

Springfield Preparatory Charter School

Questions as derived from panel and documentation review

Note: The interview summary is not a transcript of the interview audio. The order of questions and responses within the summary may not reflect the chronology during the interview.

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

1. How have your personal and professional experiences led you each to participate in proposing a charter school in Springfield? How did new members come to join the group?

- Bill Spirer - lead founder, proposed Head of School – Last year I completed a Building Excellent Schools (BES) fellowship. This year I am the Dean of Students at Troy Prep Elementary. Over the course of my career, I've been an educator, teacher coach, now a dean, and a child welfare attorney. I really truly believe in the power of schools to change the lives of children. We know that there is an urgent need in Springfield. It's a very large district with a very small number of high performing charters and small number of high performing district schools. Right now the graduation rate in Springfield hovers around 50% and we believe that is directly related to the fact that only 1/3 of kids in Springfield are reading at grade level coming into third grade, so by proposing a K-3 model we think we can really address that challenge. We really believe in our capacity to found and run a great school. We've done a lot of work over the past year to continue to build our technical expertise, our skills and our capacity to bring Springfield prep to the south end and to bring another option to Springfield.
- Sue Walsh - BES, Director of Academics – One of the interesting things that I think about with our work with Bill is that my work with charters actually started in the Merrimack Valley and Bill started his work in social justice outside of education in Lawrence. Really what BES is about is quality education especially for children who depend on public education where limited resources exist. It really is the leadership of people like Bill and team at this table that can make that possible. BES will do everything in its power to support this school and ensure that it gets off to a successful start and that people like Jill are resources to the team. We look forward to working with them.
- Jill Dunchick - BES, Director of Leadership Development – I'm with Building Excellent Schools. I am new to this stage of the process. Normally my work picks up once the charter has been granted. I've been involved for the last 18 months and spent the last year supporting the growth of three elementary schools in other parts of the country. Prior to this role I was the executive director at New School Strategy in Louisiana working in a very similar capacity to you all. Prior to that I was a principal in Philadelphia at a charter doing turnarounds, so helping them restructure their first campus because they were project based and we helped them turn into a standards based school. I also served as a principal at their second campus in south Philadelphia.
- John Brown - member of proposed board of trustees – I have a background in finance and real estate working in acquisitions, asset management, and property development. I and others on the board will be working on our facilities search. I'm here today because of my passion for education. I think education is a key component in social mobility which

we are starting to lose today. I moved from New York approximately two years ago and I saw then and I see now, Springfield Prep as a way to make a meaningful impact in the community in which I work.

- Sonia Dinnall - member of proposed board of trustees – I currently work in Hartford Public Schools as a director of college and career readiness. However, I spent 19 wonderful years as an employee of Springfield Public Schools and I am fortunate enough to still maintain and sustain collaborative and collegial relationships with members of Springfield Public Schools. I am a product of Springfield, I still live in Springfield, and I believe in Springfield. As someone who worked closely with central office staff while I was there, I know that we have pockets of success in Springfield. I know that Springfield is doing their level best to make sure students do receive a quality education and I do believe there is room for support. Springfield Prep would provide that support. We would work alongside the pockets of excellence that are exhibited in Springfield schools, such as Tallmadge and Dryden Memorial, to ensure that other students in the K-8 model have an opportunity to excel and prepare for college and career readiness. As the director of college and career readiness in Hartford I would bring that knowledge and skill set to the work of the board of Springfield Prep. I've been doing this work for 23 years in an urban environment, so I would also bring that expertise and experience to ensure that curriculum, instruction, evaluations, data reviews, special education services, and all of those things that are critical to the success of all our students are implemented with fidelity.
- James Duda - member of proposed board of trustees, proposed board chair – I am a partner at a law firm in Springfield. I was raised in Springfield and went to Springfield Public Schools. I am the prospectus chair of the board. I returned to Springfield about two years ago and I've been involved in a number of social economic activities. I've been in two different school committees since I've been back. I love Springfield and care very deeply about this city. I think the one single factor that can drive this city forward is the educational system.
- Jennifer Gabriel - member of proposed board of trustees – I work in community relations for TD Bank. Springfield is very near and dear to me. My office is there, I live there, and I have a student in the Springfield public school system. In my position at TD, I've been able to see a lot of the different schools throughout the city, along with a lot of the different educational programming that other organizations are trying to provide. In that time, I've been able to see what kind of structures foster the growth where the children are striving and it's usually where there is structure. There's a certain comfort level with that, very similar to the model we are hoping for with Springfield Prep. I also sit on the Springfield Business Leaders for Education and in that position I get to see how much the poor community in Springfield really supports any educational opportunities that we can bring forth and they are very pleased with this as well. Mainly, as a parent and resident of Springfield, I have to say having worked with this group for almost two years I am very confident in what we are proposing: the commitment of the board, the school, and the school leadership. I really think that this team together will hold the school to that commitment and bring the parents of Springfield what we are all looking for, which is opportunities in education for our kids and equal opportunities for education for our kids.

