

FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW 2011-2012

Proposed School Name: Lowell Collegiate Charter School

Grades Served At Full Capacity: K-12

Number of Students At Full Capacity: 1200

Proposed School Location: Lowell

Proposed Opening Year: 2013-2014

Public Statement:

“The Lowell Collegiate Charter School will be a rigorous college-preparatory charter public school with plans to open fall 2013 serving 540 students in grades K-5. The school will add a grade level each year until it enrolls up to 1,200 students in grades K-12 when at full capacity. The school’s mission is to prepare graduates for success in college, equip them with the ability and desire for lifelong learning, and strengthen their civic, ethical, and moral values. The school will be managed by Minnesota-based SABIS Educational Systems, a private international education company founded in 1886 that is currently managing two successful Massachusetts charter schools. This college-prep school will implement the proven SABIS educational program in a safe, caring, and rigorous academic environment. This comprehensive educational system has an outstanding record of success in preparing students for college, not only in Massachusetts, but also in other states and countries, including schools in 15 countries enrolling 60,000 students, including in eleven charters in six states.”

Mission Statement:

“The mission of the Lowell Collegiate Charter School is to provide an academically rigorous and successful world-class college preparatory public educational program that enables all students, regardless of their background, to achieve their full potential, to be prepared for success in college, equipped with the ability and desire for lifelong learning, and develop strong civic, ethical, and moral values in a safe, caring, and rigorous environment built on a school ethos that emphasizes high behavioral and academic expectations.”

Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:

School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment
First Year	K-5	540
Second Year	K-6	636
Third Year	K-7	738
Fourth Year	K-8	840
Fifth Year	K-9	942

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

Primary Strengths

- The mission and vision define the purpose and values of the proposed school. Though components of the mission were underdeveloped in the application, the mission identifies four overarching themes at the proposed school. During the interview the applicant group and representatives of SABIS Educational Systems (SABIS), were able to describe how components of the mission would be realized in the structure and operations of the proposed school. (Section I.A.)
- The vision for the proposed school describes ways in which the proposed school will positively impact students and, to a more limited extent, the teachers. (Section II.B.)
- The vision serves as an organizing principle for the application. (Section II.B.)
- The application speaks directly about the targeted student populations in Lowell and the value of an additional educational option to address poor student performance on the MCAS and concerns about the high school graduation rate. (Section I.C.)
- The applicant group indicated in both the application and the interview that they selected SABIS as an educational management organization because of the ability of the program to ‘adapt’ to student needs through identifying ‘learning gaps’ quickly and providing many different student support systems. The proposed school is described as a college preparatory alternative for Lowell parents and students. (Section I.C.)
- This charter application received letters and/or written testimony in support during the public hearing and public comment process including, but not limited to material from Lowell City Councilor Edward Caulfield, and Lowell residents, workers, and business owners. See public comment. (Section I.C.)

Primary Weaknesses

- Portions of the mission statement "ability and desire for lifelong learning" or "achieve their full potential", are never clearly defined, cultivated, measured, or monitored, and are not reflected throughout the application. (Section I.A.)
- Throughout the application, limited information is provided about the SABIS program which prevents a compelling image of the school’s future from emerging. (Section I.B.)
- The Description of Communities to be Served section provides a synopsis of the demography of the city in terms of race/ethnicity, socio-economic status and student performance but it was unclear from the application and the interview what strategies the school would implement to become a community resource for all stakeholders. (Section I.B.)
- The Lowell Superintendent, Jean Franco, does not support granting a charter to this applicant group. (Section I.C.)
- This application received letters and/or written testimony in opposition during the public hearing and public comment process, including but not limited to material from Lowell residents, parents, and teachers. See public comment. (Section I.C.)

