

**FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW 2011-2012**

**Proposed School Name:** Somerville Progressive Charter School

**Grades Served At Full Capacity:** K-8

**Number of Students At Full Capacity:** 425 (or all seats available)

**Proposed School Location:** Somerville

**Proposed Opening Year:** 2012-2013

**Public Statement:**

“The Somerville Progressive Charter School (SPCS) is a democratic, K-8 public school that inspires and enables children from diverse backgrounds to develop their full intellectual, social-emotional, and creative potential through in-depth, meaningful learning experiences that draw on their intrinsic curiosity and reflect their individual needs, interests, and learning strengths. The school offers a broad range of educational programming—including a special focus on science and languages—to serve an economically and culturally diverse community. The school is located in Somerville and will enroll up to 425 students.”

**Mission Statement:**

“The Somerville Progressive Charter School (SPCS) will be a democratic, K-8 public school that will inspire and enable children from diverse backgrounds to develop their full intellectual, social-emotional, and creative potential through in-depth, meaningful learning experiences that draw on their intrinsic curiosity and reflect their individual needs, interests, and learning strengths. The school will offer a broad range of educational programming—including a special focus on science and languages—to serve an economically and culturally diverse community.”

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

| School Year | Grade Levels | Total Student Enrollment |
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| First Year  | K-8          | 180                      |
| Second Year | K-8          | 180                      |
| Third Year  | K-8          | 240                      |
| Fourth Year | K-8          | 300                      |
| Fifth Year  | K-8          | 360                      |

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

**Primary Strengths**

- The mission statement provides a description of the purpose and values of the proposed school. The mission aspires for a democratic school with a commitment to a diverse population with individualized progressive educational

**Primary Weaknesses**

- The final application’s vision to create what it calls a Learning in Two Languages Program (LiTL), which is described as having “all of the benefits of a school-day, two-way, immersion, bilingual education program but will

programming and a special focus on science and languages. (Section I.A.)

- The applicant group demonstrated a passionate understanding and connection to the proposed mission and vision during the interview as well as a strong commitment to serve the Somerville community. (Section I.B.)
- The application speaks to the value of providing an effective, meaningful education to children who are not realizing their full potential. (Section I.A. and B.)
- The application received letters and/or written testimony in support, primarily materials were from Somerville parents and residents. See public comment. (Section I. C.)

allow greater flexibility in scheduling and staffing, provide more structured learning time overall, preserve in-school ELL support, and, because it is optional, it will not limit the student population that will be drawn to the school”, leaves reviewers with concerns about the implementation, accessibility, and viability. (Section I. B. and C.)

- The application provides a limited discussion (beyond demographics) of the specific needs and strengths of Somerville area students and very few details about how the educational program will serve those particular needs during the regular school day and the afterschool programming. (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 materials from Somerville Superintendent, Tony Pierantozzi, Mayor Joseph A. Curatone, Senator Pat Jehlen, the Somerville Board of Aldermen, the Somerville and Medford School Committees, Somerville parents, teachers, and administrators, and non-profit leaders. See public comment. (Section I. C.)

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

#### **Primary Strengths**

- The application cites research on various aspects of the multifaceted educational philosophy. (II.A.)
- The application briefly explains how the Director and Assistant Director will provide teachers with a Curriculum Master Plan; teachers will develop aspects of the curriculum during the summer planning session by using Understanding by Design; there will be biweekly mixed grade teacher group meetings with Assistant Director and teachers of both English language learners (ELL) and students receiving special education services to evaluate the effectiveness of

#### **Primary Weaknesses**

- The application explains the applicant group’s belief that “each child is a unique learner whose needs must be met (and whose strengths must be leveraged) through a variety of instructional strategies.” The application mentions high expectations, relevant curriculum, collaborative, thematic, and experiential learning in mixed groups, optional expanded learning time, student directed learning (personalized education plans, PEPs), a two-way immersion bilingual education, and family engagement. All these philosophies and beliefs are not fully developed nor articulated into a comprehensive educational program.

