

Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School

Questions as derived from panel review

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

1. What was Paulo Freire's educational philosophy? What aspects of his philosophy have you integrated into your school?

- As Paulo Freire – to create a socially just society, we need an educated citizenry. One of the things that he proposed was equal opportunities so that every student –regardless of any the isms (race, gender, class, etc.) has the equal opportunity for an extraordinary education.
- He believed that you can do that through literacy – through this literacy – he believed it was important to incorporate relevant information towards the lives of the children as well.
- We have talked about effective community involvement is needed and that is where the literacy piece leads – the writing and reading is to become an effective member of the community.
- Some of his values are the same values that we hold as far as high expectations, excellence in education and community involvement and creating citizens that are socially responsible as well as have academic excellence.
- The fact that literacy the kids will be reading and writing effectively when they leave our school.
- They will be prepared for college...
- Not just academic literacy but citizenship literacy and to give back to the community...

2. Your vision and educational program is complex. What are the priorities for planning and implementation?

- To create an environment for an education for learning – to reach all learners...
- In that part of our vision in our proposal as far as diversity and social justice is concerned – is creating a social responsive system. We hold high value to that in our vision on diversity where we say that community members are involved as well as all stakeholders will be at the table making decisions on our educational process.
- Creating cultural sensitivity in our students... The people that we will be serving come from very diverse backgrounds but they don't interact with one another within the community itself or in the world at large. What we would like to teach them is how to interact with one other and learn about each other's cultures, economic backgrounds –

race relations so that when they come out into their community they have a better sense of where they live and the people around them and prepare them to be excellent citizens.

- Having their own personal goals and being vested in their learning and we'll role model that...
- We want a high level of education. We want to prepare every single one of our students to not only be accepted in a good college but to also be successful in that college and be able to graduate. We have high expectations of the courses that they would complete for high school graduation is what any good college would accept for admission. We expect them to do all of their work at the school at a minimum 70% rate. We expect them to do more than that but that is the minimum rate. We expect them to have a really solid foundation for learning by the time they go into a college environment.

3. How is educational excellence and academic achievement reflected in the operations of the school?

- In terms of the academic achievement, all of our students there is no failure. Our expectation is that students will have a solid foundation and they will work until they get to that foundation. We do the same thing at PVPA in terms of expectations. Every paper, every test, every project must be at a minimum level for the student to get credit. They can redo, retake – it means we don't leave anyone with failing grades or holes in their education. At other schools, you may get an F on a test but you move on. No student is allowed to move on or be promoted or graduate unless all of their work is at a minimum level – 70% is the minimal level at this school. We know that the students moving on can have the foundation to be able to succeed at the next level. We will encourage our students to do more than the 70%.
- To have clear goals for the students to follow the benchmarks and standard so that they know what is expected of them. They have that goal to work towards. If they don't meet that goal right away they continue to work towards that goal to meet that goal at a 70% standard before they move on.

4. Please describe the anticipated educational needs of the student population you hope to serve and how this proposed school will address the needs of those student populations.

- One of the things that is foundational to the school is the establishing community. By community I mean students, board, faculty, and parents. All these members need to come together and talk about and resolve many of these issues. One of the interesting things about our governance structure is the board of trustees will have student, parent, and faculty representation. Any founding of a school, there will be inevitably issues that will come up and there have to be mechanisms that the stakeholders so they bring up issues as they emerge. This is one of the key structures of Paulo Freire, there is an opportunity, there is a place for these issues to come forward –whether at shared dinners, forums during the day, or board meetings – there are opportunities for the whole community to weight in on what is need and the direction.

- I expect to see a variety of needs in Holyoke. One of the primary things that I am looking at as an educator is the whole issue of engagement. If we are going to be transformative in terms of education, we have to provide role models and provide kids with individuals that students can identify with and engage with. Who you select as board members, who you select as faculty is key the success of the operation of the school
- I also think – looking at the diverse group that we have - I have worked in Holyoke for the past 20 years as a psychologist. I expect we will get kids with different learning styles, different experiences – kids who have experienced failure – kids who had been dealt with in a different way – this is why I have kept working with the group because I feel that is what we will be addressing. We will be addressing different learning styles, differentiated instruction. We will be addressing kids and how they learn in ways that may have never been addressed.

5. What evidence do you have that this participatory philosophy could be an effective option for this student population?

