

FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW 2013-2014

Proposed School Name:	Fenix Charter School
Grades Served At Full Capacity:	5-12
Number of Students At Full Capacity:	600
Proposed School Location:	Lynn
Proposed Opening Year:	FY2015

Public Statement:
 “Fenix Charter School will be a new public school for the Lynn community, serving grades 5 to 12. Located in the historic J.B. Blood building on 20 Wheeler Street, the school will honor Lynn’s pioneering history by providing a school to Lynn families that will prepare their children for the 21st century and beyond.

Through integrated and project-based curricula grounded in the core values of social entrepreneurship, students will develop the competencies that will prepare them to complete higher education, thrive in a global economy, and be change agents in their communities.”

Mission Statement:
 “Fenix Charter School partners with families and communities to provide powerful learning experiences that transform students’ understanding of themselves and the world. Through integrated and project-based curricula grounded in the core values of social entrepreneurship, students develop the competencies that will prepare them to complete higher education, thrive in a global economy, and be change agents in their communities.

This public school will serve students in grades 5 to 12 and their families in the community of Lynn, Massachusetts.”

Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:

School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment
First Year	5	75
Second Year	5, 6	150
Third Year	5, 6, 7	225
Fourth Year	5, 6, 7, 8	300
Fifth Year	5, 6, 7, 8, 9	375

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

Primary Strengths

- The mission and the vision define the purpose and values of the proposed school. The emphasis on powerful student learning experiences and social entrepreneurship are meaningful, and consistent with student success. (Section I.A.)
- The applicant group demonstrated a

Primary Weaknesses

- While the vision statement describes the values of social entrepreneurship the proposed school aims to develop in students, and is consistent with the mission and educational philosophy, the vision is not sufficiently developed and does not serve as an organizing principle for all sections of the application. (Section I.B. and II.A.)

passionate understanding of and connection to the proposed mission and vision during the interview, as well as a strong commitment to serve families and students of Lynn with a high quality public school option. (Section I.B.)

- The application received testimony and/or written comment in support of the charter application primarily from individuals or organizations associated with the proposed charter school. Families that participated in the public hearing in support of the pending charter amendment from the KIPP Academy Lynn Charter Public School also indicated during their testimony the need for other charter school options in Lynn. See public comment. (Section I. C.)

- While the application provides limited information regarding the assessment of support within the Lynn community for the proposed school, during the interview, the applicant group discussed various recruitment strategies that they have implemented or intend to implement, and emphasized that existing relationships with community organizations, such as La Vida, will support adequate enrollment for the opening of the proposed school in 2014.
- The proposed school's use of Fenix within the school name will create confusion due to its marked similarity to the use of Phoenix by an existing charter school in Chelsea. The lead founder was encouraged to revise the school's name accordingly, and declined to do so. (Section I.C.)
- This application received testimony, and/or written comment in opposition during the public hearing and public comment process, including but not limited to Senator Thomas McGee, Representative Robert Fennell, Representative Steven Walsh, the Lynn school committee, Lynn Superintendent Dr. Catherine Latham, teachers, administrators, and community members. See public comment. (Section I.C.)

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction

Primary Strengths

- The educational philosophy describes the applicant group's core beliefs and values about education, in alignment with the social entrepreneurship focus of the proposed mission, and vision. (Section I.A.)
- The application describes the proposed school's five core instructional practices which emphasize student-centered authentic learning experiences and assessments, and are aligned with the proposed school's mission, vision, and educational philosophy. During the interview, the proposed principal

Primary Weaknesses

- While the educational philosophy provides information regarding the underlying core beliefs and values, identified educational principles, and the five key elements of the educational program, the integration of these various ideas into a comprehensive educational program is not reflected throughout the application. (Section I.A.)
- Within the application and during the interview, the applicant group did not provide a clear comprehensive plan that will facilitate the development, improvement, and refinement of the

provided an extensive description of the nature of the project-based learning activities that would occur at the proposed school. (Section II.B.)