- Kelvin Molina - member of proposed board of trustees – I work at HAP Housing, which is a large non-profit organization focusing on affordable housing. I specifically work in the community organizing lineup business; I currently work in the neighborhoods in the South End. I am a lifelong resident of Springfield. I currently own property there. I am product of the Springfield school system along with my seven siblings. I am well versed with the issues of the Springfield school system from my time there, but I hear stories now from my eight nieces and nephews. I strongly believe there is a need for our students in Springfield. I'm also advocating for the parents who are constantly telling me about the lack of opportunity that they see for their children.
- Kathleen Murphy - member of proposed board of trustees – I came to the board this past July and I was very intrigued with the mission. I worked for the last 12 years in urban school districts in special education and also with English language learners. I worked the last 8 years in the Springfield public schools specifically. I recently graduated with my Doctorate in Education. I'm looking forward to bringing my training and expertise to the board. I'm also really excited about the opportunity to bring excellent education to our students in Springfield.
- Robin Olejarz - member of proposed board of trustees – Since three weeks ago, I am the CFO of Specialty Bolt and Screw and prior to that I was the CFO at the YMCA for Greater Springfield. I'm also the wife of a high school teacher with 34 years of experience. My husband is recently retired, but I understand the challenges that go into the high school level, from kids being unprepared at the middle school level. I think it is important that we cover this gap. From my perspective we are a very strong early education education. It's something Springfield needs.
- Gareth Ross - member of proposed board of trustees – I was approached by Bill about 2 years ago to bring my expertise in finance, strategy, data-driven management, which is what I practice at Mass Mutual, to this effort. I'm very proud to be part of this team. Everyone on this team is putting in a lot of work. I really believe in the mission.
- Alison Turro - member of proposed board of trustees – I serve as the managing director at the Achievement Network in western Massachusetts where we work with schools and school districts around setting up interim data cycles to drive achievements in schools. Part of the reason I joined this board this summer was because of my experiences in education. I got my start as a Teach for America Corps member in South Texas and also worked as an instructional coach at a K-8 charter school just outside of Little Rock, Arkansas. I was there for the school's first two years. In both of those experiences I saw what can happen in looking in high needs areas with students when adults in front of students have high expectations and hold student accountable. In my current role with the Achievement Network, I've been working in Springfield for the past three years now, and part of the reason why I was compelled to move to western Massachusetts was just hearing the statistics. Hearing that just over half the students in Springfield are graduating from high school is something that is really compelling for me. As I interacted with Bill and learned more about the proposed school over the last year, I was very excited when asked to join this group of individuals and work for the students, especially in the south end of Springfield.

- Danielle Williams - member of proposed board of trustees – I’m an attorney. I do work both commercial and residential with regard to housing and real estate. I’ve been an attorney for 10 years, mostly practicing in Hampden County, specifically in the Springfield area. I’m a former prosecutor; I spent 3.5 years in the Springfield district court and juvenile courts. Unfortunately, I saw what can happen when people don’t have access to good education, so I’m really thrilled to be part of this group.

2. Explain the primary changes that have been made to your proposal since last year’s submission and why they were made.

- I think we really made a strong effort to address the concerns of the Department—the additions. It really brings a depth to the board that we didn’t have before, regarding education, special education, and achievement. That was the single most important thing. The second most important thing was Bill’s experience—that was certainly an issue last year. He has continued to work with BES throughout the year, but he’s also worked at Troy Prep. This was a very critical change. We also connected with Hyde Park. In terms of tools, I think we have expanded our capabilities. We’ve expanded our tools. We’ve expanded our resources. We set up our advisory council; we have some incredible talent advising. The council has provided some very poignant and on-point issues. They have been very helpful and a great group. They have indicated that they will be available to Bill, in particular, and available to the Board as well.
- In addition to those steps, we took to heart some of the suggestions about policy structure. For example we have proposed to start with kindergarten and first grade, to have two classes at each grade level. We also went from backfilling from K-6, all way back from 8th grade. We thought about this and talked about this a lot as board and with our advisory council and there are challenges with backfilling all the way through. We recognize those challenges and have thought a lot about them. Ultimately we are all here because if there is an open seat and a child can benefit from that seat, we want to provide that. We also thought through our promotion policy to offer a little more discretion given the diverse student body that we anticipate. A lot of this came back from reviews and you. The work I’ve been doing this year at Troy Prep has been extraordinary opportunity to learn about the inner workings of a high performing school. There are many things that we will adopt and many things that we will do differently.

3. Please describe your anticipated inaugural kindergarten and first grade classes. What typifies your students – their strengths and weaknesses – and what predictions do you make for the progress (both academic and non-academic) made by the typical student in their first year and why?

- In our targeted neighborhoods we have single head of household families; we have a lot of siblings. I’m anticipating the first kindergarten and first grade class to be students of minority, Latino descent, African American descent that have siblings either older or younger. The reason why I imagine that is because what happens to them throughout the year is going to impact their family overall, simply because when you are looking at the child, I’m really looking at the whole family. When we do outreach and I talk to families

and I say the word “college” they are completely flabbergasted as if it weren’t even part of their vocabulary. These little kids are carrying a lot of weight because the family and the community are not going to be looking at them as the future. We’re worried about their future and getting out of poverty and all these other things that can be provided with a charter school like ours that is rigorous, not to the point that it’s a grindstone, but in a way that there are expectations because they have the ability to learn because they were born with it. That’s what I see in our inaugural class.

- One of the things that I experienced in the last public hearing process was hearing some of the students speak about their experience throughout the year and they were advocating for our work. I wasn’t surprised, but I was energized because they were able to articulate what they were representing. They weren’t just advocating for their school, but advocating for kids that they didn’t even know. After the school year ends, I’m really thinking that these children are going to be a lot more confident in their ability to articulate, learn, be part of a culture and be much more than what, unfortunately, our city has told them they could be.
- I think the students are going to be anxious to come back in August.
- It’s really important to this group that our student body mirrors the student body of Springfield public schools. In terms of what they would look like at the end of their first year with us, I think that they’ll have the ability to be proud of being smart, which not every kid is encouraged to have. The greatest moments for me are when kids are proud of their academic success.
- I’m excited about hearing from the parents throughout the school year and at the end and hearing about the changes that they’ve seen in their children.
- Our goal is to produce kids with self confidence, enthusiasm, and pride. If we can do that, then we’ve done our job.
- I look forward to students who will not judge themselves or value themselves based on their environment or circumstances. I look forward to Springfield Prep producing students at the end of year 1 who understand that they are not the sum total of their circumstances or experiences, the negative ones, that society says should hinder them from being all that they can be. I look forward to students who have received the support and instruction from Springfield Prep who are able to look beyond their current circumstances and see a viable future for themselves and their families and seeing themselves as contributing members of society and not seeing themselves as members of the school prison pipeline.
- I look forward to these kids seeing the possibilities and that they can be so many things and that we as a board and a school support them in that journey.

