

**FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW 2013-2014**

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| <b>Proposed School Name:</b>                | New Heights Charter School of Fall River |
| <b>Grades Served At Full Capacity:</b>      | 6-13                                     |
| <b>Number of Students At Full Capacity:</b> | 800                                      |
| <b>Proposed School Location:</b>            | Fall River                               |
| <b>Proposed Opening Year:</b>               | FY2015                                   |

**Public Statement:**

“The New Heights Charter School of Fall River (New Heights) is a college preparatory secondary education school for grades six through thirteen. We will enroll 800 students from the Fall River Public School District. Our mission is to provide urban students in grades 6-13 the opportunity to develop a career pathway that will lead to and through college graduation with a focus on community engagement, integrity, and community service. New Heights students will benefit from small classes, engaging and knowledgeable staff, early exposure to technology, service learning opportunities, career exploration and experience, and finally, the opportunity to earn up to sixty college credits along with a high school diploma.”

**Mission Statement:**

“The New Heights Charter School of Fall River (New Heights’) mission is to provide urban students in grades 6-13 the opportunity to develop a career pathway that will lead to and through college graduation with a focus on culture, integrity, and community service.”

**Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:**

| School Year | Grade Levels           | Total Student Enrollment |
|-------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| First Year  | 6, 7, 9                | 300                      |
| Second Year | 6, 7, 8, 9,            | 500                      |
| Third Year  | 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11     | 600                      |
| Fourth Year | 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 | 700                      |
| Fifth Year  | 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 | 800                      |

**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 college graduation is meaningful, and consistent with high academic standards and student success. (Section I.A.)
- The application described how the proposed school would enhance or expand the educational options through implementation of the proposed early college programming for Fall River students, and their families. (Section I.C.)
- The applicant group demonstrated a

**Primary Weaknesses**

- Reviewers noted that the non-academic aspects of the mission and vision; culture, integrity, and community service; were inconsistently developed throughout in the application. At the interview, the applicant group emphasized the goal of college and career readiness but also supporting student success through addressing the social-emotional needs of the students. (Section I.A. and I.B.)
- The proposed mission also describes career pathway development within the educational program; this component of

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 Fall River with a high quality public school option. Since the application was submitted, the applicant group has worked to develop charter school knowledge through networking with the leadership teams and boards of existing charter schools. (Section I.B.)

- This charter application received letters and/or written testimony in support during the public hearing and public comment process, including but not limited to Senator Michael Rodrigues, Representative Alan Silvia, Representative Carole Fiola, Representative Patricia Haddad, Fall River Superintendent Meg Mayo-Brown, Bristol Community College President Dr. John Sbrega, and members of the Fall River business community. See public comment. (Section I.C.)

the mission is never clearly cultivated, measured, or monitored, and is not reflected throughout the application. Limited information is provided about the supports for student exploration of career pathways through selected college studies, including the role of college guides. (Section I.A.)

- This charter application received letters and/or written testimony in opposition during the public hearing and public comment process, including but not limited to the Fall River teacher’s union, and a member of the Fall River School Committee. See public comment. (Section I.C.)

**Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction**

**Primary Strengths**

- As described in the application, a graduate of the proposed school could accumulate up to 30-60 college credits, within the proposed educational program. Students will have access to targeted college skills courses as early as grade 10, and general course offerings by grade 12. (Section II.B.)
- During the interview, the proposed school leader described his prior Resiliency Prep experience with the curriculum development of nine competency-based online courses aligned with the Common Core State Standards, and the intent to duplicate that process to develop curriculum for the proposed school. (Section II.B.)
- While not clearly described in this section of the application, students in the middle school grades (Lower School) will have double periods of literacy and mathematics instruction daily to

**Primary Weaknesses**

- While the educational philosophy provides information regarding the four key principles of the Resiliency Model, and a supportive student-centered school experience, the integration of these various beliefs and values into a comprehensive educational program is not reflected throughout the application. (Section II.A.)
- The proposed school’s process and procedures for the development, and use of individualized learning plans for every student remains unclear, and is described inconsistently in the application. (Section II.A.)
- Within the application, and during the interview, the proposed school leader described the use of commercial resources to assist in the development of curriculum for the proposed school. The application does not clearly describe a clear plan that will facilitate the development,

accelerate student learning. Blueprint Network School's (Blueprint) Math Fellows program will be implemented during one of the double periods. (Section II.B.)

improvement, and refinement of the curriculum for the proposed school. The application also does not clearly describe the process and procedures used to evaluate whether the curriculum is effective and successfully implemented. (Section II.B.)

