

## Spirit of Knowledge Charter School

Questions as derived from panel review

### Mission and Vision

- 1. Please define “high-standards academic learning.”**
  - Have found that students coming from the high schools are not well prepared for college. High standards are preparation for college.
  - In relation to the Soka principles we would include high character and a passion for learning.
  - We hope that students score high on the SATs.
  - Students shouldn’t require remedial courses going into college.

### Statement of Need

- 2. Beyond looking at waiting lists, please explain how the founding group has assessed parental demand and need within the proposed area of service.**
  - There are no schools in the district that focus on STEM careers that don’t require an entrance exam or tuition. The closest thing we have is the Math and Science Academy; it’s a statewide school for grades 11 and 12. We want to give students an opportunity to excel based on STEM and Soka with a focus on math, science, and technology...green technology.
  - We want to provide a pathway for students to the wonderful universities we have in the Worcester area and create a bridge to employers in Worcester.
  - Our target population is an underrepresented group of students. Worcester is diverse, and in the STEM fields, people of color are underrepresented and we feel that serving these students and enabling them would enrich our State.
  - To date, we are pre-enrolled for half the potential seats.
- 3. Describe the students this charter school intends to serve. What are the characteristics of the students you expect to apply to SOKCS? What do you think they need to become successful?**
  - The school will be open to the diverse population of Worcester residents including, minorities, low-income, English language learners and students involved in the juvenile justice system. We expect some students entering the school below grade level, and/or have special need students. We expect students from broken homes and kids who have gang involvement. We’re going to be their gang. We know what factors makes gangs attractive to kids.
  - We will be ready to serve that population. There will be high expectations and support so that the student will be able to meet these high expectations.
  - We need to be ready to meet all our students’ needs. That’s why we are going to have an ELL program. We are devoted to the SEI method. We are ready to pull them out of the regular classroom and assist them in the classroom. We are going to involve parents into the school work.
  - One of the key elements these kids need is structure. Not only an academically structured program but look at developing the entire student. One of the hall marks of this program is afterschool programs and a support system in place.

### **Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction**

**1. When you discuss the pedagogy of the school you state that there will be a balanced combination of the student-centered Soka Education principals with the more teacher centered approach used in other high performing urban charter schools. You explain that the balance between the two approaches will change with the grade level: the younger students, a more structured approach will be used; teaching methods will become progressively more student centered with older students.**

**a. Please describe in more detail this educational delivery system. How will you meet the needs of individual students?**

- We believe that 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> graders who are coming out of a traditional school system may need more structure, so the teacher center delivery system will be the focus for those grade levels, but as students move into 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, once they have that structure and support with the high expectations, we will move to a more student centered delivery system. They will be working on more projects and working in more groups.
- We will be teaching strategies of how to learn. Teaching a young person how to take responsibly for how they learn, knowing their own learning style. We will provide the supports, but students will help us determine what kinds of supports they need.
- We will use RTI, direct instruction and differentiated instruction. Teacher center doesn't mean just lecture style. The main idea is to keep them engaged and keep the momentum going.
- We will stay focused on identifying learning gaps and filling those gaps. We offer tutoring as part of the school day.

**2. How will levels be determined for the homogeneous classes like mathematics and physics?**

- We will do pre-testing and placement and level testing. Extensive testing to identify what they know and what they don't know. That will be communicated to advisors, teachers and students.
- Using a professional learning community model, teachers will work in teams, with one half a day weekly set-a-sides for these issues, and professional development. We will use standard based grading for both summative assessments and formative assessments. We will collect data, and review data. There will be feedback loops.

**3. On page 30 the application states that "Literacy will be a primary emphasis at the school". What do you mean? You also mentioned that all teachers will become teachers of reading. Please explain how English language arts will be taught at this school?**

- All teachers will be trained on how to teach English language arts in every class so they can focus on vocabulary development, grammar, and reading.
- English will also be a separate subject concentrating in writing, speaking, grammar, vocabulary and reading. We plan to help students express themselves in all areas.
- We will have Wilson Reading for kids who are reading significantly below grade level.

**4. In the vision you refer to "green service projects?" What do you mean? How will these be a part of the educational program?**

- It will be part of the curriculum. There will probably be a project each trimester and it will be integrated with the academic curriculum. We have resources with a lot of the green organizations and the utilities. We are still going over these issues.

**5. How is this school interdisciplinary?**

- The beauty of this curriculum is that students will be working on projects in the field, while learning about the topics academically.

**6. How will the curriculum be aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks? How will it all be accomplished in the school. What will be there when you open the first day of school?**

- It is aligned with the frameworks. It is coordinated and fully included. We see those standards as the minimal for everybody.
- We have the entire curriculum ready, we have curriculum map, syllabi and unit plans are ready, the only thing we don't have is the specific lesson plans. Over the past two years we have had a group working and preparing the curriculum based on AMSA, international structure, the big differences in this curriculum is an emphasis on literacy and math in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade and added a philosophy component and are shifting foreign language to high school so there was more time for tutoring in the early grades. The AMSA curriculum is a starting point. We have Soka philosophy and remediation is a primary focus for us.
- We realize what we are trying to do is difficult, but through out the year we will be working in teams and if anything is missing we will make corrections as we go.