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction

Primary Strengths

- At first glance, it appears that the educational philosophy succinctly describes the core beliefs and values of SABIS, the education management organization selected by the founders to provide substantially all educational services under contract. However, the interview supported that the educational philosophy indeed describes the applicant group's core beliefs and values about education in alignment with the proposed school's mission and vision. (Section II.A.)
- The curriculum and instruction are consistent with the mission and educational philosophy of the proposed school and reflect the commitment made to implement the full educational and management model from SABIS. (Section II.B.)
- The application contained an outline of the curriculum, a sample scope and sequence, sample content and skill standards, and pacing charts which provided reviewers a clear understanding of the essential concepts of the SABIS curriculum and the various materials teachers will use to guide and plan daily instruction. (Section II.B.)
- It is clear that the development, refinement, and improvement of the curriculum will be performed by SABIS personnel in Minnesota as part of the management contract. (Section II.B)
- In the application and the interview, it was clear that the Academic Quality Controller (AQC) plays an essential role. As the instructional leader, the AQC works with SABIS and the proposed school's teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum and instruction based on the student data collected through the SABIS assessment system and to initiate changes when necessary. (Section II.B.)
- The application describes the primary

Primary Weaknesses

- The brevity of discussion within the application of the structures to be adopted from SABIS provides a limited understanding as to how it will be integrated into a comprehensive education program. During the interview, the applicant group and SABIS representatives provided additional information about certain practices, including the prefect system. (Section II.A.)
- The application provides little independent research to demonstrate that the SABIS approach may improve the academic performance of all students within the anticipated student population. While SABIS provides in its own publication, "Closing the Achievement Gap: The SABIS Story," data to support the academic results for African-American, Latino, and low income student populations, it provides no supporting data for students with disabilities and students identified as English language learners. (Section II.A. and II.B.)
- The application describes the resources, both in educational materials and corporate support, which SABIS will provide as part of the draft management contract. It is unclear how the materials and corporate support will operate within a clear system to support school leadership and staff in providing effective instruction. (Section II.B.)
- While during the interview, the applicant group and representatives from SABIS stated that the SABIS program addresses the needs of all students, the application did not explain how these instructional strategies are appropriate for all students at all levels other than to re-teach points by assigning students having difficulties to Intensive classes, resource rooms, and/or tutoring sessions. (Section II.B.)
- Though it is clear that the proposed school will provide professional

approach to teaching as direct instruction coupled with the use of peer teaching on class assignments through the prefect system. Research is provided to support the use of the chosen instructional practices, and the applicant group strongly believes that these strategies accelerate learning and character development. (Section II.B.)

development during the summer (two weeks) and school year (typically one day per term) as well as scheduled weekly grade level and content area meetings, the explanation of the type of formal professional development that will be available and how it will be responsive to the teachers' and students' needs is generalized and vague. (Section II.B.)

Assessment System, Performance, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

Primary Strengths

- The application and the applicant group describe a comprehensive set of SABIS assessments that will be used to monitor students and teachers in a systematic way, including diagnostic, standardized, and norm-referenced tests. The system includes the weekly Academic Monitoring System (AMS) that is used to assess student knowledge of every concept taught the previous week, periodic exams, end-of term exams, final exams, as well as norm referenced tests from outside of the SABIS system, such as Standardized Tests for Assessment in Reading and Math. (Section II.D.)
- The SABIS assessment system is clearly explained and the application describes how the data will be used. The proposed school has a computer-based, SABIS developed academic monitoring system that will be used for teachers, administrators, parents /guardians and the board to monitor student performance. The application explicitly states that SABIS assessments are directly linked to the SABIS curriculum with all materials developed by SABIS. (Section II.D.)

Primary Weaknesses

- Though it is clear that student promotion is based on the minimum mastery of 60% of the academic benchmarks, the subject areas used to determine promotion are indicated differently in various areas of the application. In addition to this inconsistency, a potential promotion policy of minimum mastery in only mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) may not fully reflect the vision of college preparedness. (Section II.C.)
- Though the application provided information regarding the broad non-academic goals for students, the systems to measure student progress towards these goals was not clearly explained. The ten criteria related to the SABIS code of conduct was found only as a footnote to the draft accountability plan. In the interview, while SABIS representatives provided additional details of the system, the founding group spoke in general terms about their interactions with students at the SABIS schools in Springfield and Holyoke. (Section II.D.)

School Characteristics

Primary Strengths

- The application clearly describes a school which provides additional learning time through a longer day, before and after school programming (potential fees associated), Saturday academies, and summer programming. The educational

Primary Weaknesses

- The application provides a limited description of how the Lower School (K-5) and Upper School (6-12) will have distinct practices as well as how they will connect and interact within the proposed school's culture. The information

programming also includes an emphasis on ELA and mathematics in alignment with the proposed school's mission. (Section II.E.)

