assessment system. (Section II.C.)

School Characteristics

Primary Strengths

- The application and applicant group describe specific plans to establish a school culture consistent with the proposed school's mission and educational philosophy which includes a 2-week orientation program for new teachers, summer academy for students, relationship building practices (empowerment circles), celebrations of achievement, and the democratic governance structure. (Section II.E.)
- The proposed school will also provide extended day, weekend, and year support for remedial and skill building programs to serve students who attend the proposed school. (Section II.B)
- The application describes a clear plan to build family-school partnerships through communication and varied opportunities to participate in school decision-making. (Section II.E.)
- The applicant group describes the school as a 'full-service' provider which proposes to partner with Holyoke social service support agencies and surrounding colleges to provide after-school programming specific to their students' needs. The proposed school also intends to implement a dinner program to encourage families to view the school as a community center, utilize the after-school programming, and become involved in the governance and life of the proposed school. (Section II.E.)

Primary Weaknesses

- This section again lists the core values of and the aspirations for the school, yet reviewers found it difficult to envision how all the different pieces: teachers' hours, planning time, part-time adjunct teachers, student advisory, after-school, evening, Saturday, and summer programming would be implemented for students and faculty. (Section II.E.)

Special Student Populations and Student Services

Primary Strengths

- The application provides a clear description of the identification, assessment, and provision of services for English language learners (ELL), including a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) program. (Section II.F.)
- The application provides a clear understanding of the federal and state special education laws and regulations as well as clear knowledge of ESE requirements. (Section II.F.)
- The application includes a description of how services will be provided within a continuum – from full-inclusion to a resource room setting. (Section II.F.)

Primary Weaknesses

- It is not clear if the projected administrative and teacher staffing will be sufficient to deliver the required special student services. (Section III.F)
- Reviewers noted that there may be a misunderstanding about evaluating ELL students for special education services. The application inaccurately indicated that if the ELL student’s language proficiency is Beginning and Beginning Intermediate, they will be evaluated in their home language. (Section II.F.)

Enrollment and Recruitment

Primary Strengths

- The applicant group has distributed well over 100 pre-applications to interested students and families in the potential sending districts. The applicant group has demonstrated a robust organized effort to communicate with members of the communities to be served, including the use of bilingual recruitment materials. (Section III.A.)

Primary Weaknesses

- The draft Recruitment and Retention plan does not include all of the required subgroups, though in the interview, the proposed school leaders discussed their expectation that PVPA’s reputation of serving special education students will bring families to their proposed school. (Section III.A.)
- The application and the applicant group explained that they planned for high attrition, based on their experience during the founding and opening PVPA of 20% attrition that leveled to less than 10%. (Section III.A.)

Capacity and School Governance

Primary Strengths

- Most members of the applicant group were either staff or board members for PVPA and as a result are well acquainted with the governance and operations of a Massachusetts charter public school. (Section III.B.)
- The proposed board of trustees is

Primary Weaknesses

- The organizational chart is poorly visualized and does not accurately reflect the school governance model, staffing, or the reporting structure that was described in the application. (Section III.C.)

comprised of individuals with skills and experience in charter school development, education, law, community development, and finance. (Section III.B.)

- The ‘democratic’ governance model of including students, parents, teachers, and community members on the board of trustees is consistent with the proposed school’s mission and program. (Section III.C.)
- The applicant group proposes an ambitious democratic policy development strategy that is driven by individual stakeholders representing various constituency groups on the board in alignment with the school’s social justice philosophy. (Section III.C.)

Management

Primary Strengths

- The application provides a narrative describing a clear reporting structure and delineation of responsibilities for the proposed school’s leader and other administrative staff. (Section III.D.)
- The application provides a teacher observation and evaluation process that outlines specific components, clear goals, and descriptive criteria to be reviewed both informally and formally by the principal during the school year. (Section III.D.)
- The application describes how the school will determine professional development needs of the staff and gives examples of a few of the professional development opportunities. (Section II.B and III.D.)
- In both the application and the interview, the applicant group indicates informal support from members of the PVPA community through the sharing of curriculum and assessment, teacher mentoring, and professional development opportunities. (Section II.B.)
- The application and the applicant group demonstrated a strong commitment to attract and retain highly qualified staff

Primary Weaknesses

- It is unclear how the teaching program and outside of the class responsibilities for the typical classroom teacher will operate at the proposed high school. During the interview, the applicant group indicated that the proposed school would follow a similar school schedule as PVPA as well as incorporate a schedule of before school staff meetings as found at Global Learning Charter Public School. (Section III.D.)

through both professional and personal support. (Section III.D.)

Facilities, Transportation, and Finances

Primary Strengths

- The application and the applicant group describe a viable process for conducting a facilities search, and in the interview the group provided a brief status report. (Section III.E.)
- Based on the present economic climate, the applicant group acknowledged during the interview that they were re-thinking the aggressive 4% increase in per pupil tuition revenue assumed in their three year budget. The group described ways that they could scale back and their capacity to fundraise. (Section III.F)

Primary Weaknesses

- The application and the applicant group stated that they intend to provide limited transportation options for students that include a fee-based bus service with a sliding scale cost, coordinating ride sharing amongst families or public transportation. In the interview, the group clearly stated the requirement that the proposed school's facility be in close proximity to the bus routes of the PVTA system which serves all six towns in the proposal. (Section III.E.)