- When I think of that I think of our makeup as being diverse –you have students coming from different backgrounds, different socioeconomic backgrounds that normally don't have the chance to have the across race and across socio-economic dialogues. In having these dialogues and those different populations of students when you normally don't get those differences at a school that is serving in one area; you would get just the same types of the students. With our school, this cross-class and cross-race dialogues will really prepare our students to go out into the real world that has that and be able to deal with that.
- We have two models that you can look at. One is PVPA with the same curriculum, same grading system, and same governing system – lots of similarities. Bob and I created that years ago and it worked really successfully and we served students from all of the towns currently identified – Holyoke, Chicopee, South Hadley, etc.. We had issues with students coming in who didn't have skills and we had to bring their skills up. We had many of these same concerns at PVPA and had real success stories – major transformations of learning for students who had previously been in learning environment where they hadn't been successful. We had students with Asperger's syndrome who really thrived in our school. We had many different communities represented, 60 towns and cities; we got to see every school system and every type of student in that school. We were able to create that community and learning environment through our expectations.
- Second – there is a Paulo Freire charter school in Philadelphia, an inner city school, and I visited the school and spent time with the school leaders. A lot of the pieces that we have identified as necessary; they have also identified these same pieces. They are doing the same things in terms of student government, student participation, use of the code of conduct developed from the students, and similar educational system. Full service is really key to what we expect to do. We don't expect student to come in to our school with a lot of skills and one of the reasons why we chose this area was because Holyoke,

Chicopee, Westfield, West Springfield had very low indicators that the students are being successful. Their MCAS scores are way down. One of the schools in Holyoke had to be taken over by the state this year. We find that the education systems are really low and that is why we chose this district so that we could really make a difference in terms of the education. We have worked with the Peck school in Holyoke (K-8 school) that has done full service for the past four years. Working as a full service school with very similar systems in place to what we are proposing, they have seen a real difference in student success. The parents are excited and really involved the Peck school. The school has about 75 eighth graders who need another choice for their students to go to high school. Parents are upset that there is not another choice – Holyoke High does not have full services programming.

- The full service program works well – there is research and results to support it.

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction

1. How is academic rigor and college preparation reflected in your curriculum and instruction, and educational program in general?

- Actually 70% is the lowest it could possibly be. It is not our baseline; it is the minimum amount that somebody can get in anything. It is not a 70% average. You have to get at least 70% in everything that you do to get credit for it.
- For some students based on where they are coming from and what their skills are coming in, that may be the best that they could do over a short period of time. We expect to challenge them further than that. But with our system of grading you will be able to improve your work until you decide that you are finished but at least up to that 70% mark. They have to improve all work to at least achieve the minimum.
- We are going to have qualified teachers first of all. As a teacher myself, we grade 1-4 on our report cards at my school. If they grade 1 or 2 during the first term they are not accessing the curriculum, they are not working to grade level. It is up to the teacher and student to work to bring that up to the 70% at least.
- It is to build off of the students' work – the child may be coming in with some deficits...
- I think that the 70% is the beginning point that is the minimum amount that anyone can do on anything. In a other environment where they don't follow our system, you may get a 40 and nothing happens after that but it will be averaged in with other assignments. But we are requiring students to work on all their work to reach a 70% and then challenge to continue to improve to move them beyond that.
- I wanted to say – we look at the 70% - it has become a number now that is almost laughable. I look back at school and 65% was the passing grade. 70% is a just hair past 65 so is it really that rigorous but if you are looking at a student who has deficits, learning gaps, and he gets a 40% and (in other systems) hopefully he'll just go on and pass the

next test –there is something that he is missing. But with our system there is a learning process that is much more valuable than ignoring the 40% but expecting the student to work and refine their learning to at least reach that 70% on everything.

- I think there are three steps for me – one, we know it will be a diverse group and we know that we will have a tremendous amount of work for students coming in the ninth grade and many will have had very weak K-8 experiences. This full service model that includes tutoring and after school, all the pieces in our proposal, are to get them up to that minimum level over a period of time. Our experience at PVPA with those kinds of students, some students it took a semester – some students it took a two or three years. At PVPA it was 82.5% and found that it was too high for some students with really poor preparation to meet early on and that it took time to get there.
- We are talking about getting students prepared for a really good college. Obviously, that 70% would not be sufficient to get kids a great college. The 70% is not the goal; the ultimate goal is kids are ready to go to a really great college.

2. How would you describe college preparation? What does it take for students to be “fully prepared to enroll in college”? What does it mean to be college ready?

- The first thing that comes to my mind is differentiated instruction so that we are meeting the kids’ learning needs in every way.
- Teaching to multiple learning styles – for me personally growing up in Harlem, I was very good at structural learning and noticed later on in life I realized I was a visual learning. Most teachers today teach to one style which is that structural style. Using the multiple learning styles approach in my job as a teacher at PVPA, it went a long way. Kids that were labeled or those students that weren’t expected to reach the marks did so by including the multiple styles of learning.
- I am a father of a Holyoke public school student – a white middle class kid. Her Puerto Rican and African American friends were channeled not go to college. I think people are branded as failures and that they not capable of doing this thing. One of the most important things for our kids is that they see that they can do it. That they are getting help, that they have role models; that they see their friends going to college, that their teachers are pushing them towards college. At least one period a day will be individualized tutoring for kids. There is afterschool tutoring and summer tutoring. There is all this stuff that finally gets a kid to say – I can do this. Once that moment happens where a kid can say I can do this it is a game changer in a lot of ways.
- We believe in them – that is an important step making the students feel successful. I work with those kids, they hardly get a 60 so starting them at 70 and challenging them to go up and using those tools to make them feel successful.
- When we say literacy we are not just talking about reading – it is reading, writing, comprehension in all of the uses of technology. All the skills that you would need to go to

college, complete it and get a job and be successful at it. You need this whole set of skills. We also talk a lot about it in the social justice aspect of our curriculum -access to resources, access to government and knowing how to be a good citizen. This is crucial in this economy. It is not just about getting a job but also often about how to call your state representative and get something done in your community that you need to do.