- The application describes specific professional development opportunities for the leadership team and staff that are facilitated through the proposed partner Big Picture Learning (BPL) during both the summer and school year. BPL will provide professional development in curriculum development, school culture implementation, Response to Intervention (RtI) model implementation, as well as access to curriculum and assessments developed and used by BPL schools. (Section II.B.)
- The proposed school will implement daily team planning periods, as well as staff meetings on Friday afternoons to support the regular delivery of professional development opportunities. Annual professional development plans will be developed by the leadership team, and be guided by student achievement performance and the resulting instructional priorities. (Section II.B.)
- The proposed school's principal will be supported by a BPL school designer, and the BPL school network to develop and implement the proposed educational program. (Section II.B.)

curriculum for the proposed school beyond the intent to use the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework, and student performance on projects. The applicant group indicated that the partnership with BPL, and the individuals already identified for employment as integrated learning directors will play a key role during the pre-operational period. (Section II.B.)

- The application lacks the information necessary to understand the full depth and breadth of the content and skills students will learn. Reviewers were concerned with the apparent absence of multidisciplinary integration; academic rigor, or increasing complexity; and repeated areas of redundancy within the proposed curriculum outline. During the interview, the applicant group indicated a curriculum scope and sequence has been developed since the application was submitted. (Section II.B.)
- The application does not describe the process and procedures used to evaluate whether the curriculum is effective and successfully implemented. (Section II.B.)
- While the application indicated the intent to use an RtI model approach to determine interventions for students as needed, it is unclear how the system would be implemented within the proposed school, including how individual student's needs would be identified and addressed. (Section II.B.)
- Reviewers noted concerns regarding the limited opportunities for observation and feedback described within the proposed teacher evaluation system to effectively develop and support high quality instruction, as well as concerns that the proposed principal lacks the educational leadership background needed to effectively develop and evaluate classroom teachers. During the interview, the applicant group clarified that the integrated learning directors will be responsible for the individual teacher development plans within their content areas, with support from the principal as

needed. (Section II.B.)

- In both the application and the interview, the applicant group indicated that it was still in the design phase of developing, improving, and refining the curriculum, and assessment system for the proposed school. Even with the additional capacity provided by the partnership with BPL, the limited progress on essential school structures will pose potential challenges for the scheduled opening in 2014 serving 75 students in fifth grade. (Section II.B.)

Assessment System, Performance, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

Primary Strengths

- The proposed school incorporates a variety of performance-based assessment tools, such as student presentations, projects, and portfolios, which are consistent with high expectations of students, and the proposed school's mission and vision. BPL will provide support in the development of performance assessments and rubrics. (Section II.D.)

Primary Weaknesses

- While the promotion and graduation standards require students to consistently demonstrate core content knowledge and skills in all areas of study consistent with high academic standards and student success, it is unclear if the submitted curriculum outline's apparent lack of rigor undermines such high standards. (Section II.C.)
- The assessment system proposes to implement a variety of performance based assessments to support student growth and development. It is unclear what systems will be in place to effectively monitor student progress across the variety of proposed assessment tools, and to implement programming changes as a result of achievement data. (Section II.D.)
- The proposed assessment system did not indicate the likely intent to use standardized assessment tools, with the exception of MCAS, or multiple measures of student outcomes that can be used to report student growth overtime. (Section II.D.)
- While the application indicates the commitment to use data to facilitate decision-making about adjustments to the educational program, and indicates the assistance to be received from BPL in data collection and management, the fundamental design for measuring, and timely reporting of the performance and

progress of the charter school, and the academic and social development of individual students to all relevant stakeholders remains unclear. During the interview, the applicant group acknowledged the challenge of identifying an assessment system that effectively incorporates project-based learning. (Section II.D.)

