

## **Somerville Progressive Charter School**

Questions as derived from panel review

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

#### **1. How have your experiences as residents of Somerville led you to want to start a this Commonwealth charter school in Somerville?**

- I am a parent of three kids – a twenty year Somerville resident, my husband has lived in Somerville for forty years and family parents put him in private school it was hard for him to keep up and move on. We stayed almost four years in the public system. My children all have different needs. The system does not meet the individual needs and strengths. In Somerville, me being an immigrant, immigrants and whites are separated and it reflects a separation - the different treatment. Expectations that are placed on their head are different made me very uncomfortable.
- My wife and I have two children – my son entered the school six years ago at the K level. We needed an afterschool – the extended day was not educational but babysitting. We were looking for afterschool that would address the areas where my son was lacking. My wife and I developed an after school educational offering. After three years (principal changed practically every year) one of the principals took over the program under the condition to make it a higher quality practice.

#### **2. What do you think are some of the challenges you may face?**

- Some of the great opportunity of a school in this system is also part of the challenge. Our demographics reflect the challenges in education right now. There are good intentions but to really make use of this aspect of the city as a strength rather than an excuse for why is it poor performing. There is a two way bilingual, there was a progressive program in the system so there is support for that. We have an interest and appreciation for that – failure in low income immigrant population – failed and failed. The challenge will be to engage those families. Our kind of belief of a democratic and progressive school requires the engagement of all families. It takes a lot of work to engage families, community, and teachers. Teachers have to do way more work to make the home visits, to really make it happen. We have started the work to sow the seeds in newspapers, etc. We're going to do an open day – We have made efforts to bring those families in. Fiscally, that will be a challenge there is less money than last year. We know the individualized approach takes people but also money.

#### **3. What skills and knowledge does the founding group possess to address these challenges?**

- We almost all have live and work in the city and have kids in the city. I've seen part of it work and seen part of it fail – we know how hard this will be. My work has been outreach and community engagement. Bruce has fiscal experience and a small business owner. We have a connection with someone who has worked inside the school system and work with

grant raising and super committed. This parent has taken her children out of the system and put them in PHA.

- Our proven providers have had the same experience with the community demographics.

**4. What are the needs and strengths of the Somerville community? How did you determine (identify) these needs and strengths? How are these needs and strengths reflected in the design of your proposed school?**

- Based on living in Somerville – it is not a secret in Somerville that we have a tiered educational system in which middle class students have success do quite well and are getting into prestigious colleges. The vast majority of the kids end up on a different track and this does not serve them very well. This is common knowledge in Somerville. We are committed to progressive education. We have a diverse community – you can't offer a one size fits all education. We think progressive education is the answer. This is a city where you have a child of a Harvard professor sitting next to a child whose family has just arrived from El Salvador. Looking at each child as an individual – you can't do one size fits all teacher proof curriculum. You must recognize the student – who they are and where they are – working with a system where they have the time to tailor a child's education to a much greater degree than our current system is set up to do.
- I was at the NCSS conference and heard Jeffrey Canada speak. He talked about how kids who live in poverty really need the same opportunities of those that live in affluence. It is a desire to create opportunities that allow kids - whether it be language or the arts – to have a variety of opportunities to enrich them.

**5. How is progressive education reflected in the operation of your school?**

- I am a family child care provider. I see things from the relationship with the child. The school will have a lot of adults in a very relationship-based program. Each child will be known - 20 kids with two staff members– mixed age groupings will be known for two years. People with native speakers will visit the house. Start those relationships very early. The school will have a lot of materials, experiential learning – whether through integrated arts, integrated STEM, etc. These may be kids who don't have a lot of materials at home but we will have those materials at the school.
- Personal education plan – we will invite the child to the table and recognize that the child is quite full not an empty slate. How will you recognize what the child has to develop that that is key.
- The emphasis on integrated learning. The six thematic units will be integrated with various disciplines and arts. There will be a lot of student choice, voice and independence to build critical thinking, problem solving skills, collaboration, and communication. All of those things will take place within those thematic units – those progressive underpinnings will go through the whole school all day but the thematic units will be useful for all kids. There will be opportunities for students that are coming in with dual

languages. That contextual thematic learning builds context for kids. The things that they are learning all interconnected. To be independent – to bring their own interests and passions to table.

- The best way that English is taught is to have content taught in context – to have things and activities that students can engage in before they are completely proficient in English - to be able to develop the concepts without yet having the language skills.
- I've been in both types of schools – it is possible to have a primarily progressive school and still meet the skill based needs of the students by using curriculum. We are using curriculums that have been proved. We have an absolute commitment to assure every child have the skills that student needs to pass MCAS. We believe that MCAS is a test that tests skills that children should have and also demands critical thinking and problem solving. We could not have a school without making certain that is the primary thing that students come out with those skills – it is the way in which we do it that will be different. If our way isn't working with certain students, we will address in support services.