- There are organizations in the Holyoke community that just received grants on going green – there are many organizations that are community based that we will be collaborating with as well.
- One of Freire' big points is to give everyone a voice in the game. We know right now that this is not true but it is important in this school. We live in a democracy, the problem that I see is that citizens need to be active and effective – we need teachers that know how to do this. You cannot teach at this school unless you know how to do that and you are going to train your kids in how to do that. We are going to support them to be active and supportive citizens so that they have a voice. Once you can see you can make a difference in this world, it opens all kind of worlds for these kids.

3. What is the relationship between Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter School (PVPACS) and the proposed school? Do you have any formal agreements?

- There is no contract. We have some formal agreements in terms of curriculum with the director of the history and social studies department and the English language arts department to work with our teaching staff around implementation and development of our curriculum piece.
- Initially, when we have our first group of teachers – they will be new to the school and we will need mentors for those teachers. PVPA teachers who have been teaching in that field for a number of years will serve as mentors to our teachers. Charles and I have spoken about sharing training that we would be doing – to share the cost of bringing teachers together, visiting classrooms really supporting each other. Molly Welch at PVPA has put together a really wonderful curriculum for ELA and she has had great success – her 10th grade class finished first in the state in terms of ELA score on the MCAS this year. She will share her curriculum, and training about what has been most effective.
- Weekly mentorship program for the first year – we haven't finalized the specific times yet but we are relatively close to PVPA in terms of distance.

4. How will teachers know what to teach and how to teach it?

- The frameworks – standards and benchmarks.
- Taking the frameworks and taking the core curriculum – creating scope and sequence from it and we worked with PVPA to get it done so we already have a lot of that in place. Out of the scope and sequence, the teachers will be working during orientation and

summer prep program working out our curriculum map, lessons, activities and wherever possible integrated learning. Out of the curriculum map will come very specific standards and benchmarks, updated from PVPA because we want the teachers to own it and those standards and benchmarks will be the beginning piece to work with. The standards and benchmarks will be given to parents and students at the beginning of the year.

- They have already had time in the summer program and prep time as well. They have had support in developing lessons incorporating the multiple learning styles and differentiation as well as incorporating culturally responsive techniques in their classes. There will be professional development training to be able to incorporate beforehand and mentored to reach that. They will be highly qualified teachers that can go onto a classroom and recognize student needs. When I started to incorporate these techniques into my lesson plans, I learned a lot about not only my students and myself and the strategies that did work. It made a huge difference – I could identify student learning styles and use student information to teach.

5. Acknowledging the possibility that students may be performing below grade level, how with this program accelerate their learning?

- Each student is coming in with an ISSP (individual student success plan). Together as a community at orientation that is when we develop it with the family members using their past school histories and their experiences with education prior to this point and review all of the information and we sit with parents and families and community. It is similar to an IEP but every student gets one.
- Back to the participatory element – my experience as an educator, from the 2nd grade on up students are able to sit with you and discuss what they need to work on and where their weaknesses are. By the time they get to high school they must be able to have the serious conversations about what they need to focus on and what we will help them work on. One of our discussions as a board is that we don't want to approach students as empty vessels that we will drop information into. They have to be participants in their education and involved in constructing it that means working with them to identify what it is important, what is their interests, what give them a sense of success in their learning. To come up with a general principle –it requires a focus on the individual.

6. How will struggling students or students who are below grade level to be supported?

- There is process in place to watch that happen. We mentioned how we would create the ISSPs. It is a clear weekly process - meeting with teachers to evaluate student progress around those ISSPs and whether they are succeeding. Teachers meet every morning during the week. One morning each week teachers meet to look at student progress on the ISSPs another morning each week is for teachers to meet to strategize about those students who are not making progress. It is a formative process. We are not waiting until the end when they have already failed – we are using data weekly to review student progress.

- We have tests that we are administering twice a year – GRADE and GMADE that will give us baseline data. We will do it when students are first accepted in the lottery, before the summer program starts, we will ask parents to come in and have student testing so that we can understand what the students' needs are and use the summer programming to prepare students.
- Once a student is admitted to the school, we then have immediate meetings and testing to work out a plan for that student and to allow the student and parents to understand that they have a voice in the school. We perform the home language surveys to identify English language learners. To really get to know our community. It is really important getting to know each student as an individual and getting to know their needs. It really forms a community. The teachers know every student in the school. We will get together every week and make a list of the students who were struggling and the teachers would get together to discuss what is working with the student, where did you find success with the student, what strategies worked, so that we could really craft a way to support each and every student.
- If you teach with a constructivist philosophy, you will have kids doing formative assessment all the time – constantly assessed. That makes a big difference. My daughter in the Holyoke schools – her experience didn't measure understanding just measured her memorization of teacher notes.
- We see ourselves making an excellent place for education. Students will not only have academic skills. Our experience at PVPA often many of the students who came from these communities were socially promoted. They didn't have any skills coming in. We need to start where the student is at and build supports for students in any way possible. Once a student get it. A lot of educational and social issues are just because a student doesn't have a foundation. Then it gets harder when they get to higher levels to feel confident – it can be self-defeating. Student who have been socially promoted don't feel they know where to start. The extra support programs during the school day, afterschool, evenings, weekends – whatever the student needs to get proficient is what we will do. Making sure that students have the supports that they need to succeed. 70% is not our bar that is just to encourage students to get to ground level. We encourage students to be able to do more. You aren't finished when you get it to 70% you can then get it to 80% then 90%. There is nothing to stop a student from getting to the highest level that they possibly can. A chance to learn skills of perseverance that are important life skills – if you are someone who works really really hard to get an A – it means a huge amount for you.