- The application provides a general description of how the school will establish the school culture, including a brief description of the SABIS Student Life Program and the SABIS Student Life Organization™, which are the programs that deal with culture, classroom management, character education, and student empowerment and leadership. In the interview, the applicant group reiterated the emphasis on building confidence and leadership skills of students as well as eliminating gaps in learning. (Section II.E.)
- The application provided a clear philosophy regarding student behavior and discipline that was consistent with the proposed school's mission and educational philosophy. (Section II.E.)
- While in the application, plans to engage parents and families in the education of their children were underdeveloped, in the interview, the applicant group described specific strategies to support the building and maintaining of family-school partnerships. (Section II.E.)

provided in the application and the interview is generalized and does not provide a clear picture of the fully enrolled K-12 school in action. (Section II.E.)

- The application provided a brief description and explanation of the SABIS Student Life Organization™ which though clearly aligned with the proposed school's mission and educational philosophy does not communicate the necessary information regarding a plan to establish and maintain the envisioned culture. During the interview the applicant group and representatives of SABIS, provided additional information to better envision the systems that will be put in place. (Section II.E.)
- Though the discipline philosophy was clear, it was unclear how the philosophy would be understood and implemented in a planned systematic way for teachers, students, and parents. (Section II.E.)

Special Student Populations and Student Services

Primary Strengths

- The application provided general knowledge regarding program requirements for special education and English language development (ELD) program. In addition, during the interview, the applicant group and SABIS representatives described the use of accommodations and modifications to meet individual students' needs. (Section II.F.)

Primary Weaknesses

- Though in the application and during the interview, the applicant group states that the SABIS model, including curriculum and assessment, is adapted to provide access to students with disabilities and students learning English, it is still unclear how the model is responsive to the needs of special student populations and diverse learners. (Section II.F.)
- Though the student population of English language learners (ELLs) could be significant at the school (33% students with Limited English Proficiency in Lowell), the applicant group anticipates

employing only one licensed English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. Based on projected enrollment that could be a student-teacher ratio of 178:1 FTE teacher during the first year. (Section II.F.)

- The student-teacher ratios for special education proposed in the application are high (27:1 FTE teacher/1 aide) based on projected enrollment during the first year. (Section II.F.)
- While the application provided a general overview of the English language development (ELD) program and special education program, the narrative lacked details about the processes and procedures that the proposed school would use to identify, assess, and provide specialized instruction to each student in need of services. (Section II.F.)

Enrollment and Recruitment

Primary Strengths

- The applicant group plans to open the school in 2013-2014 with 540 students in grades K-5 after a planning year and provides a specific rationale for the growth strategy based on the enrollment plans of other SABIS managed schools. (Section III.A.)
- The application indicates that the applicant group is intending to allocate substantial resources to reach out to potential students. In addition the applicant group stated that they held an information session in Lowell after the final application was submitted. (Section III.A.)

Primary Weaknesses

- While the application included a petition supporting the establishment of a new charter school in Lowell with approximately 536 signatures, including a limited number who indicated an interest in enrollment for their children, it was not otherwise evident in the application, the interview, nor at the public hearing or in submitted public comment if potential enrollment will support the founding of a 1,200 student SABIS managed K-12 school. (Section III.A.)

Capacity and School Governance

Primary Strengths

- The proposed board of trustees has experience and qualifications that indicate the potential to found and sustain an excellent charter school, including ELL/ESL education, K-12 public education, public school leadership, early childhood education, higher education, human resources management, real estate

Primary Weaknesses

- The proposed board of trustees does not have a member with legal expertise which would benefit in their dealings with SABIS, in addition to the legal counsel hired to support the needs of the proposed school. (Section III.B.)
- While the applicant group indicates it will seek input from SABIS and school staff in

and facilities, and finance. Additionally, three proposed board members have experience on previous charter school board of trustees. (Section III.B.)