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

1. What do you consider the unique challenges of an early education curriculum that is rigorous, engaging, data-driven, and individualized?

- I think one challenge is that these are very little people; they are five years old, six years old, and seven years old. All of us here know what the consequences can be for poor early academic performance in school. So, a challenge is balancing this desire to let kids be kids, but also to be very structured, rigorous, and hold students accountable. More specifically, another challenge is literacy. It's all about literacy and habits. Primarily what our model focuses on is building literacy skills and building habits to help kids navigate their own emotions, interactions with other kids, and their study habits. What we teach them in the early years, so that they can sustain throughout the later years. With students in kindergarten and first grade, we're going to have kids with language issues. Springfield has a relatively high population of English language learners. Often times it's hard to know if language development challenges are a result of one's home language or some kind of speech and language challenge. So, that is a unique challenge and we need to be careful and thoughtful about how we parse that out and how we provide support for children with those struggles. We need to track carefully and use an RTI (Response to Intervention) model carefully to make sure we are addressing the needs of our students in the earliest years.

2. Describe examples of the engaging nature of the proposed curriculum.

- One of the things Bill mentioned was the emphasis on early literacy. With regard to the reading block, it's going to be broken up in a very structured way so we can hit both the fundamental skills around phonics, which we know our very critical in building reading skills, as well as small group guided reading with teachers. Once they get to the point where they can independently read, they'll be able to do that. So having that structured environment and the two teacher classroom model will allow teachers the chance to be able to use data that we are getting from a variety of assessments to be able to differentiate the instruction supports and needs for different students.
- The Nellie Mae Foundation has done a great deal of research on individualized learning as well as personalized. To ensure that students are fully engaged in the learning process, so that they are co-learners with the teacher. It has to be interesting, engaging, and culturally relevant. It has to be something where they can see the connection so when we design a curriculum, we won't only be looking at the rigor but also looking at the engagement. What is interesting to the student? How to do include tech tools? How do we incorporate blended learning? We want a rich, global, structured environment and learning environment. We also want to make sure the culture and climate is conducive to individualized and personalized learning. We want to make sure that starting at kindergarten, that all students are exposed to a rich curriculum that allows them to explore and grow while taking into consideration their own pace and learning style.
- As a teacher, I developed every curriculum and every lesson plan I ever taught. Frankly, it wasn't very sustainable. I've thought a great deal about how to make curriculum

development sustainable for teachers, but also for scholars. What we do as a leadership team is to provide very clear standards for teachers and provide lots of resources. The connections I've made with other charter schools through Building Excellent Schools and Uncommon Schools—there are some great resources out there. I think really empowering teachers and pointing them to quality resources and giving them power to plan lessons that will drive and inspire their students. The last thing I would say is that one of things I've taken away from working at Troy Prep is that they are really leaders in the Teach like a Champion strategy, which is used nationally and a lot of those strategies are related to student engagement and student accountability.

3. Bill Spirer: Tell us about your experience as Dean of Students at Troy Prep Elementary and how it supports your preparedness to become the proposed school's Head of School?

- I help the school principal oversee all discipline. I oversee many of the all school procedures. So, entry, lunch, dismissal and working primarily on issues of culture. I think the primary takeaway for me has been that through the proposal stages of the school is: you think through a lot of things. There is a lot of promise and in order to write an application you have to think through a large number of issues, but the amount of small, yet really significant decisions that school leadership needs to make on a daily basis is immense. So, what I've been able to do is learn from Katie, as a fantastic school leader who brings 15-20 years of experience to her role. I've learned a lot from her and have begun to take over some of the roles myself. As a school leader, you stress attendance. Being on time is important. I've learned that a good budget is critically important in running a school. I've learned to think through the nuances of various issues and dilemmas that arise for school leaders; this has been very valuable to me.

4. With your commitment to accept new students through 8th grade, the proposed school will encounter the need to provide targeted remediation for students who enter far below grade level. Tell us about the strategies that will be implemented to address the needs of these students.

- It starts with, in the younger grades it would be that model of the small focus groups. When they get into their later years and their middle school years then it'll be having the focus blocks, the targeted tutoring. Those are the things that we already have in place for them, but we'll also follow the plans the students come with or that will be created once they are there. I think initial structure we have in place allows for that along with some specialized information as well.
- We proposed a very strong assessment system to include formative and summative assessments looking very closely at MCAS, even though it is sun setting it is still very relevant. We're also using some of the released PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) items, as well as using the STEP assessment and making sure that teachers, who provide instruction, are checking for understanding and clarity right along the course of the instruction. We will also implement a very strong, data-driven RTI model to ensure that interventions are targeted and focused on what the data is telling us. Data will drive our decisions around instruction, as well as everything

else that occurs as Springfield Prep. But most importantly, data will help students understand their strengths and weaknesses.

5. One of your principles is the thoughtful use of data. How do you plan to support the use of student data in teacher practice?

