

Spirit of Knowledge Charter School Executive Summary

This is prepared by the founding group of the proposed Spirit of Knowledge Charter School.

Mission:

The Spirit of Knowledge Charter School's 7th through 12th grade Worcester students will create value in their lives and the lives of others through high-standards academic learning, especially in math, science and technology, gaining admission to college, and developing a positive character.

Vision:

At the Spirit of Knowledge Charter School ("the School"), the basic tenet of creating value will be defined as and measured through the following three functions:

- 1. Provide high-standards academic learning.* Our students will achieve proficiency in reading, writing, math, sciences, and technology by mastering our innovative curriculum at a high standards level. For example, the students will understand and be able to apply math and science concepts; create interdisciplinary projects on innovative technological topics such as renewable energy and biotechnology and present them at special Stand and Deliver festivals; the students will be proficient in using technology in everyday schoolwork based on the School-wide *1:1 Learning with Technology* strategy.
- 2. Prepare students for college.* All of our students will be immersed in a college-going culture; they will visit colleges and learn about their programs. Although all college careers will be encouraged, our graduates will be specifically prepared to pursue majors that address modern technological challenges such as clean energy and biotechnology.
- 3. Instill positive school culture and character development.* The School will embrace an inspiring school culture based on a value-creating philosophy and positive character-building system.

Need:

The School will serve 7th through 12th grade students from the diverse population of Worcester. The need for a school with this mission in Worcester is demonstrated by the following: lack of a successful public option in Worcester that addresses truly contemporary technical education; substantial parental demand demonstrated by over 1,200 Worcester students on the waiting lists of the current Worcester charter schools, and over 250 petition signatures and a substantial number of pre-enrollments for this school; academic results of the Worcester Public Schools (WPS) significantly below the state averages, as measured by the MCAS results in all core subjects, especially in high school sciences; indicators of college preparedness, such as that only 38% of 2008 WPS graduates plan to go to 4-year colleges, compared to 57% statewide, and that the WPS's SAT scores (450 – Reading, 445 – Writing, 451 – Math) are well behind averages for the state (502, 515, 494) and for Worcester's current charter high school (518, 502, 537). Many WPS students who go to college are unprepared for college level work (55% have to take remediation courses in college). In addition, an array of indicators (attendance, suspension, truancy and juvenile arrest rates) demonstrate the need for a strong school culture and character development program in Worcester.

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction:

The School's educational philosophy is based on Soka Education, a Japanese educational and ethical theory developed by the Japanese educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), a contemporary of

John Dewey's and supporter of many of his educational principles. "*Soka*" is a contraction of "sozo kachi", meaning "creation of value" in Japanese. The main ideas of Soka Education are creating value in the lives of students, community and society. The basic tenet of creating value serves as the core organizational principle and the "glue" holding together all components of the School design: high-standards curriculum based on the International structure; the cutting-edge, research-based organizational and instructional methods; and the school culture and emphasis on character development. Each one of these components is grounded in extensive research and demonstrated success. We believe that education is THE critical path to creating value in one's own life, and in the lives of others.

The School's curriculum is based on the following principles:

- High-standards academic learning;
- Subject-specific, multi-year courses that span grades 7-12;
- A focus on intensive math, sciences and technology with a unique practical application to renewable, "clean" energy and biotechnology, preparing students for future studies and/or careers in these areas;
- The same sequence of academic courses for all students, so they may progress along a consistent continuum of learning.

The 7 through 8-grade curriculum will lay the foundation of literacy and math skills and prepare students for a rigorous high school experience. In grades 9 through 12, all students will receive four years of instruction in Math, Physics, Chemistry and Biology, and two years of Computer Science (total of four years in 7-10 grades). Humanities will be studied in a 6-year historical sequence from grades 7 through 12. The Latin language studied in grades 9-12 will help students in English, SAT tests, science and technology terminology, and will serve as a foundation for further studies of the Latin-based languages. All students will study Martial Arts in Physical Education classes.