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| <p>the curriculum and instruction based on data for each student and make adjustments. (Section II.B.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The literacy and language development aspect of the mission seems to be reflected in the curriculum and instruction section of the application. (Section II.B.)</li> <li>• While it is not clear how all the aspects of professional development will work together, the application outlines how the school will determine the professional needs of staff, including teacher drafted Professional Growth Plans (PGPs) and self evaluations, teachers’ participation in support teams, and the Assistant Director formal evaluations twice a year. (Section II. B.)</li> </ul> | <p>(Section II.A.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The applicant group’s educational philosophy includes “expanded learning time and consistent targeted remediation for those who need it.” Neither of these programmatic aspects is clearly explained or reflected though the application. (Section II.A. and B.)</li> <li>• While certain pieces of the curricular components are described in the curriculum and instruction section within the application, it lacks a clear plan of the curricular components that will facilitate the ongoing development, implementation, improvement, and refinement of curriculum. (Section II.B.)</li> <li>• While the afterschool programming seems central to the school’s vision and educational philosophy, it is not reflected in the curriculum and instruction section of the application. It is not clear how the curriculum, instruction, PEP, and/or assessments will be linked between the school day educational programming and the fee for service afterschool programming. (Section II.B.)</li> <li>• The section about how the school will ensure that teachers are proficient in delivering the chosen instructional methods focuses on the teacher’s commitment to progressive education and enthusiasm for gaining experience teaching in learner-centered classrooms, rather than ensuring proficiency. During the interview, the applicant group acknowledged that their hope is to hire as many teachers as possible with the knowledge but to also provide as much professional development as possible during the summer and school year. (Section II.B.)</li> </ul> |
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**Assessment System, Performance, Promotion, and Graduation Standards**

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| <p><b><u>Primary Strengths</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The assessment system includes examples of assessments that are consistent with the proposed school’s mission, program, and high expectations of students, such as a</li> </ul> | <p><b><u>Primary Weaknesses</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The promotion standards are not clear. It is not clear how the school will determine exit standards for the schools’ grade groupings. It is not clear what students</li> </ul> |
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| <p>variety of literacy assessments, performance assessments, and self-assessment. (Section II.D.)</p> | <p>would need to know or what they would be able to do at the end of each grade. (Section II. C.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The assessment system proposes to implement multiple diagnostic tests, school-developed tests, student self-assessments, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Project presentations, and individual student portfolios. It is unclear how the assessment system, including the unit performance standards checklists (UPCL), will effectively monitor student progress across these varied assessments and to implement programming changes as a result of achievement data. (Section II.D.)</li> </ul> |
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**School Characteristics**

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| <p><b><u>Primary Strengths</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The application and applicant group describe aspirations for the school culture that includes valuing the unique contributions of each individual and the Somerville community’s broad cultural diversity. (Section II.E.)</li> <li>• The application speaks to the strategies it will use to promote family engagement and involve parents/guardians as partners through communication with families in home languages, summer home visits, PEP goal meetings, volunteer opportunities at the school, playing an integral role in governing and running the school, and community collaboration. (Section II.E.)</li> </ul> | <p><b><u>Primary Weaknesses</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While the application describes the aspirations of the school culture, it offers limited information about how the school will establish the school culture and the norms that it aspires to, such as the August Community Weekend and the daily All School Morning Meetings. (Section II.E.)</li> <li>• There is very little information about the high expectations and differentiated instruction that is mentioned in the educational philosophy. (Section II.E.)</li> <li>• There is very little information about the roles and training for mentors, advisors, family volunteers, and afterschool staff. (Section II.E.)</li> <li>• It is unclear what plans will be in place for the effective implementation, management, and evaluation of such varied programming within and outside of a school day. (Section II.E.)</li> </ul> |
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**Special Student Populations and Student Services**

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| <p><b><u>Primary Strengths</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The application provides a general overview of the processes and procedures that the proposed school will employ to</li> </ul> | <p><b><u>Primary Weaknesses</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Though the English as a second language (ESL) services described mirror the ESE recommendations, the proposed school</li> </ul> |
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identify, assess, and serve ELLs. (Section II.F.)

- In the application and the interview, the applicant group discussed an English Language Development (ELD) program that would emphasize language development through curriculum and content learning. (Section II.F.)

schedule did not clearly indicate sufficient time for ELD instruction to occur depending on students' proficiency levels. During the interview, the applicant group clarified that such instruction would occur during World Languages instruction, as indicated in the application, as well as during non-academic time, such as music, when necessary. (Section II.F.)