**6. Your mission and vision is complex. What are the priorities for planning and implementation? Why are many of the components of the school optional?**

- I would say that our priorities on the vision are looking at students as individuals, figuring out what they need and finding creative solutions to get them what they need and being accountable to them, their families, the state that they are educated with the basic skills and the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that they need. I would say that is priority number one
- Priority number two is our deep commitment that the school reflects the diversity of the community. We are expending a lot of time to ensure this. The city of Somerville has scared away families that would have applied. We think that we will have a large proportion of low income students. It is important that it will be an integrated school that we have a balanced community so the community can bring resources to the school – cultural knowledge will come from immigrants, linguistic knowledge and we are finding ways to tap that; in the same token, middle class families will have connections, resources – furniture, books and films from Museum of Science. All things that are available to us and we have accessed resources for the school.
- First came to mind is the staff –the faculty – this goes back to the challenges of getting and keeping and training highly qualified teachers – a must priority. A faculty that understands the complexity of the student population. The staff has not only training in progressive education methods but is culturally proficient and competent.
- We have an opportunity to build a school culture from the ground up both in terms of the staff and leadership. We will use responsive classroom throughout the whole school. Having the opportunity to have that autonomy from the top, throughout the staff, throughout the volunteers makes a huge difference.

- To address the after school optional question – two other parts of the vision are the STEM and language education part of the school. Part of commitment with the language focus is to serve students that whose home language is not English – we have a proven provider that has experience with some of those language groups. Families have consistently requested foreign language instruction earlier within the school system which has not happened. STEM science oriented people are on the founding group. We recognize it is a good place to work with progressive education and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills – things that are may not be fully fleshed out in the public schools. The language and STEM piece will happen somewhat afterschool and somewhat during the school day. We wish to meet the needs of the student and the family rather than one size fits all. In terms of world language, it is an option during the day to not overwhelm students with special needs or English language learners. It allows parents to select immersion option if they want it and to conserve resources for those students who really need the longer day.
- If we could put the afterschool piece in the school day it would be awesome, but there is so much we want to achieve during the school day. If I as a parent cannot do the extra-curricular services like LEGO engineering program at Tufts University that rich parents otherwise would be providing – this school will provide it.

#### **7. How does the after-school program operate?**

- Our application had a heavier emphasis on the after school program because we have innovative ideas for that part of the day. Families will choose it who need quality afterschool care. They need quality after school care. We have the very long opening hours of 7:30 – 5:30 to accommodate working parents. To let their student do something educational and appropriate.
- It is a sliding scale fee so that everyone can do that is based on the free lunch application. We know that there are families that don't apply. In the culture of our school, we expect to know and understand those families. For kids that want to get additional things they will pay. There is the same sliding scale type of program in Somerville. We would be doing the same piece that the Somerville district is doing. We are hoping to use this as a resource for all students. We are making connections with families to know how they are doing. The other thing that may not be clear is that a lot of the teaching staff will be involved in the after school program.
- Teachers will have identified students that are struggling through the three tier approach – teachers will work with students to incorporate those strategies. Having people just come in who are not part of the regular day, who don't know the kids you lose time and are not as effective.
- Some teachers are staggered. The main classroom teachers are coming in at 8 am and working until 4 pm. They start the teaching in the after school program but it is picked up by staggered shift teachers or other teachers that are brought in, contract workers. The teachers will be there together and then the main teacher will leave.

- We have an after school program as an extension of our day at International Charter School where I am the director. I would say of the 8 main teachers, 6 classroom teachers stay for the afterschool program by choice. They are paid extra for the hours after school. The ones that are not classroom teachers, they are involved in all of the professional development that main teachers participate in. Part of the time is homework help – just hiring anyone doesn't work. Teachers that are not familiar with what we do during the day just does not work. We have tried a model that the teachers stay partly into the after school program. For the math help with Investigations you need the classroom teacher but for the outdoor activities it is the other staff member.
- A lot of meeting time with staff can be used for the director to meet with afterschool staff or for the teachers to be together. A lot of our model is based on collaboration and integration. They would meet during the day to plan – 30 minutes recess before afterschool programming and 2 or 3 hours during the school day for planning.
- At ICS, planning of the afterschool and for the child for the school day and after school – the coordinator is not a classroom teacher who coordinates the logistics of the teacher work after school. There will be communication folders about the students' individual issues – academic or non-academic. It is planning for the child's needs not necessarily the afterschool logistics which the coordinator does. I wouldn't say that the time that they spend is just about after school but student needs.

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

#### **1. How will the proposed school identify a student's needs, interests, and strengths?**

- Identification will come from the home visits, which will provide valuable information, and each child will be assessed in ELA and math before they come into the school and from the combination of that information, we will have groups of kids that will need specific things and we will put things into place and use the tier model system for immediately identifying tier two and three children.
- The home visits will provide information about the student language needs.
- I think that you learn so much from a home visit. I did home visits when I taught nursery school which is common – I think to understand what the child's background is and what is important to the student and their family is as important as the academic skill level determined from testing. Talking to parents is extremely useful.
- From a parent's perspective; when my first child went to K – luckily we went to a school that did home visits. It was the most wonderful thing. I was very insecure about the teacher and the classroom. I got my Master's here but didn't go to school here. It wasn't something that I could put my hands on. It is an important school tool – knowing that the teacher would know and understand me and would ask about my child was one of the most important things that could happen to link me to the school. It created a family school link and it is important.