Assessment, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

1. Clarify your promotion and graduation policy.

- Basic idea is that overall credit requirement and basic distribution requirement within the core subject areas of English, math, social studies and science as well as electives over the four years.

- In the third year they go into an internship program where they get placed. The internship coordinator will place them into the communities that we serve for the one year internship, at least 50 hours during their senior year.
- There are 16 electives required for graduation within the four different areas laid out in the charter. Most students will be doing their internship during their senior year because they will not have completed their other requirements until then.
- Student will be allowed to take at the level of their proficiency. If they have succeeded at a certain level then they can move on to the next level. If they enter in ninth grade and are prepared for tenth grade courses they can move. The same way that students who are capable of taking college courses through dual enrollment will be encouraged to take college courses. There are many different systems in the Pioneer Valley that we can use. At PVPA, we had a huge number of dual enrollment students. When I got to New Bedford, there was no dual enrollment program but by the end of my first year at Global Learning we had 30% of juniors and seniors taking college courses at Bristol Community College and University of Massachusetts.

2. What tools will be used to measure student progress on non-academic goals?

- They need to be able to complete the entire program and that is the internship. They will need to do the 50 hours in community service and each of the different electives are required for graduation.
- We have done internship programs in the past. The way we have gone about doing it is an application process where you describe what it is you are going to do and what it is that you are going to accomplish. You identify a faculty advisor and the identification of goals that you will accomplish and a process of checking in on your progress towards these goals.
- Other teaching besides the academic teaching – how to be responsible members of the school community, they are creating the code of conduct as a group and following the code of conduct, they are serving as representatives to the board and serving on committees. Students were on the hiring and assessment committee at PVPA. Students are really active member of their community. We also expect engagement in the class – we don't expect students to just sit there. We expect them to really think about things and understand and be able to deconstruct information that they get. To be able to read things and understand the point of view. To be able to assess what they are hearing and using. This is where the whole social justice aspect comes in. We want them to be responsible in terms of their education. They will put together in ninth grade a five year plan to determine what they are going to be doing in terms of college. Parents will be a part of that and will start right away with college preparation as soon as they get into the school. We expect to continue with our students in the following years (through five years). We expect to have someone coming in working with the students in their first year of college – a staff member doing support work starting in our fourth year. There are a lot of skills that come when students are engaged active learners. At PVPA, we were told by top

schools that your students are the only students who are involved, excited about learning and enthusiastic - they really take charge and know how to work.

- Using UbD, they are being taught right then how to critically think and self –reflect in academic and no-academic courses.
- Most of those things will be part of the assessment in the academic and elective settings. Academic courses will not just be about the standards and benchmarks of the MCF or the Common Core. We are developing additional ones within each of those courses that will be incorporated that will not be separate from the academic goals. We will be measuring things such as academic engagement and social responsibility in our courses and throughout the whole experience of the school.

School Characteristics

1. As a community where participation of all stakeholders is key to the realization of the mission, how will parents and families be engaged in their child’s education and the success of the school?

- One of the things that may not be coming across is our passion as a group. We won’t let a child fail, there is nothing we won’t do to help a child succeed and to be clear about that success is getting into college. Our experience here and at PVPA, we will do whatever it takes if it means we have to drive a student to school, which we have done, we will. We talk about an evening program for parents. We are going to do a dinner program to see what their children are doing and to give the parents an opportunity to participate in our governance structure. We are incredibly passionate.
- Well I think for me, it is a tone – it is a top down. It is the board's responsibility to observe this – to make sure that the goals and the laws and the regulations are being complied with. Also telling the parents that this is how the board feels, this is what we are going to do. We are shooting for everyone to go to college and succeed in college and graduate. The board is going to be setting the tone. We are going to have a very active board. We will oversee the plans. We are all very passionate – the tone at the top is that we are going to show that that is the philosophy. We will not be a laid back board.
- Passion is contagious and we have it. I also think from working in Holyoke - having an open school where the parents feel that they belong and that they have a voice will make a difference. A lot of our Latino parents in Holyoke are scared that the calls from school are about misbehavior, about behavior management. Having parents involved not only in the wrong but in the positive. Knowing our expectations – we have a strong belief that all kids can learn. How are we going to get this student to learn – how do they learn and how can we reach them?
- Part of that learning is in the home and communicating with the home and having a sense of belonging where that parent is coming in and also teaching about their culture. Having the community involved and being role models.