- As a team we've been really thoughtful about the general assessment strategy. We'll use a combination of MCAS once the students get to that grade level, but in meantime we'll use the STEP reading assessments, teacher interim assessments, Achievement Network, and the Terra Nova. As a leadership team, we have a strong strategy in place. From a supporting teachers perspective there are three critical areas where we want to professional develop our teachers: academics, culture, and data. During the course of the school year, five full-day professional days will be devoted to having data days. So, stepping back and looking at relevant data points and supporting teachers with their analysis and planning to support students.
- In my own teacher days, in the start of data-driven instruction, my Teach for America advisor would come to me and tell me to show him my data and how I was using it. There was no coaching on how to implement the data into my instruction. We would use STEP in our first few years. I've used it quite a bit over the past two years. So part of it would just be training through STEP through the University of Chicago. Uncommon Schools has done a great deal of work with STEP as well. The tool itself is very powerful. It can help direct teachers to areas where kids need the most help. We're building time into the school year to coach teachers and build action plans from the data. You need to have time to review and create action plans, or else you're not going to get anything out of the data.

6. Tell us about the philosophy underlying your promotion policy. The proposed promotion policy indicates that students who are reading more than a half a year below grade level by the end of the academic year are likely candidates for retention. Explain the role of the Child Study Team and implementation of RTI to identify and support students identified for potential retention.

- We know that students who are not ready to go on to the next grade level is a risk factor. We're also aware that retaining students in certain grade levels can also be a factor that can lead to higher dropout rates later on. So as a team, one of those proposed changes—looking at students who are more than half a grade level below in terms of their reading levels or who are not showing the proposed mastery of standards—was a change that was done knowing that this is a tricky topic. It was to be able to give the leadership team some discretion to be able to make decisions that are in the best interest of students in the long run. The process is going to be transparent with students and parents the whole way through.
- So, one of the many issues that I thought through the nuances of this year was promotion. It is a huge decision that school leaders have to make. The half a year below grade level making retention possible—I think it is just saying, given the amount of time and supports that is put into literacy in the early years, if the student is not at grade level, it's

just a warning flag that there may be a need to retain them. The reason we changed the language is because last year it was too stark. It said “if you are this behind, you will be retained.” That doesn’t provide the necessary nuances that a promotion policy should have. One concrete example of what that might be is if you enroll a student, a backfilled student for example, in the third grade and the reading is at first grade or upper kindergarten level. But over three months they make two grade levels of growth and they are now reading at the second grade level. We can see from their trajectory that they will be on track after second grade. It wouldn’t be smart or fair to say you are below the mid third grade reading level, so we are going to retain you. That just doesn’t make sense. It was a combination of recognizing the need for more nuances and partly accommodating a new policy.

- At the broadest level, I think this is an example of maturation as a board as a whole over the past year. The basic concept of individualization versus standards is something that we talked about. We talked a lot of the nuances, so being able to serve the individual but still have very high standards. We can do both.
- I think this specific policy was mostly a result of discussions with the advisory council. I think we fortunately do have an advisory council that is doing this work every single day. The advisory council has been very valuable in terms of operationalizing our policies. So here, I think it was looking at charter schools, such as Match [Match and Match Community Day Charter Public Schools in Boston], Brooke [3 Brooke Charter Schools in Boston], KIPP [KIPP Academy Charter Schools in Lynn and Boston], Veritas Preparatory Charter School [Springfield] and other schools within our network of contacts and supports and thinking through their policies. And then more than anything, it was thinking about what we believe in as a group, which may not align with every school, and figuring out what made the most sense and what was most realistic.
- In the paradigm shift, in thinking about retention vs. academic excellence and success, I know that even at the high school level there is a focus on the cohort graduation rate ensuring that students that begin in the 9th grade complete in four years. I understand the need for that focus; however, I also understand the changing face of our nation with new arrivals, state adjudicated youth, as well as parenting teens. So those hard and fast and strict levels sometimes don’t apply to all of students. So focusing on what is in the best interest of the student and ensuring that we provide structured, targeted, focused support within an RTI model. So ensuring that tier 1, which should target 80% of students, should respond to tier 1; ensuring that those two-teacher models that the curriculum is guaranteed and viable; to ensure its high quality; making sure that teachers are receiving the feedback that they need from the coaches—that should cover your 80%. Then the tier 2: we are looking at 10-15% of students who should respond to the tier 2 interventions; the focused tutoring; the small group instruction; pulling students out for individualized tutoring; taking a look at those students and the data that they bring to the child study team. In Springfield we called it the Student Teacher Assistant team and I helped to run and develop that for my years in central office. We were very strategic in that we made sure that we provided the support to the school based teams when they looked at the data and determined the interventions. The print was our bible. We kept it there in those meetings and referred to it often. It had the data-driven instructional and intervention strategies that would provide the students the support that they needed, as well as helping

the teachers that they are not powerless in moving students to where they need to be. So, taking a look at the tier 2 interventions; perhaps the student is in need of very rigorous intervention at that level and taking a look at some tools. I know that Read 180 is a common tool used on tier 2. Then, we make sure that we do our due diligence in that child study team to stem the flow to tier 3. Too often, many of our students that represent populations like the ones we are trying to serve in Springfield are over identified. We don't want to contribute to that problem, but we want to the ebb the flow and we want to make sure that in the student child study team we bring everyone to the table: the teacher, the data support people, to ensure that we are providing any wrap around services especially if the issue isn't solely academic. The child study team will reveal behavioral issues that may be addressed through FBAs (Functional Behavioral Assessment), BIPs (Behavior Intervention Plan), and perhaps even a Section 504 plan may need to be developed. Just to make sure that we are doing the best for our students.

- We're not proposing a traditional wrap around model, and there are numbers of reasons for that, but I think what is important is that we've worked really hard for the last year and a half to develop relationships with a number of organizations that do provide those services. We'd be foolish to think that the types of needs that those organizations help to address will not impact academic performance of our students. But at the same time, the reason we don't propose a wrap around model is because it's our fundamental belief that the academic and character development of our students is the single best lever for their own growth. The second part is just that we are concerned that if we take too much on as a startup, that's a recipe for disaster. We need to be very good at the things we do and not try to do everything. We will certainly have all of the supports that will directly impact academic progress; for example a counselor and a psychologist, at first we won't have that full time because we're small—but we'll contract those positions out.