**7. How and when will students take MCAS science tests since the content is spread across four years?**

- Our curriculum for middle school is designed to take the 8<sup>th</sup> grade tests. They will be ready to take some or all of the science tests by the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade, including the physics MCAS.

**8. Please explain how Advanced Placement courses fit into the context of this curriculum and how will students be ready to take AP tests?**

- Most of the classes in the curriculum would be considered advanced placement classes. They are accelerated; you don't see these topics in most high schools unless they're advanced placement. Students would be able to take the advanced placement tests.

**9. When will the Character Education curriculum be taught? Also, you mention that non academic goals will be evaluated based on multiple data sets, can you describe that? Do you have standards for character development?**

- We will have a ½ hour advisory everyday and we have a character education curriculum that will be used a few days a week. We are planning to use the character development program that Boston Preparatory Charter School uses and integrate Soka elements. We plan to incorporate character education each day in the classroom. Teachable moments are everyday. All the teachers will be aware of it and emphasize that we all can create value in everything that we do.

**Assessment, Promotion, and Graduation Standards**

**1. Please describe requirements for graduation.**

- a. Please explain the requirement found on page 19 that students must pass character development studies to be promoted.**
- b. How do portfolios and Stand and Deliver connect to promotion and graduation standards?**
  - i. How will portfolios be implemented?**
  - ii. What does Stand and Deliver look like?**

- There will be English, mathematics, and the sciences throughout the six years. Four years of Latin and computer literacy. Character development portfolio that needs to be completed for graduation. The passing grade is 70%.
  - With Stand and Deliver students would present to teachers, students and parents each year in every grade in order to pass to the next grade.
  - There will be a rubric for portfolio to allow for assessment.
- 2. In the accountability plan section you mention 11<sup>th</sup> graders taking PSATs and 12<sup>th</sup> graders taking SATs, is that the standard timeline? Don't students begin applying to college in the fall of 12<sup>th</sup> grade?**
- It depends on the kids, some will be taking them in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup>. They will take the PSAT twice. Once in October of 10<sup>th</sup> grade and then again in 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

### School Characteristics

- 1. Please describe the Academic Success Plans (ASP) (for students who are in danger of failing 2 subjects, how about one subject?) Also, could you discuss tutoring at this school? How is it determined that someone needs/wants tutoring beyond ASP? When does it take place? (afterschool, Saturday, and summer) Is it required? Who is tutoring? How will kids get transportation to/from tutoring?**
- The ASP is developed with the student, teacher, head of the department, dean of students and educational director and parents that would delineate certain goals for the school to meet in educating the student.
  - Student assessment will be ongoing. Mid-trimester there should be indication if the student is not doing well. We have included a support system that won't allow students to fail. We will have tier instruction and RTI. We will hold student service session at our staff development meetings. On a weekly basis we will be able to review trends. Can we intervene? This is one of the ways we will use the ASP.
  - There is tutoring during the day between 12:30 and 1:20. All students will have access to tutoring.
  - Afterschool or Saturday school tutoring is required for students who are failing. Parents will be responsible for transportation for tutoring. But if that is not possible, we will help students find solutions to get students to the school. However, we do expect parents being very involved.
  - We will be working with local colleges and "Tutors for All" to recruit tutors. Also students may tutor other students.
- 2. What is the homework policy? Do all classes have homework?**
- All of the classes will have homework assignments. When there are heavy homework assignments, teachers will collaborate. There will be a school internal calendar where teacher post quizzes and test, or big projects. No more than two tests per day.
  - If the student is staying afterschool, they can and will be working on the homework.
- 3. How will teachers be supported at this school?**
- We envision a community of administrators who truly understand teaching and have been teachers.
  - We will all live the Soka principles. All of us have bought in to leaving any situation better than we found it.
  - We will be in the classrooms and can role model.

- It will be positive to have PD every week. That will develop the community and we will encourage teachers to take the time to look at their own and others practices and ask for help.
  - There will be mentor and mentee teachers.
- 4. How will the organizational support letters translate in to part of a comprehensive educational program?**
- a. To date, what kinds of connections have you made with the STEM Education Network?**
- We are well positioned with colleges in Worcester right now regarding tutors. Also, Olin College will allow students to come work in their labs.
  - A lot of opportunities with companies in Worcester working on clean energy technology. Businesses are excited about the STEM focus.
  - The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center will help the students at the school with business development skills.
  - Since the application was written, we have made other contacts like the Worcester Art Museum. They have curriculum material that they will share with us.
  - The Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers currently works with high schools with design challenges. We also have speakers. We are focused on Worcester right now.