- It is also about not being invisible. In the public school system, it is easy for the student to just be one of many students. But if you have a school like this where everyone is an individual and every one person matters and that the parent has a say in what happens. We are actively seeking the parents to be involved and providing services for the parents to get their GEDs. This is a way also to get parents involved in education to want to share in this experience with their children because in some point in their lives they didn't have this. They now have an opportunity to experience this. I didn't read a book until I was 21 years old. I was told I couldn't learn. If we have a school that cares about the individual and cares about the parents and says that your voice matters – you matter your children matter that is enough to get any parent involved.

2. Please describe the organization of the typical school day; typical student schedule will look like.

- First thing – Bob (Brick) is out in the hall –and he is standing there as the kids are coming in - they are congregating and talking and Bob is out there talking with them...
- We have periods that are 45 minutes long. The academic day starts are 8:30 a.m.
- It is not a staggered lunch schedule on purpose. We found at PVPA that in a community when people break bread together, eat together that is our plan. In the bid that went out - next Friday is the deadline for building bids to come in, we designed a community center. It will be where we will eat together, where we meet together, used as a multipurpose common space for the school but also for the community on weekends and evenings. We plan to contract to bring in the food and we plan to supplement that with really nutritional vending machines. We always have a local pizza vendor. We have lunch in the middle of the day. The electives piece happens later in the day. Every student gets a teacher supported study in their schedule during the day.

3. Why did you decide that the day of classroom teachers ends an hour before the end of the school day? Why did you decide that teachers have all of their planning and meeting time before the school day begins? Who are the part-time adjunct teachers who teach the elective classes from 2:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.? How are the adjunct teachers supported to be successful at the proposed school?

- In New Bedford at Global Learning, we had meetings every morning before the academic day begins and it really worked well so that is where this model comes from. Teachers were dealing with things directly; everyone was there, everyone shared. It was really a great way to have all the different meetings on different mornings– department, grade level, all school – it really worked successfully. People didn't have other responsibilities at that time of the day as they would will afterschool.
- In the afternoon, we have part time staff, similar to PVPA, that teach the last long block during the day when electives happen which gives full time staff additional opportunities for planning or meeting with students.

- The part time staff has training when they come in that is different than fulltime giving the values of the school. They will have supervision having a chance to see what is going on the classroom and a chance for them to meet.

4. Please describe how the afterschool, evening, Saturday and summer programming will be developed, integrated, supervised, and assessed.

- We are working with several colleges that have specific programs that they run to provide educational support – Hampshire College, Amherst College, Westfield State, and Springfield College. They will all be working with us - sending us tutors and student teachers that will be supervised by the college.
- Summer is mandatory for all new students coming in because we want to build the school culture and build shared understandings around the various approaches at the school. The summer program is not all about remediation. Students are expected to attend because they are part of the community and they are going to help the other students that need that help. Some of the summer program is fun. In the future, it will have more community building and not necessarily all academic skill building. We will provide longer summer sessions in our second year. It is shorter the first year because we don't know if we will have the building ready early enough.
- We have a budget for bus passes. We have required all the bidders, and again we don't know where it will be located yet but it must be located within a short walking distance from the bus route. All of the six towns are part of the PVRTA existing bus system. One bus without a transfer and less than an hour ride — The facility has to be within that. This Friday is the bid date. We know folks that we are working with that plan to meet that requirement.

Special Student Populations and Services

1. How will the proposed school identify, assess, and provide specialized instruction to students with limited English proficiency? How did you determine staffing projections?

- Well for the English language learners, the process we will be using is starting with the home language survey. Based on that, the testing that we will be using is the LAS-O and R/W and looking at language proficiency. The other thing that we will be doing is using the MELA-O. It is a good observational form and looks at how kids use English. Even native speakers often don't come out as a 5 on that scale. That is a system that we will be using. At working this out – our best guess – is that the majority of English language learners we will get would be mid-level 2 to mid-level 4 in terms of the MELA-O. They will have some basic English. Following the Department guidelines, kids that are at the lowest level you are looking at least 2.5 hours of English language instruction to possibly a full day. In terms of our staffing, using the figures from Holyoke because that will probably be the primary source of kids with English as a second language needs, we estimated that we would need 1 certified ESL teacher during the first year and apprentice

teachers and translators. We have a direct collaboration with UMASS on their translation unit. Ideally, I would love to tell you that we will find a lot of bilingual staff. When it comes to translators, we will certainly try to recruit from the community.

2. How will the proposed school identify, assess, and provide specialized instruction to each student in need of special education services?