- The application does not describe the instructional methods that will be used to deliver curriculum, or how the proposed instructional methods will support high standards of achievement for all students. (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 Blueprint, the limited progress on essential school structures will pose potential challenges for the scheduled opening in 2014, serving 300 students in grades 6, 7, and 9. (Section II.B.)
- The application contains limited information on the plans to train and support teachers to address the individual needs of all students. (Section II.B.)
- The application provides a generalized and limited description of the proposed teacher evaluation system, which is modeled after the state's tools, and its implementation. It is clear it will incorporate consistent weekly feedback for all instructional staff by members of the leadership team (the principal, dean of curriculum and instruction, and director of student services). (Section II.B.)

**Assessment System, Performance, Promotion, and Graduation Standards**

**Primary Strengths**

- The proposed school will implement Accuplacer assessments to gauge student readiness for college level courses in grade 9, and place students in appropriate college courses when they are eligible in grade 10. (Section II.D.)

**Primary Weaknesses**

- While the use of proficiency standards, and promotion standards, maintains rigorous standards while identifying struggling students for interventions prior to a retention decision; it remained unclear how the remedial support

services; pre-school and/or post-school tutoring, Saturday Academy, and/or Summer Academy; are operated to support student success. (Section II.C.)

- The application contains unusual language regarding the use of exit policies to remove students, approve student transfer, or approve early graduation at the end of grade 12. (Section II.C.)
- While the proposed leadership team has not yet finalized the selection of commercial assessment tools, the application does not clearly describe the development of an assessment system that will facilitate decision-making about adjustments to the educational program, and inform a staff development plan that will support the goal of improved student learning. (Section II.D.)
- It is unclear how the described assessment system demonstrates a sound design for measuring and reporting the performance and progress of the charter school, and the academic and social development of each student to all relevant stakeholders. (Section II.D.)

### School Characteristics

#### Primary Strengths

- The proposed school would operate for a school year of 180 days, with an extended school day from 7:45 a.m.- 4 p.m. and a shortened Wednesday. The proposed school's schedule will include three opportunities for advisory (morning, lunch, and afternoon). The proposed school will implement an Enrichment and Support period from 4-5 p.m., to provide tutoring; community service opportunities; and extracurricular activities. (Section II.E.)
- The proposed school proposes to implement academic support services for struggling students before and after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer. (Section II.E.)

#### Primary Weaknesses

- The application does not clearly describe the mechanics of the school day or school week as experienced by students and faculty, including the shortened Wednesdays for professional development, the Enrichment and Support period, and Saturday Academy programming. It remains unclear how the early college aspect of the proposed program will be experienced by students, and integrated and monitored by the school. (Section II.E.)
- It is not clear how the proposed school will address the challenges of preparing students who perform below grade level to successfully participate in the early college component of the school's vision. (Section II.E.)
- While the application describes strategies

to support student development, such as advisory, community service projects, and enrichment, the proposed school's culture is not meaningfully described, nor is a clear plan for establishing a school culture provided. (Section II.E.)

**Special Student Populations and Student Services**

**Primary Strengths**

- The application contains generalized descriptions of the processes and procedures that the proposed school would use to identify, assess, and provide specialized instruction to English Language Learners (ELLs) that demonstrates an understanding of legal requirements, and program implementation. (Section II.F.)
- While limited information was provided within the application, during the interview, the proposed director of student services provided additional information regarding the wraparound services that would be available to students and their families at the proposed school. (Section II.F.)

**Primary Weaknesses**

- The application does not provide sufficient information to evaluate the special education program as proposed, or to establish the applicant group's capacity to adequately serve students with disabilities. The application does not clearly indicate the processes and procedures that will be used to identify and assess students in need of special education services, nor the types of services students with disabilities will receive. (Section II.F.)
- The application did not contain a discussion of how the English Language Development (ELD) program would be evaluated. (Section II.F.)

**Enrollment and Recruitment**

**Primary Strengths**

- During the interview, the applicant group provided a clear rationale for the increase to the proposed enrollment of the school, and the grade span proposed. The proposed enrollment provides adequate financial resources to implement the full educational program as envisioned. The proposed school's grade span will align with the natural break in Fall River Public Schools, which implements elementary schools serving K-5, and middle schools serving grades 6-8. (Section III.A.)
- During the interview, the applicant group described the on-going recruitment efforts to enroll a student population reflective of the highest need areas of Fall River, such as the south end of the city. (Section III.A.)

**Primary Weaknesses**

- While the applicant group acknowledges the challenges inherent in its proposed opening with serving 300 students in grades 6, 7, and 9, the group is committed to providing students who were interested in the original innovation school proposal the opportunity to attend grade 9 at the proposed school. (Section II.A.)
- While the application narrative contains some of the required elements, the submitted draft enrollment policy does not accurately reflect the most recent Department guidance (August 2011) on required elements of enrollment policies and implementation practices. (Section III.A.)