School Characteristics

Primary Strengths

- The proposed school would operate for an extended school year of 185 days, and an extended school day from 8:30 a.m.-6 p.m. with a shortened day on Fridays for teacher professional development. The proposed school's schedule will include a daily morning circle (advisory) and 60 minute community lunch to address both the academic and non-academic goals of the proposed educational program. The proposed school will implement an Extended Learning Program (ELP) from 4-6 p.m., four days a week, to provide tutoring; foreign language, arts and wellness electives; and career development strategies to all students. (Section II.E.)
- The proposed school would implement 75 minute academic blocks to support the project-based learning proposed in alignment with the proposed mission. (Section II.E.)
- The application indicates a number of proposed strategies to support student needs consistent with its social entrepreneurship values, including advisory during morning circle, mentoring programs, and restorative justice programming. (Section II.E.)
- Within the application and during the interview, the applicant group indicated the commitment to create family and community programs during the evenings at the school in partnership with non-profit community organizations, including adult education services. (Section II.E.)

Primary Weaknesses

- While the proposed school's educational philosophy closely aligns with the key design elements of BPL's approach, within the application and during the interview, the applicant group provided insufficient information regarding the implementation of the majority of the key design elements within the proposed educational program. (Section II.E.)
- The application does not contain a comprehensive plan to implement the Extended Learning Program (ELP) as described. It is also unclear how the ELP may be modified to accommodate high school students who must pursue employment, or wish to pursue extracurricular options not offered by proposed school. (Section II.E.)
- The application provided a limited discussion of the proposed school's culture as well as the plan to establish a school culture consistent with the mission and educational programming of the proposed school. (Section II.E.)

Special Student Populations and Student Services

Primary Strengths

- None identified.

Primary Weaknesses

- While the application clearly states the intent to comply with state and federal laws and regulations, the description of the processes and procedures used to identify, assess, and serve students receiving special education services was limited, and could not establish knowledge to serve students with disabilities in accordance with requirements. For example, the application does not provide clear information on how student identification and assessment will be conducted, the types of support services to be offered, or the qualifications of individuals delivering services. (Section II.F.)
- Similarly, while the application clearly states the intent to comply with state and federal laws and regulations, the description of the processes and procedures used to identify, assess, and serve English language learners (ELLs) had missing pieces or inaccurate components, and could not establish knowledge to serve ELLs in accordance with requirements. For example, the application incorrectly identified the tools for identifying ELLs, provided limited information regarding the English language development curriculum, and the qualifications of individuals delivering services. (Section II.F.)
- While the applicant group indicates the intent to implement a co-teaching classroom model at the proposed school to support ELLs and students receiving special education services, it is unclear how the model will be implemented based on the staffing levels proposed for both programs over time. (Section II.F.)

Capacity and School Governance

Primary Strengths

- The diverse founding group includes proposed board members, proposed employees, and advisors with qualifications as educators, higher education administrators, professional development providers, community organizers, business entrepreneurs, a special education teacher, an English as a Second Language educator, charter school staff member, a medical researcher, architect, and non-profit administrators. Seven individuals are indicated as proposed school employees, including the school leader and principal. The applicant group indicated interest in recruiting additional proposed board members, such as a lawyer, parent, and individuals with finance and fundraising experience. (Section III.B.)
- The applicant group has tangible ties to Lynn, and provides a broad and diverse representation of professionals committed to improving public education in Lynn. The proposed board is reflective of the proposed school's mission and educational program. (Section III.B.)
- During the interview, the applicant group described ways in which BPL can enhance the capacity of the school by providing a school designer, as well as strategies and structures intended to facilitate the development of curriculum; inform instruction; create professional development opportunities; and establish a school culture and norms consistent with the mission, vision, and educational philosophy. (Section III.C.)