7. Describe the use of instructional coaches in supporting teacher development. How will professional development opportunities support each teacher to serve all students well and to grow professionally?

- So the premise of it is just that teaching is incredibly hard work and the teachers that we hire are going to be teachers that want to get better every single day. The best way to do that is to have a coach to help you set goals, to help provide observations and to support your development. In the initials years, the plan is to have myself and the director of curriculum instruction split coaching duties. Obviously being Head of School, there's going to be a lot of responsibilities and this refers to a number of the policy changes that I mentioned earlier based on the feedback from last year. Sustainability—how can one person coach all those teachers? So breaking it down in year 1 and year 2 to Director and Curriculum and Head of School, then in subsequent years, begin to shift that to grade level chairs; which we think will aid in sustainability. Troy prep does something very similar. I think it's also an important way to grow your leadership bench. This gives the talented teachers you've identified the opportunity to start to transfer responsibility. The format is, it would be at least a weekly observation with video and then video analysis in your weekly meeting and help planning your next lesson using the action steps you've derived from the video analysis. Also something we do at Troy Prep and will do here is live practice before lesson plans.

School Characteristics

1. Describe the two teacher model proposed for K-4 classrooms. Why was this approach selected? Tell us about the difference between the lead teacher and the associate teacher, including qualifications and skills.

- We've spoken at length about this, understanding the two teacher model. I think it goes back to what you mentioned earlier, the long days and teacher sustainability. I think the two teacher model is a great help with that. It allows for more flexibility, when we're talking about English Language Learners (ELL), students with disabilities, and small groups, it allows for that flexibility. The teaching itself also becomes more of a collaborative effort between the two. With regard to the lead teacher and the associate teacher, the student will never know the difference. There will be two teachers in the classroom. One may have further experience, different levels of experience, different types of experience and that would distinguish between the two. Our greatest hope is that it leads to teacher sustainability.
- The \$46,000 salary is an average between both the associate and the lead teacher.

2. How are teachers supported by school leadership and program design to create sustainable working conditions within the anticipated 10 hour day Monday through Thursday?

- Generally speaking, I think we recognize that getting quality and talent into the school is going to be one of our big challenges to meet. There's a number of ways that we can address that, it's something we've talked about a lot. One of those is the building aspect; that we can include the talent, build a system, and incorporate professional development. We are going to have a challenge going up against places like Boston, where the opportunities for professional development are many and ready at hand.
- The days are very long. Primarily, I think it's important to recognize that there are many teachers out there that want schools like this. Having the opportunity to work as part of a team that is aligned and can leverage their efforts to get really powerful results I think is something that is appealing to a lot of people. With that said, I think the point that I've noticed that is most challenging for charter schools is when you have teachers who maybe have been working for 5 or 6 years and looking to start a family or just want to transition to a different role. I think the way that we do that is by providing leadership opportunity. So as the schools grows, so does leadership opportunities for teachers. I think it also means thinking through the areas of the non-negotiables in terms of hours and staffing and the areas and times where you might actually be able to be flexible. There are few charter schools who have experimented with flexible staffing arrangements. That is not part of our proposal so I don't want to get too into that, I would just say that it is on our minds. I think it's not a part of our early years, during the startup. I think the most important part is around how we develop our teachers. I'm fortunate enough to be spending a year with, really, the national leaders in teacher development who are responsible for driving the dialogue on how to prepare teachers. First of all, being in Troy was a conscious decision on my part vs. being at a Boston or New York school because I wanted to be in a smaller city market and see how that school drives the talent and trains the talent. The Troy Prep staff is exceptional, due in large part to great

training. And that is important and what we're going to do. I learned that just trying to hire that rock star teacher is very short-sighted recruitment strategy. Helping to develop and sustain your staff is much smarter over the long term. That consistency will help the students.

3. Describe your discipline policies and the underlying philosophy behind your proposed strategies. How were these proposed practices developed? Why was Homework Center and detention removed from afterschool? Explain the philosophy of holding detention during lunchtime.

- For elementary there is the color code system. If a student is following directions, they get a check as you start going down the list. So at an elementary level that is where we start handling discipline. In the middle school we have a system based on the overall values of the school and the teachers tracking those merits throughout the day and every week on Friday they get that report showing that. There is detention during lunch; there is homework makeup during lunch and recess to make up for whatever they are missing. It's a constant day-late tracking program.
- Progressive discipline will most definitely be implemented with fidelity. We'll take a look at all of the factors that influence a child's behavior and the choices that students make concerning the behaviors that they exhibit. Being supported with our PRIDE character development would support students who are perhaps coming from a less structured environment. We'll help parents and community stakeholders make that paradigm shift from an anything-goes behavioral approach or a swift-and-severe disciplinary approach to the no-excuses approach; where we provide support every step of the way, helping students reflect on the choices they are making, and helping them understand consequence and reward. To ensure that students don't feel like something is being done to them, but that they contributed to the consequence that they are receiving. But again, character development from the very foundation, supporting students through progressive discipline and not putting it against the student the very next day, helping the student understand that they can be reintegrated into the school community with nothing held against them.
- My philosophy on discipline really derived from my work as an attorney. I was representing kids who were kicked out of school and I thought that it was the height of unfairness and injustice to exclude kids from school where they were supposed to be developed as people. That is important because it is my fundamental belief that it's on the school to provide the environment that a child can be successful. Springfield Prep will not be a place where, if the child isn't successful, we exclude them. The flip side of this is that safety is a priority. As a leader of a school, you are really a protector of a community and need to make sure that that community is safe. So that is just sort of the caveat to my initial philosophy. In terms of elementary school discipline though, really it's an effort to teach and make good habits. Detention begins in the 5th grade. It's not something we'd do in the elementary school, but there would be a logical consequence system so students can learn from mistakes and strive to be better next time. There are often concerns that kids won't like the structure of school, but that structure makes the schools a very safe

place. Schools right now aren't always safe places to be, and we know, unfortunately, that that is true in Springfield.