## Capacity and School Governance

### Primary Strengths

- The proposed board members have a range of experience and qualifications, including higher education; non-profit management; finance and banking; fundraising; real estate; sales and marketing; law; and extensive governance experience as members of public bodies and non-profit boards, including the board of trustees of the University of Massachusetts. The proposed board of trustees indicated the need for the recruitment of additional members with community-based experience, and to increase the diversity of the board. (Section III.B.)
- The three proposed employees are presently employees of the non-profit Resiliency Foundation, with expertise in school leadership, alternative education and program development, and early college programming. During the interview, it was clear that the proposed executive director would maintain an affiliation with the non-profit as he transitioned from an employee of the organization to a paid consultant. It is advised that the individuals seek an informal written opinion from State Ethics Commission. (Section III.C.)
- The governance model described in the application includes clear roles and responsibilities for the proposed board of trustees, consistent with public accountability. (Section III.C.)
- The proposed board of trustees intends to partner with Blueprint, a school support organization, to support effective implementation of its key design elements for accelerated student learning. The proposed charter school intends to implement Blueprint's Math Fellows program, receive support in teacher recruitment, and undergo evaluation visits by Blueprint to support targeted school improvement. (Section III.C.)

### Primary Weaknesses

- The proposed board lacks a member with a K-12 education background to assist in monitoring the proposed school's academic performance and the school leader's effectiveness in the development and implementation of the proposed academic program. (Section III.B.)
- Within the application, and during the interview, the proposed board of trustees did not describe a clear process or criteria the board would use for its own evaluation and development. Additionally, there is not yet a clearly developed process or measurable criteria for the evaluation of the proposed executive director. During the interview, the proposed board of trustees indicated the intent to hire a governance consultant to support implementation of effective governance practices. (Section III.C.)
- The draft bylaws, application narrative, and interview discussion indicated the proposed board of trustees intends to hire both the executive director, already identified as Omari Walker, and the principal, not yet identified, indicating confusion as to the school employees a charter school board of trustees is tasked with hiring. (Section III.C.)
- While the relationship with Blueprint dates to the proposal's iteration as an innovation school plan, and would be a source of additional capacity for the applicant group, limited information is provided within the application to determine the extent of services to be received by the proposed school. (Section III.B.)

## **Management**

### **Primary Strengths**

- The application describes clearly delineated roles and responsibilities for the proposed school leader, and members of the leadership team, and articulates key role distinctions with regard to academic programming, student and family support programming, and college programming in support of implementation of the proposed educational program. (Section III.D.)

### **Primary Weaknesses**

- It is unclear how quickly the applicant group will recruit and identify a qualified and experienced principal who will be essential to the successful founding and operating of the proposed school. As the instructional leader, the proposed principal's responsibilities include developing curriculum, assessment system, and professional development. The principal has a tremendous amount of responsibility during the planning period and first operational year. (Section III.D.)
- The general staffing chart and brief narrative staffing plan provided information that was inadequate to determine if staffing projections were aligned with the proposed educational program, and sufficient to meet students' needs, including the proposed use of two teachers to deliver science and social studies curricula to 300 students. (Section III.D.)
- Reviewers noted concerns regarding the extent of teacher responsibilities, including the length of day, before-school and after-school programming, Saturday Academies, and Summer Academy; questions remain about how the educational program will be implemented to provide sustainable working conditions for teachers during the first years of implementation and over time. During the interview, the applicant group emphasized that recruiting and hiring the right people, and building a school culture that empowers teachers is key. (Section III.D.)
- The application contains limited information regarding the plans to determine the professional development needs of the staff, and the content of professional opportunities that will be delivered during the proposed professional development schedule, including summers, school breaks, and Wednesday afternoons. Within the application, and during the interview, the applicant group indicated the intent to use

student performance data to guide the selection of professional development for instructional staff. (Section II.B. and III.D.)

**Facilities, Transportation, and Finances**

**Primary Strengths**

- The application and the applicant group describe a viable process for conducting a facilities search, and in the interview the group provided a brief status report that indicated the option to co-locate with an existing charter school in Fall River, Atlantis Charter School (Atlantis). (Section III.E.)
- During the interview, the applicant group indicated revisions to the budget since the application was submitted. The proposed school leader indicated that after consultation with, and support from Atlantis' finance administrator, the group was able to make corrections to the assumptions within the draft budget, including improving the accuracy of fringe benefit expenditures. (Section III.E.)

**Primary Weaknesses**

- While certain areas were clarified during the interview, there were inconsistencies between the budget narrative, and proposed budget in regards to the staffing plans. (Section III.F.)
- Within the application, limited information is provided regarding the proposed structure, and process for managing the school's finances. The proposed school intends to contract with Atlantis for business management support, and intends to model its financial management practices after Atlantis. It remains unclear if the proposed leadership team has sufficient knowledge of the practical financial matters relevant to the operation of a charter school without this support. (Section III.E.)
- The applicant group proposes to contract with Blueprint for a flat rate fee of \$100,000 the first year of implementation and \$200,000 annually thereafter. It remains unclear the full scope of the services received from the school support organization. (Section III.E.)