- At a high school level, we would hope that most students would have been identified but we know that is not the case. Doing the initial testing before the summer program starts is really essential. Doing the GRADE and GMADE test assessment so that we can see what skills are like before a student comes in. Certainly meeting with the parents and student and talking about their experiences of learning have been is really important before we get to the summer program to determine if there is a need for an IEP that isn't in place. If there is an IEP in place, going over those records and really seeing what works within our environment. We found at PVPA, that students coming in with their IEPs, we really had to redo them to create an effective tool for the school that we were in.
- Our experience in PVPA and the community, if you build it they shall come. We had such a good program, we were so responsive to those parents, we were so inclusive – that is what we are putting out to the community. This next week we are doing our first informational meetings to the community about the potential for this school in all of our six communities. That is the kind of word that will go out there. We did not have to recruit IEP students at PVPA because the word got out very quickly that we were really successful. Our reputation will bring those students from our efforts at PVPA.
- The word is out that this school is founded by the same group that started PVPA. We have already been hearing from parents about their situations in schools and how it hasn't served their student's needs. We were so successful with students at PVPA in terms of special education students. We had a very high percentage of students going off to four year colleges. We had two students who came from a resource room environment at their previous school and they went to Ivy League colleges. They were prepared and successful when they got there. You don't really know what the skills are until you create a differentiated instructional environment where you can meet the individual needs of a student.
- I think a good school when a kid starts to emerge and people become concerned about whether a student has special needs. One of the things that is really incumbent upon the school is to go the RTI route (Response to Intervention) – start trying different approaches. One of the wonderful things I love about PVPA is the teachers – capturing a culture on paper is not an easy thing to do– but part of the culture is that teachers are very responsive to suggestions from peers, parents, and students. It would be that type of culture that I would like to see developed in this school. The IEP should be a last resort. Inevitably, those kids end up seeing themselves as damaged and that is not the message. We try to prevent kids from seeing themselves as not having a certain potential. They have to believe that they are capable of reaching the moon.

3. What is the status of the agreements with the organizations that will provide the school with ancillary services?

- I can talk about Amherst College program. They have a learning community program where they assign student tutors. They spend two semesters and they have their own supervision. I have used them in other afterschool programs in Holyoke. It is not only academics – they do technology, theatre, etc. They emphasize the students’ needs. It is important both ways in terms of community engagement– it adds the community experience. It is a learning experience on both sides – some people are not exposed to this kind of life.
- As a professor at Springfield College, my entire department is aware of the proposal and is ready to offer their individual services as well as placing student teachers and supervisors. I am very interested in assisting in the hiring of teachers.
- We have a direct relationship with the Adult Learning Center in Holyoke. We will be contracting with them to provide our adult learning services in the evening. We have talked about leadership training and sexual education from Girls, Inc. that will be in place at the school. We are working directly with Career Point on job training services and support. A number of the groups are in the support letters within our application. The University of Massachusetts-Boston and Amherst partnership is around research and scholarship funding for our students that get into UMass-Boston.

Enrollment and Recruitment

1. What are the entry points of the proposed school, and do they change as your school adds grades?

- In a perfect world, students come in the 9th grade. That is why our figures show an attrition rate where our upper grades go down a bit. What we learned in PVPA, you only build culture when kids come in from the beginning. If an 11th grader enters the school, they may benefit but they don’t really become as actively engaged in the culture and contributing to the life of the school. Our enrollment figures are based on the notion that we will only have students enter in the ninth grade.

2. What has led your group to expect such high attrition? Why do you plan for so many students to leave between 9th (145) and 10th (110) grades?

- These were the percentages from PVPA in the early years. In our experience, in the early years of a charter school, people don’t really know what you are. The attrition rate in the early years of PVPA was 20% and then it went down to 8-10% as people began to choose a little bit better. People can walk whenever they want and go back to their district school and there are many reasons why that happens.
- That is why we have the extended day and attrition did go down. I had exit interviews with the students that left PVPA and I can tell you that the bigger issues were economic.

Parents needed their kid to be at work at 2:30 p.m. and couldn't do an extended day. We really worked with them; we would give them jobs in the school. We have some plan at our school to give students jobs at school to avoid that. There is some level of attrition at all charter schools.

Capacity, Governance, and Management

1. What financial and logistical support has been provided to the founding group by PVPA?

- No technical financial support but lots of logistical support especially during the first round last year. They supported me to help prepare the initial proposal and help with copying and space for meetings. No direct financial relationship.

2. For Bob Brick and Ljuba Marsh: Please describe your roles and responsibilities as school leaders at Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter School.

- My role is fairly similar. I was the director of education which is the principal's role. I was responsible for all curriculum development, all hiring and supervision of teachers, all of the training of teachers – all of the educational components. I was not the only trainer but I did a lot of the in house training. I worked with the educational team which is the department heads that we will have in year three. The department heads will be overseeing their departments and I will be working with them during the supervision and the planning and the developing. I did the testing and assessment as well.
- I had two roles but when we worked together I was the administrative director. After Ljuba left, they changed the model and I moved to the executive director position which is the model that we have proposed here. I did all of the administrative things in the earlier job when Ljuba & I were together we were co-directors. But in this model I will be her supervisor.

3. How do you respond to the potential criticism that Bob and Ljuba do not have experience serving a student population similar to the targeted population to be served by the proposed charter?