- With regard to switching detention and homework center from afterschool to lunch, thinking operationally, I thought about the difficulty of transportation. Busing is a huge issue in city schools. If parents are told to pick their children up after school but don't have the transportation, then parents could become uncomfortable with the school.

Special Student Populations and Services

1. Throughout the application, including in your mission statement, there is an articulated commitment to inclusion. How do your recruitment efforts within the community support this commitment?

- We will be primarily in the South End neighborhood where there is a large population of Spanish-speaking families. We're lucky enough to have Bill who is bilingual, I am also bilingual, and so when we have done community outreach, we've done it in various languages. All of our materials and all our marketing, all of our campaigns, have been bilingual content. I think when you look at a close neighbor, Veritas Preparatory Charter School, they have been very successful in recruiting ELL students and special needs students. So our efforts now are continuous when it comes to recruiting these populations.

[Follow-up: Troy Prep doesn't have the same ELL profile, so what differences do you see operationally in terms of serving ELLs in the structure that is very similar to Troy Prep Elementary model?]

- Troy has a very small percentage of ELLs, which is just a function of the community. This small group structure, the literacy block structure, the student support program will enable us to provide SEI instruction and do it in a relatively seamless way; some out of class, some support in class, obviously there are many levels of direct ESL instruction and sheltered content instruction. I think what we would primarily do is use the literacy blocks and the independent reading blocks to do targeted ESL instruction. We would have a more robust student support staff in three parts: special education teachers, academic support teachers, and leadership developing teachers. One of the key issues is that it is hard to know exact numbers. We've worked hard on approximations and formed our staff accordingly. We're very prepared to reallocate funds if we need to.
- As a board we understand that this is a critical part of our mission, which is serving those communities. It's one of the major points in our accountability plan and we will hold Bill accountable for on an annual basis. Are we matching our communities? Are we doing enough community outreach? If we're not, we'll find ways to do that.
- There is a higher concentration of ELLs in the South End of Springfield.
- What we did, in part, was we looked at the South End Middle School which is the only district school in the South End and we looked at their numbers. They are around 35% ELL. We talked a lot about if the numbers are actually accurate. This seems to be

relatively low for limited English proficient numbers and relatively high for multiple languages spoken at home number, so we think there may be some under identification. We are starting in Kindergarten. We're anticipating about 25% ELLs and we may see that number decrease over time as the primary cohort gains proficiency. These are projections, but we believe they are in the ball park.

2. How was the special student populations and student services section developed? What expertise does the founding group have presently regarding English language learners and students with disabilities?

- There was a big push last year for us to operationalize that program. It started with going on a number of school visits. The Henderson School had a different model but it was an important one to visit. We visited Alma Del Mar Charter School and the Brooke Charter Schools. We reviewed different special education policies and programs, such as Boston Preparatory Charter School and Match Charter Public School, for example. It was really about gathering information and doing school visits. Segue to new board members; we talked to Kate, who has an extensive background in special education, about it a lot. We reviewed numbers and the numbers we might expect and the staffing levels. We looked at the identification progression and whether it was in compliance with the law and also made sense within our school model. It went from gathering resources to discussion among this group and the advisory council and then putting it on paper.
- I've been working as a bilingual speech pathologist for the past 12 years. I worked extensively deciphering between language differences and language disorder and also educating teachers and staff about what to expect when you have a dual language learner and multi-language learner. We talked about this a lot because we're looking at beginning with the K-1 population and that it varies very differently from the second and third grade population. Children coming after having been at home for 3 or 4 years in their dominant language, it's going to look very different than students who have been within the academic environment and have had more of an opportunity for language acquisition. Just making sure that there is some understanding that even though this is what we expect doesn't mean that that is the reality of it.
- For the years that I spent in Springfield, one of my goals was to become the guidance counselor. I would attend the IEP meetings and I would bring the relevant data: the grades, the attendance, the behavior, and any of that information. We'd make sure that we were creating an IEP that really met the needs of the student. It's not just based on the assessment results, but it's also about the whole child. I bring that knowledge to Springfield Prep. When we are looking at students and their IEPs we want to make sure that we are focusing on equity, access, and compliance. We want to make sure we are in compliance with IDEA and FAPE and full compliance with all special education mandates, guidelines and laws. Not just to be in compliance, but because we really believe that all students have a right to a high quality education. We believe that all students can learn at the highest levels. So with the two teachers in the classroom structure, as well as all the other supports we put in place for the instructors and students, we are committed to meeting the needs of all students.

- I think one of the things that we bring to this is that there is this compliance issue; to be clear that we are holding people accountable and that it is actually happening. We want them to have equal access. With our backgrounds in ELL and special education, we want the school to understand what that means.

Governance & Management

1. Proposed board: What do you consider the most important job of a charter school trustee and why?

- If I had to pick one, it would be the academic success and character development. There's also the financial viability of the school which is our responsibility. If we don't make sure the school stays viable then we aren't going to have academic success. There is also adherence to the charter. If we get a charter, we are making a promise to the state. Our application includes a list of insurances that we are going to do. It's the board's responsibility to make sure they all happen.
- I think the evaluation of our head of school and making sure we are holding him accountable for his responsibilities is another key role.
- I would also add that asking the right questions is important. I second the financial responsibility.

