*Proposed* Hampden Charter School of Science West

Executive Summary

*This was prepared by the Hampden Charter School of Science West applicant group.*

Hampden Charter School of Science West (HCSS-WEST) will be a 6-12 school serving 588 students from Agawam, Holyoke, Westfield, and West Springfield. The mission of HCSS-WEST is to provide a college preparatory-focused education to the youth of every race and ethnic group in Agawam, Holyoke, Westfield, and West Springfield in a safe, student-centered, academically challenging, and caring educational environment. Our promise is to sustain small school size; to provide extended math and science curriculum, individualized attention, college guidance, and university outreach programs; and to nurture student-teacher-parent partnerships. Our mission is to provide our students with the support necessary to empower them to reach their fullest intellectual, emotional, social, and physical potentials to ensure student preparation for college.

The vision of the HCSS-WEST is to increase the rate of college entry of the students in Agawam, Holyoke, Westfield, and West Springfield. Exemplary learning opportunities designed for college preparation in a technologically rich-environment will be the standard. The curriculum will focus on mathematics and science education to strengthen performance in STEM. We will provide college guidance to all students and encourage all students to both graduate from HCSS-WEST and pursue higher education. Individualized attention, tutoring, university outreach programs, social projects, and various scholarly extra-curricular activities such as lab projects, science fairs, debate contests, and math competitions will create an energetic and dynamic learning environment while encouraging all students to think independently and creatively. HCSS-WEST will place significant emphasis on family involvement. The instructors will be committed to teaching. HCSS-WEST will use external and internal assessment methods to measure the success rate of our students. Each year the rate of college entry will be analyzed and if it is necessary, the curriculum, the teaching methods, and the supporting modules will be improved. In addition to the fundamental academic skills, the students will gain excellent reasoning and problem solving skills. Therefore, the graduates who do not attend college will have these skills to bring to future career choices.

HCSS-WEST will be a public charter school with the following core beliefs:

1. Rigorous academic program with extended math, science, and computer technology curriculum
2. Problem and project-based instructional approaches for contextual learning
3. Individualized attention
4. College and career readiness
5. Supportive, structured, collaborative and positive school culture achieved by student-teacher-parent partnership

HCSS-WEST will replicate the successful model of HCSS (flagship school) in the cities of Agawam, Holyoke, West Springfield and Westfield. As a proven provider, the founding group of HCSS-WEST demonstrates the ability and capacity to serve the target population. The proven provider status of our team is based on the record of academic success and organizational viability. HCSS is a Level 1 public charter school with an emphasis on science and math based in Chicopee. HCSS has surpassed its sending districts and the state average on statewide assessments in both SGP and proficiency rates. HCSS students achieved 100 percent proficient or advanced scores on both the 10th grade math and English 2015 MCAS exams. In 2016, HCSS had 98 percent proficiency rate on 10th grade ELA MCAS and 96 percent proficiency rate on 10th grade Math MCAS. Moreover, in both 2014 and 2015, HCSS was recognized for having the highest Student Growth Percentile (SGP) in 10th grade math. HCSS was also ranked in top five districts in 2016 in highest Math median SGP in MCAS 10th grade exam. In 2014, HCSS was recognized for having the highest SGP in 10th grade English and the second highest SGP in 2015.

One hundred percent of HCSS graduates have been accepted to a four year college. In the last three years, graduates have been offered 13.8 million dollars in scholarships averaging $150,000 per student. Ninety-six percent of all HCSS graduates are attending college or university including special education and ELL students. One hundred percent of students not attending college are fully employed.

One of the main reasons for a college preparatory charter school for the districts of Agawam, Holyoke, West Springfield and Westfield is the fact that student growth in all four districts is either moderate or low in terms of mSGP (median Student Growth Percentile). Another reason is that MCAS performance levels in four districts have been lower than the state from year to year.[[1]](#footnote-1) HCSS students showed high growth, and MCAS performance levels have been higher than all sending districts and the state in the last three years.