- We served the towns and communities what I find is that based on the lottery with the number of students you never know what you will have in terms of a population. We are serving the same towns and the same age groups as we have before. In New Bedford, we had a very large population of Spanish speaking, Portuguese speaking, and a Cape Verdean population. Because of the lottery, because of who actually got in the school, there were very few identified ELL students. There was work we had to do with students who may have been in the past ELL students or Spanish speaking families but you really don't predict those kinds of figures at a charter school. We will do all of the recruitment and expect a large number. We are also a high school so

they may have already received a lot of services in K-8 and coming into a high school without that level of need.

- A legitimate criticism is that it will be a percentile difference but we certainly worked with those students and were successful with those students. We certainly had a high success rate. We don't know but we are guessing 8-10% potentially of our students will fall into that range and PVPA was around 1%. It is a percentile difference but we certainly worked with those students successfully. We had a high success rate.
- The fact that Holyoke already has a charter school that goes from K-8, those are the potential students. The potential concern that parents have is that they don't have another high school where they can send their kids that graduate from eighth grade.

4. Please give examples of some of the unexpected challenges you encountered in opening and operating a charter school and the solutions you used to effectively address those challenges.

- We started a charter school when no one knew what a charter school was and had an intense amount of issues. We feel much more prepared for starting this school. We've been through the fiscal planning and scheduling issues. We didn't have a building identified when we got our charter with PVPA. Today we have blueprints, we've already sent them out, we already done the bidding process. We didn't have a curriculum in place – we now have a huge model of what we used at PVPA that we can work off of. We didn't have a hiring process- we put that together. All of the different pieces we've already worked with and made it much more workable. What we expect is there will be specific things that we will need to change. We will have a tight community with the teachers with all the regular meetings and will be able to see immediately when something is not working. We will have enough meetings to catch it. We have a sense of understanding the flexibility that is needed during the first few years of a school starting. You have to make sure that you are listening and hearing things and looking at the trends that are happening.
- My favorite story from the beginning of PVPA involves understanding the voice of the parents. We had a planned integrated curriculum in math that first year and the parents came to us en mass and said change the math curriculum or we walk. We take that seriously. One of the reasons we start small is to be able to shift gears. Within three to four weeks, we had implemented a more traditional approach to math because that is what the parents and our community was demanding. It still fit within the mission and vision. So a big piece is to be flexible. This is a new parent community and it will be an interesting challenge to listen really closely to what that community wants. PVPA was a performing arts school and students asked for competitive sports teams and we listened to those things and responded. It will be all new constituencies. It will be learning to listen again to the new constituencies. Those will be the challenges I think.

5. Why did you (Bob and Ljuba) leave PVPACS?

- I planned to leave at the end of ten years; I wanted to do more in education. PVPA was complete, it was in a spot where it could be on its own. I really like start-ups so I kept starting up new programs. I kept thinking people are ready to not have start-ups anymore. After I started up the middle school I decided that it was time and I gave two years notice to my board that I was leaving and we did a whole planned process. My son was going to PVPA and he asked that I stay until he finished and graduated. We graduated together. I stayed 12 years.
- I stayed 15 years. It became clear to me that I had done it all at PVPA and it was time for a new challenge. As much as I loved it everyday and I still miss the kids, it was time to try something new for me personally. I taught a social justice course at PVPA, it is one of my passions and I really wanted to focus on that – I sing and dance really horribly – so it was that or social justice.
- Social justice was one of those things that we focused on at PVPA though we didn't call it social justice. We tried to do a lot of dissemination work at PVPA. Two of the sixty districts that we served, every student who came from these two districts could not read, could not write. We saw this over and over again. We were always doing training and outreach to the communities. One of the communities was willing to let me come in for a whole year to do their teacher training to support them –it was free training. The other community said no and that was Holyoke. We were trying for years to support the Holyoke community to build up the skills of the students they were sending us. They would not accept free training from us. Bob & I really want to locate in Holyoke. We want to finally make a change in that community.

6. Does the proposed school have a succession plan?

- Yes. We have talked about Bob & Ljuba being there for five years and then we will be looking at...
- One of our primary roles is to evaluate Bob's performance as the executive director. We need to be very involved in the policy formation not meddling in the day to day operation. Our way of ultimately influencing the day to day operations of the school is evaluating Bob. One of our tasks is to come up with a set of criteria that says to us that Bob is accomplishing what we set out to do.

7. What do you think are the challenges the proposed board might face in evaluating a colleague with whom you have had a longstanding professional and personal relationship?

- The student always comes first in my eyes – it is all about the students. I have been known – it doesn't matter who – if there is an issue that I don't feel good about or there is something that I am seeing that is not working, I will not shy away from it. Bob & Ljuba are open to accept any criticism. The race and class lens that I wear – I

am blown away at times at their response – I am respected; I am heard – it is talked about and I know that will be the case. I can say Bob that was all wrong. The community that we will have there will role model all of that. The openness, the acceptance - you can tell me anything even if I am wrong and I will hear you. I will do something to work with you on that.