- In the interview, the applicant group described how they came to select SABIS to provide services to the proposed school based on the type of rigor and programming that aligned with their vision for the school. (Section III.D.)
- In the interview, the proposed board of trustees voiced a strong commitment to exercise board oversight in making key decisions regarding student outcomes, organizational viability, and faithfulness to the charter. (Section III.D.)
- In the interview, the applicant group stated the clear commitment to establish standards for SABIS' performance and to perform monthly evaluations to determine if they are meeting those standards. They plan to create an evaluation tool if chartered. That tool will be developed both independently and in collaboration with SABIS. (Section II.C)

determining policies, it does not indicate a clear process for decision making. (Section III.B.)

- While the draft contract requires refinement, review, and approval by the Department, the draft contract, as it is written, does not clearly define the performance-based relationship between the EMO and the proposed school's board of trustees. While the contract provides general information regarding targets for student performance, an annual academic progress report and quarterly budget reports provided by the EMO to the proposed board, there is no discussion of the formal evaluation of SABIS by the proposed board. In the interview, the proposed board indicated that it would review specific data and materials to monitor academic performance and fiscal management, such as MCAS results, annual report, accountability plan, and annual audit but did not indicate a formal organized process to hold the EMO accountable for the proposed school's academic performance, organizational viability and faithfulness to the charter. (Section III.C.)
- The draft contract did not clearly delineate the specific services that the proposed school would receive from SABIS for the management and licensing fees paid nor all of the potential services or materials not covered by the 14% fee. See additional comments in finance section below. (Section III.C.)
- In addition, there is limited discussion within the draft contract of the conditions and procedures for the contract's renewal and termination. Automatic renewal of the agreement is not an acceptable practice. It would be essential to have safeguards in place that empower the board of trustees of a charter school. (Section III.C.)
-

Management

Primary Strengths

- SABIS can enhance the capacity of the school by providing a collection of instructional and operational services to the school leadership and the board of trustees, including but not limited to staff recruitment and training, core academic and character education curriculum, integrated assessment system, staff professional development, access to and development of resources, in addition to start-up process management. (Section III.D.)
- In the interview, the applicant group indicated the intent to develop a strong relationship and active regular communication with the school director beyond the monthly reporting at the board's meetings. The board clearly communicated expectations for the school director that included developing strong parent engagement through effective communication and a welcoming environment. (Section III.D)
- In the interview, SABIS representatives described the professional support provided to members of the school's leadership team and academic staff to support the effective implementation of the SABIS educational program and the effective operation of the proposed charter school. The proposed school's staff and director report to and are evaluated by SABIS. The proposed board is also involved in the director's evaluation. (Section III.D)

Primary Weaknesses

- The general staffing chart and brief narrative staffing plan provided information that was inadequate to determine if staffing projections were aligned with the application and sufficient to meet students' needs. (Section III.D)
- While the interview provided some clarifying information about the management structure and staffing at the school, it also revealed some confusion on the part of the applicant group regarding who at the proposed school would be considered employees of SABIS. (Section III.D)
- As a school intending to contract with an EMO to provide substantially all of the educational and management services, limited information is provided about the structure and staffing at SABIS that will support school leadership and teachers. Questions remain about the role and authority of the school leader, the influence and responsibility of SABIS, and the potential challenges among school leadership, SABIS corporate staff, and school staff created by management both internally by school leadership and externally by SABIS. (Section III.D.)
- Questions remain about the proposed school's plan for making key school-level decisions on student achievement, fiscal planning, and/or operations as well as the board's oversight of decision-making by SABIS. (Section III.D.)

Facilities, Transportation, and Finances

Primary Strengths

- During the interview, the applicant group indicated that they have located a potential facility but that it will require extensive renovation and construction. The group indicated that they would pursue local financing first and foremost, specifically local area banks. (Section III.E)

Primary Weaknesses

- Though the proposed budget aligns with the overall application, the budget narrative and expenditure justifications lacked sufficient detail to explain and support the projected amounts in the budget. (Section III.F.)
- The various fees provided to the

- The application contains a well detailed narrative describing the proposed financial operations as well as fiscal controls and reporting policies. (Section III.F.)

educational management organization are not clearly described in the application, draft management contract, or budget. See comments in governance section. (Section III.F.)

- The applicant group has also indicated that it would consider the use of a line of credit from SABIS during the first operational year to cover salary costs if necessary and acknowledged there would be an interest rate for the credit provided by SABIS. (Section III.F.)