2. Proposed board: Tell us more about the anticipated need for fundraising and the experiences of those proposed board members who indicated expertise in fundraising.

- I think this is a good example of what the board has done in the past year. We've been raising money already and I think we've done a good job. We responded to the news that we may not be getting anything.
- Of all the questions you were going to ask, I'm glad you ask this one. As a board, we are very proud of how we answered the CSP (charter school planning grant) question. When that funding was in question, we did what it took. Bill raised \$75,000 in addition to the Davis Foundation's \$200,000 that is already there. I've already raised \$30,000 from Mass Mutual with much more to come. We are on our way. We have \$300,000 already raised, just as a way of initially getting going and that's before we've even been chartered. I think we've proven that we can go and raise money when need be.
- You mentioned different levels of fundraising on the board itself. My current role at TD Bank, and my last place of work as well, is grant reviews. So I am the other person on the other side of grants. So we discussed what do people look for. So I'm really comfortable in my board role advising as to this is what they are going to ask for.
- We've already gone out and created a foundation for a place for that money to go, before we've been granted a charter. We've incorporated.
- It's a separate foundation, which is an entity that can take funds earmarked for the school if chartered and if not it can earmark them to other places.

- It would be a potentially overlapping board.

3. Proposed board: Describe how Bill Spirer will be held accountable by the board in his role as Head of School.

- In short, we have a series of dashboards. We're probably going to use the High Bars tool. Within that tool there is a section called the "CEO Accountability Matrix" with key performance indicators. As a board and through various dashboards that we'll extract on a monthly basis, we will hold Bill accountable to those matrices. Some of the indicators will be financial in nature, academic achievement, and retaining talent. Categories like that will each have 4-5 metrics that have been identified. Through the two dashboards, one of which is the academic dashboard which was developed internally, as well as the school viability financial dashboard and operations dashboard. We would look at those monthly through the various committees and make sure we are moving towards our goals. That ultimately becomes Bill's annual review process by which we'd have the board review annually and develop goals for him.

4. Proposed board: Tell us about the process the board will use to evaluate its own effectiveness as a governing body.

- Self assessments will certainly be important. High Bar's "Board on Track" lays out a good set of thorough assessments covering board meetings, board propositions, calendar, strategic decisions, and agendas. Some of the assessments are for the board as whole, while others are individual. Each one of us will have a written description of our responsibilities. Our committees will have written descriptions have their responsibilities. Part of our assessments will be are we satisfying what we said we were going to do? We'll be looking at if we are meeting our financial commitments, are we networking well, are we being good ambassadors. There are many metrics out there that we can hold ourselves accountable to.
- The advisory council will also play a role in evaluating our effectiveness, giving feedback and having discussions and asking questions.
- All the metrics I mentioned are just tools to help measure our effectiveness, but at the end of the day the real question is: How is the school doing? How are our students doing? That is our broader goal.
- One other thing to add is if there's a red flag. How do we address it? Being successful is sort of on the easier side of things, as opposed to handling things if they aren't going so well.

5. Since BES fellowship concluded, what has the relationship with BES been for rest of the applicant group?

- I made it difficult moving to Troy, in terms of my time and distance. Before that, school visits would be facilitated by BES. They helped me work through some of the policy changes and structural changes of the application, doing some ongoing training. That has

been the primary nature of our interaction. There's obviously a close tie given all the work we've done the past two years together and that is going to continue.

- As different board members have been coming on we've been meeting with them and making a re-introduction of Chris Collins, who had done some training with us in the past year. To Bill, I think with the work of Troy has really taken more of his time. In terms of community support, really just being a good access point as he needs us for whatever questions might arise. Going forward the relationship with BES would transition much more into someone like in Jill's position of chartering in terms of school preparations and so forth.

6. What support will BES provide to the board and school personnel if the proposed charter school is granted a charter?

- We take our role, as a proven provider in Massachusetts and even beyond that status, as someone who incubates leaders and incubates them in the school design. It is critically important work, but it's all for naught if the school doesn't open successfully and work successfully. We have committed more resources to that part of the work in many ways individually then people get when they are in the fellowship.
- We, as an organization, financially, have made a commitment to support through formalized supports through year zero. This past year I was with the first institutions of formalized year zero. I was responsible for two elementary schools that I got to work through year zero with opening in Nashville and another school that started in fourth grade. So I had the opportunity with three schools to work with through the planning year with them and work on the strategic design. So we'll help Bill bring everyone in his 200 page document to life and making sure that we're crossing our "Ts" and dotting our "Is" and making sure that he is operationalizing and bring it to fruition.

7. Tell us about the establishment of the Advisory Council and its role if chartered.

- The advisory council is purely advisory. They are not policy-making and they do not vote on anything. We can turn to them when we are seeking advice in a particular direction and we see that staying on as such.
- They will be subject to our conflict of interest policies.
- A large part of the council is helping Bill. They have a great deal of charter school experience and would be a great resource for Bill. They will also be a good resource particularly in the starting years with regarding to budgeting and things like that.
- I think one of our key responsibilities is asking the right questions. For example, a large part of a budget is the assumptions, and our advisory board has the experience to own those assumptions.

8. Explain the rationale for the leadership structure at the proposed school and its implementation over time, including the dual elementary school and middle school Principals, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Director of Operations, and Deans of Students. Clarify the division of duties and responsibilities amongst the Executive Director, Principals, and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction (DCI). What guides your hiring plan?