Our pedagogy will be a balanced combination of the student-centered Soka Education principles with the more teacher-centered approach used in other high-performing urban charter schools. The balance between the two approaches will change with the grade level: for younger students, a more structured approach will be used to ensure that the students submerge into the learning process and adopt systematic learning habits. Teaching methods will become progressively more student-centered for older students, who will have more freedom to define their own studies. Teachers and students will actively use technology: the School will develop experimental laboratories for the sciences; every teacher will be provided on-line and computer software to generate learning materials, conduct assessments, and, using Web 2.0 tools, publish their learning materials on their web pages; using their personal laptop computers, students will actively use web-based tools to prepare their work, take assessments and share information.

SOKCS intends to serve all students' learning styles and individual talents. Our strong academic support system will include Expanded Learning Time; individual and small group tutoring incorporated in the school day, after school, on weekends, and during summers; small math classes; Universal Design for Learning as the basis for the teaching methodology of every lesson; training all teachers to be teachers of reading; and careful monitoring of every student's academic and non-academic progress in a small-group advisory. English Language Learners and students on IEP will be provided a full array of services with emphasis on general classroom inclusion where possible.

Academic excellence and college preparedness are the major part of the School's mission of value-creation, requiring that our faculty be continuously focused on improving curriculum and teaching

quality to maximize student achievement. Therefore, the School will follow an on-going cyclic process of data collection, analysis, discussion, and implementation, followed by successive iterations.

School Organization:

The School plans to open in September 2010 with total of 156 students in grades 7th through 9th: two sections in each grade, an average of 26 students per section. The School will grow one grade per year until total enrollment reaches 275 students in grades 7-12.

Following our research-based mission and the Soka principles of value creation for both students and teachers, activities and decision-making at SOKCS will be conducted within the framework of a Professional Learning Community (PLC). Core PLC principles include shared mission, vision and values, teamwork and collaboration, urgency of constant improvement, collective learning, frequent peer observations and feedback, and personal accountability.

School Culture:

The School will embrace an inspiring culture based on value-creating philosophy and positive character-building through understanding and implementation of the core tenets of the Soka philosophy: Beauty (bi), demonstrated through creating physical beauty in the school or community environment, and by producing “beautiful”, excellent academic work; Gain (ri), defined as creating individual benefit or achievement; and Good (zen), defined as creating social benefit, or benefit to others or to a group and not just to the individual. Within this framework, our students will be encouraged to implement, and recognized for implementing, the school’s nine key virtues in their lives: creation of beauty, scholarship, courage, perseverance, improvement, integrity, respect, friendship, and service. The school community, including staff, parents and students will share and celebrate these tenets in every day school life and communications as well as through traditions, rituals and assemblies. A comprehensive character education and ethics curriculum will be taught during Advisory periods several times per week. Lessons will progress from situational ethics, peaceful conflict resolution, an explicit anti-bullying program, and practical application of the school’s key virtues, in the lower grades, to intensive study of ethical philosophy in grades 11 and 12. Every student will assemble and maintain a character, ethics, and personal growth portfolio under the guidance of his or her Advisor.

Because of the unusual, high-standards academic program and challenging social goals, active parent involvement with full buy-in and support are critical for success of the School’s mission. We will apply continuous effort to inform, educate and involve current and potential parents on every step of creating, developing and growing our school. In addition, communication and partnership with community organizations, colleges, and businesses will be instrumental to our educational programs and school culture.

The Founding Group:

Currently consisting of 18 members, the Spirit of Knowledge Charter School’s Founding Group is united and passionate about offering this outstanding educational option to the Worcester community. All of the prospective Board of Trustees members live and/or work in Worcester. Several Group members have a proven record of successfully starting and managing a high-performing math and science charter school; some have successfully consulted at high performing charter and district schools for many years. The school’s racially and ethnically diverse Founding Group includes K-12 and higher education specialists, technology experts, community organization representatives, engineers,

professionals, local parents, and a lawyer and a banker to advise the school in issues related to law and finance. In addition, we have started an Academic Advisory Board, a group of experts who will advise us on issues of curriculum, instruction, school organization, and other issues. A group of energized parents have created a Parent Action Team that is actively involved in community development.

Community Connections:

We have contacted and plan to collaborate in the future with many local organizations: colleges, clean energy companies, businesses, and non-profit organizations. We have adopted a Memorandum of Understanding with the Martin Luther King, Jr. Business Empowerment Center in Worcester that will allow us to better serve the most underrepresented minority groups in the city.