In addition to low growth and low achievement in science and technology/engineering and in math, there is unmistakable evidence of the need for a college guidance and preparation program in those communities. According to a Holyoke Public School survey conducted in 2013-2014, only 18 percent of Holyoke High School graduates had plans to attend a 4-year college, while this intention statewide was 59 percent.

The need for Hampden Charter School of Science also appears on surveys conducted in proposed locations. Accordingly, the majority of the survey respondents in Agawam, Holyoke, and Westfield believed that there is a need for a college preparatory school. Again, the majority in these districts has an interest in sending their children to HCSS which signals the potential need for such a school. The survey also reveals the potential student population who will be eligible to attend the school.

HCSS-WEST is proposed to open in the 2018-2019 academic year in one of the municipalities of Hampden County: Holyoke, Agawam, West Springfield or Westfield. The HCSS model and experience will be used to reach the goals. During the first year, HCSS-WEST will serve 252 students in grades 6 through 9. At full capacity, HCSS-WEST will serve grades 6 through 12 with 588 students.

The school day will run from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and will be followed by after-school programs until 4:45 p.m. There will be 40 periods of instruction per week. In line with HCSS-WEST’s emphasis on math and science, the majority of hours will be spent on these subjects. Students will also spend a considerable amount of time with a range of courses such as computer science, foreign language, physical education, music, and the arts.

HCSS-WEST will keep class sizes small, with an average around 20 students per class. The small class size will be easy to manage, and teachers may adapt instructional methods according to the individual needs of students. HCSS-WEST will keep our student/teacher ratio around 11 to 1, allowing us to monitor each student’s achievement closely. Opening with a small school will create a family-like environment. Moreover, this enrollment will allow for a stable and steady growth of the student body, which is important to building and maintaining a positive and strong school culture.

HCSS-WEST believes that improving the educational results for children with disabilities is essential to ensure equal opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. A special education program and ELL services at HCSS-WEST will be provided in accordance with federal and state laws and regulations. HCSS-WEST shall not discriminate in admission based on a student’s disability.

To help bring success to both the special education program and ELL services, HCSS is building relationships in the community. HCSS is a partner with Westfield State University’s Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment (ICE) Program. Partners meet every two months and include Agawam and Westfield school districts. This program provides dual enrollment opportunities for transitioning students, ages 18-21, with intellectual disabilities and/or autism spectrum disorder. To increase human capital and disseminate best practices, HCSS has partnered with the education departments at both Westfield State University and Western New England University’s to host practicum and pre-practicum students. HCSS has also conducted two trainings on Project Based Learning for Western New England University education students. HCSS is working with the Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School located in Holyoke and conducted their special education training for general education teachers.

Another local organization that we will work with is the MassMutual Center Financial Group, which will hold workshops on financial aid, saving for college, and the options available for our students and families. HCSS has built relationships with professors from institutions such as UMASS, WNEU, Elms College, Westfield State, Northeastern, and Harvard which we plan to carry over to HCSS-WEST.

Benjamin Franklin once said, “Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning.” The founding group, the Board of Trustees and current staff of HCSS, has embarked on replication. The founding group’s aim is to provide resources to help the community, families, and students of Agawam, Holyoke, Westfield, and West Springfield to meet high standards in school and in life.

The founding group is currently overseeing a very successful public charter school and is highly qualified to establish HCSS-WEST. The founding members have expertise in fields such as education, science, management, finance, and law. With the oversight of the current board of trustees and the founding group, HCSS has become a Proven Provider and Level 1 School.

HCSS has the organizational capacity to grow successfully while maintaining quality. The Board is ready to manage this challenge. To guarantee quality the Board will regularly evaluate the performance of both schools on the goals and objectives outlined in the accountability plan and the five year strategic plan. The performance evaluation of the schools includes, but is not limited to, student performance on internal and external assessments; financial reports showing projected and actual expenditures as well as the cash flow; annual independent audits; student recruitment and retention; and staff recruitment, retention, and advancement.

To ensure governance oversight and to support the healthy growth of the successful school, network structure will be created to manage both schools. The accumulated academic and operational experience and established employment and financial policies and procedures will be implemented to ensure true replication and smooth transition.

1. 1 http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)