- I think the primary thing is that there is a bit of tension between the CEO of a school and having a lot of things on his or her plate. Also know that the primary work of the school is academic excellence. So what I've tried to do is try to make sure that the Head of School role has sufficient oversight and involvement in the academic program, while also providing the space to do the other work that is necessary: the fundraising, the external relations, and interfacing with the board. I think the DCI model is what will work. I think the DCI is the logical person to grow into the principal role. The idea there is that if you look at growing out a school, you have a much larger staff, a much larger facility, more funds, so leaving that to an executive director and bringing in a principal is a viable way to do that. Depending on CSP funding it's possible to take someone on fulltime, but frankly I'm not sure that's the best use of resources. Ideally, we'd like to identify someone early that is able to do some part-time work throughout the winter and then in the spring come in fulltime. It's a bit hard to predict, but my guess is that the best candidates out there are going to be working at other schools.
- Part of our thinking in this model is the ability to have succession plans in place, regarding the Director of Operations.
- In an ideal world, we would bring on a DCI and Director of Operations on Jan. 1 and secure other funding to support that, because there's a lot of work to be done to hire doors.

Finances/Facilities

1. What progress been made with the sites that you have identified for potential school facilities?

- We're not exactly at our ideal site yet. We have two very viable options. One option is the MacDuffie site. Since we last spoke, Jim and I have visited the MacDuffie site. They have one standalone building that is a little over 3000 sq ft. that can extend to a larger facility that has significant space. Another potential option is co-locating at Veritas' newly built out school. They have approximately 9,000 sq ft, so that would certainly work for at least one year. The optimum solution would be a facility that we could stay in and would accommodate us and growth through year 3 and beyond. What we've done in terms of identifying a property manager or a developer is bring in one individual, the developer behind Veritas Preparatory Charter School's facility development, who addressed the board. The entire board was able to ask any question. That is the optimal solution.
- Ideally finding something for 2-3 years would be good, with the idea that we'd find something else. It's a constant effort because the real estate market is always changing.

We're out talking to everyone we can because that is how these things happen. We've met with the city, Mass Development, another local developer involved with charter schools, and doing site visits.

2. Is locating in the South End negotiable?

- Our goal is give a location that is accessible to the people in the South End. We may be considering places that are on a single bus line in the North End. As mentioned in our application, one of the big issues with parents in the South End is that it takes two hours to get to the school for teacher meetings after school or for activities.
- As we look at sites, we'll have to weigh the pros and cons. If there is a great turnkey place in the North End, is it easily accessible to those in the South End so we can begin to serve the community that we are targeting and then move a place that is closer? That is something we'd have to think about.
- Having deal breakers in what we are trying to do it really hard. We just need to meet the needs of the community we want to serve.

3. How was your budget developed? What resources did you use to develop the budget? To what extent did the board or any members of the board review the budget prior to submission of the final application?

- We had a really good starting point from the budget last year. This has been an act of refinement over the last 12 months and quite frankly putting in more conservatism and very detailed line item knowledge based on the guidance. One of the things that I didn't realize last year was the importance of cash flows to the operational viability of early stage schools. When I look at a budget, that is the world I live in, and it looks like a very clean budget. But then you talk to the experts and they say, but you have to understand that this comes in a quarterly cycle. So we've built conservatism into the budget we built last year. We built in more insight, more redundancy, and better assumptions.
- I think we became more conservative with the per pupil tuition rate. We might know the published rate, but let's take it down 5% or so for flexibility in case there are changes made.
- We worked very closely with Chris Collins and Mike Larson at the Academy of the Pacific Rim and MATCH, respectively and Rachel Romano [at Veritas Preparatory Charter School] and Central Source who is a presumptive back office provider who has done this with many charter schools, to make sure every assumption we had was as accurate as possible. We spoke to advisory council and they said special education funding is often an area that schools undercut, so we went through those numbers. So we really took our budget last year and refined it. The whole process is important too because it involves learning the market. The process was more enhanced. We added some more resources, such as Central Source. We really leaned on the advisory council given their technical expertise and that is what they are meant for. We have a lot of finance expertise on our team as well, which we drew from.

- Bill put together the first draft of the budget, which was then vetted with subcommittees. Stressed tested, pushed on, and then it was proposed to the entire board.
- There is a lot of communication between subcommittees and advisory council members.

4. How would receipt of CSP grant funding impact the present budget?

- Given some of the work we've done when we heard news of the status of the CSP grant, we have more flexibility—given some of the pre-fundraising we've done. It would allow for flexibility with regard to staffing and attracting specific teachers and specific administrators with specific skills. The slow surplus build, which only happens in the build-out years, I think we can start to have some of those buffers earlier in place. Having that financial flexibility also allows us to raise lines of credit to give us cash flow flexibility.
- I think the budget we submitted is relatively tight, especially in the first year. It's not that we'd put the startup funding to a contingency plan, but it would help cover up areas that are harder to cover in the first years. The primary contingencies that we see are real estate staffing and special populations.

5. How did you determine the salary structure for your teaching and operations staff, including special education, and ESL teachers/coordinators? Are these salaries competitive for the area?

- In short, yes, we think we have competitive salaries. We looked at the survey that DESE puts out for charter schools and looked at like districts in the western part of the state and those rates are very competitive. But I also stress that that is an average rate and some teachers will be below that, some will be above that. We feel we have flexibility. The salary is part of a broader package of a rewarding working environment and things like that, which we think factors in.
- There are some organizations that we've built relationships with in the area that help to run special education programs. For example, Futures Education where Kate works does some of that work. James Levine and Associates, which is in South Hadley, does some of that work. Our plan is not to have another provider run our special education program, but we know that if in the event we can't find a qualified administrator there is a backup plan to consult with organizations. The second thing is that the budget that we propose is a relatively lean one based in part on uncertainty of startup funds. As tuition dollars come in and initial startup costs diminish I think we're going to have a more stable base, in which case we'll be able to offer more competitive salaries. We've done some really strong fundraising since meeting with you last. I'm confident with that in place and potentially with CSP funding that we can provide even more competitive salaries.