Primary Weaknesses

- While the proposed board and proposed employees, including the executive director and principal are committed to establish the proposed school, it is unclear if the shortened six month planning period will be sufficient for the group and their selected school support organization, BPL, to implement the complex components of the proposed school. (Section III.B.)
- The application contains a generalized, discussion of charter school governance that provides a limited ability to assess the applicant group's understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of the board and the school administration. The application, and draft bylaws indicate a limited distinction between the board chair's role and that of the proposed school leader. During the interview, the proposed board provided inconsistent evidence of a comprehensive understanding of a charter school board's responsibilities, including board decision-making, and self-evaluation. No proposed board officers have been identified. (Section III.C.)
- During the interview, the proposed board of trustees acknowledged the potential challenges of evaluating the proposed Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Frank DeVito due to their prior relationships with him, and his role as the primary driver of the proposed school. While the members reiterated that their responsibility is to the students, and that they will objectively evaluate Frank's performance, a clear school leader evaluation process and metrics was not articulated during the interview or within the application. (Section III.C.)
- The primary application author and proposed CEO of the proposed school, Frank DeVito, would transition from an employee role to a governance role at a non-profit organization he founded (Fenix Center for Innovative Schools). Within

the application and during the interview, Frank DeVito indicates using the foundation to support dissemination of the proposed educational model to other schools, as well as creating a network of charter schools in Massachusetts and nationally. (Section III.B.).

Management

Primary Strengths

- The applicant group has partnered with BPL, a school support organization, to support the proposed school in its development, and implementation of the proposed educational program. The services would involve summer training conferences and mid-year leadership conferences; professional development support and training materials focused on school culture, academic standards, assessment development, student and faculty recruitment; monthly principal coaching and support; annual site visit by other BPL school leaders; and access to the network of BPL schools. (Section III.D.)
- During the interview, the BPL representative described the role of the BPL school designer who would support the school leadership team during the pre-operational period in student recruitment and family engagement, professional development, and exposure to other existing BPL schools, such as the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (the MET) in Rhode Island. (Section II.B.)
- The application clearly describes how the proposed school will determine the professional development needs of the faculty using student achievement data, and provides frequent opportunities for collaboration and professional development to take place, including weekly staff roundtables. (Section II.B. and III.D.)

Primary Weaknesses

- Throughout the application, the academic leadership team, consisting of the integrated learning directors, student support director, the English language learner director, and learning specialist director, is tasked with sharing the responsibility with the principal for the various systems required to operate the school effectively, including curriculum, and assessment. It is unclear how the academic leadership team plays this role within the proposed educational program during the first years of implementation and once additional faculty has been hired. (Section II.B., II.D., and III.D.)
- The application contains limited information regarding how the mechanics of the proposed educational program, including the length of day, and teacher responsibilities, will be implemented to provide sustainable working conditions for teachers during the first years of implementation and over time. (Section III.D.)
- While the proposed principal's professional roles have included experience in professional development design, and training for science teachers; middle and high school science curriculum development; grant writing; working with urban secondary students; and leadership roles in higher education, she has not previously held a position as an instructional leader for a secondary education program. (Section III.C.)

Facilities, Transportation, and Finances

Primary Strengths

- During the interview, the applicant group provided an update on facility planning and the identification of a potential desirable location in downtown Lynn. The applicant group described the space as being ideal for the early years of the proposed school's implementation. (Section III.E.)

Primary Weaknesses

- The application provides very limited information about the fiscal management, fiscal controls, and the financial policies and procedures of the proposed school. The proposed board treasurer; with qualifications in finance, and banking; is no longer affiliated with the applicant group due to professional commitments. The proposed board of trustees is looking to recruit a replacement. (Section III.F.)
- The budget narrative, and the proposed budget, did not accurately reflect the staffing plan submitted in the application. (Section III.F.)
- While the budget narrative provided within the charter application is limited and provides little explanation of the projected amounts in the budget and their underlying assumptions, during the interview, the applicant group provided additional information regarding the development of the budget, and its review by multiple members of the applicant group. The applicant group noted that the submitted budget underestimated the expenses related to facilities. (Section III.F.)