- The application proposes to offer after school programs, including Learning in Two Languages (LiTL) for those who need additional academic support services, it is unclear whether the after school program will supplant rather than supplement instruction during the school day. (Section II.F.)
- While the application provided a general overview of the 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 special education services. (Section II.F.)

### **Enrollment and Recruitment**

#### **Primary Strengths**

- The application provides recruitment and retention plans emphasizing outreach to limited English proficient students. (Section III.A.)

#### **Primary Weaknesses**

- The application and the applicant group never explain their justification for requesting all seats that are available in Somerville, as appose to a deliberate maximum enrollment plan. (Section III.A.)
- The application and applicant group offer a rationale to explain why they intend to open with 20 students per grade and a full grade span in the first year of operation. However, it does not seem to reflect an understanding of the challenges the proposed school would face opening in the fall of 2012. (Section III.A)
- Additionally, the proposed school does not intend to increase enrollment during the second year of operation to 'refine and tailor our educational practices and allow the school's culture to firmly take root.'

Though commendable, this may not support organizational viability considering the scope and complexity of programming that they wish to implement. (Section III.A.)

- Since the Somerville community is so polarized, it is not clear how the proposed school will maintain its support. See public comment. (Section III.A.)

### **Capacity and School Governance**

#### **Primary Strengths**

- The proposed founding board possesses a wide range of skills and experience including, but not limited to educational leadership, organizational development, law, community development, special education, and architecture. (Section III.B.)
- Many members of the applicant group and proposed board of trustees have tangible ties to Somerville. (Section III.B.)
- During the interview, Heidi Lyne, confirmed by the applicant group as the proposed school leader, discussed in detail her specific qualifications and experience. Ms. Lyne has extensive experience in both the progressive school model and the urban charter school model for elementary school aged children. (Section III.B. and III.C.)

#### **Primary Weaknesses**

- While the application describes aspects of the democratic governance structure, board elections, and establishing seats with different areas of expertise, it does not clearly describe recruitment, selection, and development plans for board members. (Section III.C.)
- It is not clear that the applicant group fully understands the roles and responsibilities of the board of trustees at a charter school. (Section III.C.)
- The reporting structure between the school administration, board of trustees, and advisory committees are not clear. (Section III.C.)

### **Management**

#### **Primary Strengths**

- The organizational chart is clear and the roles and responsibilities of the school's leader and other administrative staff are briefly described. (Section III.D.)

#### **Primary Weaknesses**

- The application acknowledges that compensation for teachers will remain fairly modest, and though it lists reasons why the school will attract and retain high-quality employees, it is unclear whether the proposed working conditions will attract and retain highly qualified staff who are expected to potentially work longer school days and a longer school year. (Section III.D.)

- The description of the evaluation system for faculty is inconsistent throughout the application. In one section, it states that the Assistant Director will evaluate faculty, in another section, it states that faculty will be evaluated by the Director. (Section III.D.)
- The application does not clearly explain the typical teaching program. It is not clear what the expectations are for work hours, classroom time, and/or other school-related responsibilities outside of the classroom. It is not clear how the 2 ½ to 3 hours of preparation time per day, is possible and/or how it will be utilized. (Section III.D.)
- Though the participatory governance structure reflects the mission and vision of the school, the application does not provide a clear plan for making key school-level decisions on student achievement, fiscal planning, and operations. (Section III.D.)

### **Facilities, Transportation, and Finances**

#### **Primary Strengths**

- The applicant group has identified a potential facility for the proposed school which would support the type of educational programming described in the application. (Section III.E)

#### **Primary Weaknesses**

- The application provides very limited information about the fiscal management, fiscal controls, and the financial policies and procedures of the proposed school. (Section III.F.)
- The budget narrative is limited providing little explanation of the projected amounts in the budget nor does it reflect the full extent of the proposed school's educational program, such as the after school educational programming. (Section III.F.)
- The school finances section does not demonstrate knowledge of the practical matters relevant to the operation of a charter school. During the interview, it was indicated by the group that they had used the Rhode Island International Charter School's budget for guidance. (Section III.F.)