- As board members we know that we have a fiduciary responsibility to the charter school and there are laws and regulations that have to be followed and that is our primary concern. We do that through the supervision of Bob. We are monitoring him and we have to, as a board, take that responsibility seriously. I know I do. I am a CPA for a number of non-profits and I have to speak with boards constantly. I have seen the “founderitis” that they talk about which is very serious – that is something that will have to be monitored. People will look at it as their school. Yes, but it is a quasi-governmental agency and it has to be monitored by independent board members and I see that as a very important function of our role. We have to be honest with Bob.
- I have to say as a minority myself coming from the system in Holyoke you are used to not being heard. I went through the social justice in education program that is what brought me to this group. I can say I have found a group that has let me be myself. I am quite sure I will be listened to – we have gotten into arguments and they are so good to listen and be open and flexible.

8. Bob, what do you think are the challenges you face in evaluating Ljuba, a colleague with whom you have had a longstanding professional and personal relationship?

- We have worked together so many times and in so many ways. We really have no problem with it. There are really very clear delineated work responsibilities. But everybody does a little bit of everything in a start-up. When PVPA first opened, we were teaching half-time and volunteered to clean the building at night. The board would not let us clean the building which I am thankful for now. I don't really see a challenge with that. We know when we ring each other's bells and we've developed ways to step back from that together and get around that.
- He was my supervisor at one of my jobs at a mental health center for five years together. We are a team we see ourselves as team. We give each other feedback all the time. We are willing to listen to each other. I have no problem with Bob saying listen we need to do this a different way.

9. Please describe how individuals become board members for the proposed charter school.

- There are parent, teacher, and student representatives. Students will choose amongst themselves in an electoral process where teachers and staff will help to organize and educate students around the process. We hope to choose parents that way as well, similar to the practices in the early years of PVPA though they changed to a different

more traditional selection process as the school grew geographically larger. We might shift to that later on. Teachers are also elected by their peers.

Facilities and Finances

1. What is the status of your facility search? How will you deal with budgeting for facility renovation?

- The facility search was finished a year ago but because that was too old we are doing it again. The final bid date is this Friday for the first round. The subcommittee of the board will be meeting on Sunday to review those bids and visit the sites. We pretty much know who will apply since we have been working with these folks for a couple of years. There is one new building. Cisco Systems has put in a high speed computing center right in the neighborhood where we want to be in. It looks like we will get a bid on a building right across the street. That is really exciting for the relationship that we might build with Cisco Systems. We have a proposed review date. We will be ready to sign a lease on March 1 if we have a charter.
- The bid proposal itself is to have a building – it is a lease proposal to come ready with all the spaces and materials that we need except for some specific technology and other equipment that we have in the budget. There is capital improvement in budget for each year as we grow over the first three years.

2. Please explain your assumption on an annual 4% tuition increase.

- We used the numbers that we had been experiencing at PVPA before we realized it was too aggressive a number. We have had this conversation at the board meeting. Given that the state is not in that place, we were discussing areas for scale back. Well, if you want to take a look at the actual budget, you'll notice that although we were aggressive in year two and year three, we had a significant surplus and we had a contingency budget. If you look at the contingency and surplus budgets and dial back a 1% or so depending, it will give us space. There are a number of positions that we can add more slowly. We are willing to sign on for significantly less money in the early years if needed which we did with PVPA. We want the school to succeed.
- It is imperative that the board will monitor this and we will be tasking Bob ...
- We were very successful at fundraising. We raised all the money to build our own site. We raised well over a million dollars in a short period time because we are aggressive fundraisers. We plan to be just as aggressive. I think we will be more successful because there are a lot of people in the valley with significant resources who really want to see a school focused on social justice. The focus of the Amherst and Northampton area is social justice so we have so much support from these people who want to see this succeed. A lot of support from the colleges in the area and people in the education system that want this to succeed as well as all the banks. I plan to immediately start fundraising if chartered to start getting the things that we

really need, like technology. A lot of the sources that supported PVPA are sources that would easily support this school. We will create a foundation.

- We don't want to start those conversations until we get a charter but as soon as we get a charter that is the first thing we'll be building upon.

3. What are the plans for technology use in the classroom?

- We expect that we will have the opportunity for technology in the every classroom – 1:1 computers for students. We will raise funds for technology and included some of the funds for it under acquisition of capital line item (64) that was not included in the bid. The \$50K each year. I was construing the cost of those things to be actual capital purchases. It was just a budget line choice.
- I knew that we had money in the budget for this but I want more than just simple systems. SMART boards in every classroom – really good technology, software for the students and systems for the students to learn. Students will have four years of technology classes. We'll have them involved in Cisco. We want students to get internships at Cisco.
- We didn't as a board spell out specifically what the specific trainings would be for the teachers because we don't know who the teachers are or what their skills are coming in. During the orientation of teachers, there will be technology training, a whole series of trainings in the values of the school, multiple learning styles, and differentiated instruction and then during the weekly supervision there will be extra support in that.
- Speaking for Springfield College, one of the people who signed on in the letter of commitment is our technology person and they will provide professional development to teachers in education technology.