### **Special Student Populations and Services**

- 1. Please respond to the serious concerns that have been raised about the population at AMSA not reflecting the sending districts, particularly for Special Education students and English language learners.**
- Worcester is different than Marlboro. This school will look like the district. Sixty percent of the population is low income; large percent of English language learners, a large percent have special needs. We have weekly information sessions in the inner city. We are given information to all students and trying to reach underperforming students. This is not going to be an elitist school; it's going to be an inner-city school with a focus on STEM and Soka. Our goal is to position ourselves to reach out to underrepresented populations in the STEM field. We are going to have translations in multiple languages as part of outreach. To date we have translated information into Vietnamese, Spanish, and Portuguese.
- 2. How will the school provide supports for English language learners and disabled students? Please explain the staffing plan, as well as the plans for professional development. What's the role of the ELL Coordinator and how will the needs of students be met with a part time position?**
- First we will have a home language survey and then we will try to make connections with families. I know how isolated ELL students feel, especially at the beginning. We are going to make a nurturing environment. Our assessment system in place. We will work as a team.
  - The way the law is written it encourages segregation. We are committed to total immersion. Wherever possible we will keep the child in the classroom. Teachers will be trained in Sheltered English Instruction. Students can be pulled out during the tutoring time or as part of the extended day. This would be required. There will be an SEI qualified teacher. That will allow us to provide the services for ELL students. Our goal is to provide SEI training to all the teachers.

- We also want to work with parents. We are thinking of ways to offer adult education, not in our first year. But it would help students.
- The Coordinator will be tracking student progress and overseeing SEI instruction for the whole faculty. We track for two years.
- We anticipate a significant number of students who will need special education services. We will have learning support specialists who will provide direct services to students in class or pull-out model as needed. We will have a learning center in the school where students can go to receive some or all of their services as needed. If a student requires a substantially separate class, they will go to that center. We do expect students who will need these supports. Right now we have 1 ½ staff for the first year. If we need additional staff we will hire them.

### **Enrollment and Recruitment**

#### **1. Where are you with your “Intent to Apply” forms?**

- We have about 70 pre-enrollment forms.

### **Capacity**

#### **1. What have you learned from the AMSA experience regarding what has worked and what hasn't?**

- The structured sequential curriculum works.
- There is substantial demand for high standards STEM middle and high school education.
- It's necessary to implement a strong school culture from day one. We will have explicit character and ethics development goals and instruction and have training for teachers in this area.
- Need a governance structure that insures the accountability of the board and minimize board politics.
- Have learned how to work with the board.
- We have planned explicitly to serve a subset of students who may have difficulty learning complex concepts.
- We have learned about teacher training and teacher hiring. Different people need to be mentored in different ways.

#### **2. Who in the founding group has the ability and/or expertise to participate in the finance committee?**

- Two of the people in attendance have financial experience.

### **Governance and Management**

#### **1. What is the rationale for this administrative structure in a school of 240 students?**

- We want the entire team to be in place because we anticipate the difficulty. It is a very complicated school. We want to get the growth and start-up right from day one.
- We want additional adults there who are not scheduled every minute of the day who can assist and support teachers.

#### **2. How will evaluations work, particularly for administrators?**

- There is an evaluation for administrators. Administrators will be evaluated by the director, peers, consultants, and the advisory board. Trying to do 360 degree evaluation.
- The board will evaluate the executive director.

**3. How will the “commitment to pay according to performance” function, for teachers, administrators, other staff?**

- That’s for teachers. We have an evaluation form for teachers in the application. We think this is very important. We will be doing a lot of fundraising to invest in teachers. Stipends, PD, courses, and assistants.

**4. Looking at the staffing chart on page 40:**

- a. How are you going to provide foreign language for all students in year one with .2 of a teacher, and subsequently .3, .6, and .8?**
- b. How are you going to have 2.7 teachers teaching all science classes including computer science, biology, physical sciences, physics, chemistry and earth science? How many classes is that per week? Preps? Are these part-time workers?**

- It is not easy. We would love to have one teacher, one subject, one grade. But that won’t happen until we double in size. First year we will have to have teachers teaching multiple subjects. They do have time in the schedule to do multiple preps. Out of the 36 periods they will teach 24. The first year is precious, with the enormous energy in the building.
- The foreign language teacher will be part-time or combined with other courses. We fully understand how difficult it will be.

**Budget**

**1. Please walk us through the budget.**

- a. What is the assumption about \$325,000 per year for State grants?**
- Start-up grants, and then there were separate grants.
- b. What are the club costs and program fees?**
- It’s about \$250.00 per student; we will attempt to offset those funds ourselves so no one is excluded based on the ability to pay.

**Other**

**1. Why do you think the school would be prepared to open in September?**

- We have curriculum prepared.
- We have administration standing by.
- We have a building, which is already renovated.
- We have half of our pre-enrollment done and don’t think we will have a problem to be fully enrolled. We have an outreach plan for the next month.