- Suppose they don't want you in their home then we would invite them to the school.
- We have done home visits for the past 11 years and we have had a 95% participation in my experience doing these visits. It is part of the school culture there are things that you do in advance to let them know why you are coming into their home - the relationship building piece. What is it that this family has that we can bring into the school?
- For teachers is it a great opportunity - getting information about the student's environment – for teachers it is a great opportunity for our teachers to be in the community.
- It is important for special needs students – an example of a student that never spoke in school but her mother sent a video of the child speaking at home – at home in her own environment, she was talking and dancing. Sometimes it is very valuable.
- With immigrant families that have never been in school or their schools were very different, they actually are much more comfortable meeting you in that setting and then we've already established that connection. We have in the first two weeks, activities at the school and we have 95% participation because we have established that connection.

**2. Tell us more about PEP (Personalized Educational Plan)?**

- Personalized plan for kids that would involve academics and looking to see what they are interested in, what their needs are, who they are as human beings, what their goals are for themselves, what their families goals are for them, etc. That is where the personalization occurs.

**3. Please clarify non-academic goals and how they will be monitored. How will these goals be integrated into the school culture?**

- For example, I will bring my homework in 4-5 days a week or I will read three pages of my book today. It is personalized for what the family and student want for their child. A lot of schools try to do it but they do it poorly. It ends up being the teacher's goals rather than coming from the family and the child. The vision here is about having the goals come from the student and family. We return to a document that teachers refer to with every child – that they are using in their conversations with the child and the work that they are doing with the child that contains the child's voice.
- I think the personalization becomes part of the known culture of the school. It'll grow into its own effectiveness. At the beginning, it will be a challenge because it is so different than what is being done in other schools. We will be admitting students at a number of different grade levels, the younger students as they move up will know what they will do.
- I have a son who is in a charter school that does this. The very first conference that we had and I was ready to ask all of the questions but he did it. The faculty had spent time to

prepare the student. What had he had done that he felt good about that semester with just a few cues; he voluntarily said what he thought he could do better and wanted to work on. It was through the teacher's coaching. The conversations took place with the teacher and the student before the conference – the third time he did it better and he took on the onus of what he needed to work on – in that one year, his competence improved, he is a different student.

- My experience with kids who did not necessarily come from homes where this language was in place. The way progressive education works there were many opportunities to have reflective conversation through classroom discussion or individual meetings. One on one knowing between teachers and students – teachers were able to bring those kids to a much better place to communicate their academic and non-academic needs.
- I think that you start off with the assumption that they may have those skills - it is okay if they are not able to set a goal then that is the goal.
- In our largely immigrant Spanish speaking population, we have done this with role playing from kindergarten on for 11 years, You do need to provide a lot of professional development for teachers and role playing for teachers. Students that may not have the language skills, then it is an oral activity and written by teachers.
- They are all doing it but they are doing it at different levels– it is absolutely a challenge but I have seen it work.
- My son just brought his goals home and he needs adults to help him develop goals.
- I was hearing in your question, I think, the assumption that maybe most of the child's academic will be based on the PEP. The child is not going to decide everything – there are skills that they must learn at each grade level. The child will direct a piece of their learning but the there are standards that the children will meet.

**4. Please explain the proposed plan for the development of the interdisciplinary thematic units for the two-year cycled curriculum by teachers.**

- It is a lot – it is a lot that the teachers are going to need to know and there is not enough time. It will be a work in progress – we will do as much training as we can during the summer and the school year. We plan to hire as many teachers as we can with knowledge. We will do as much as we can with the curriculum mapping before the teachers are on board. Ideally the teachers will be involved in the CMP, and teachers must be involved in the development of the thematic units. Hopefully the thematic units will be built during the first year. We will build them using Understanding by Design. We may only get to the first unit by the beginning of the year and work on the units during the school year. I think it is very exciting work for teachers to do through UbD will ensure that we meet the standards. It will also bring activities and fun things into what they are doing – teachers will be involved in the unit development.

- We have put into the year the time that is not in the thematic units is regular classroom teaching time and time for the standards. Time for the teachers to meet the standards that were not met in the thematic unit. Math will be using Investigations throughout the school year – ELA and Social Studies will be intertwined as will Science in the thematic units.
- The model that we use during the day at ICS is slightly different than the model that will be used here. Students will be given ELD instruction – inclusion and pull out – with support from teachers that are trained. Both depend on the level.
- Teachers that have ELL students in their classroom will hopefully all be trained. Most teachers will have had training in sheltered instruction. They will also have ELL training – we will provide training but we hope to hire teachers that are trained. They will not be all trained at day one but we will provide training. Prospect Hill has offered category training during the last two summers and invited other districts. I am QMT - I could train teachers to administer the MELA-O assessments. I am not hired by the school yet but we would have someone on staff that would hopefully train teachers on that. Hopefully hire other teachers that are trained as teacher trainers – search them out if those teachers that are available and hire. It would be SEI qualified teachers able to shelter their instruction to scaffold the language for ELL students in the mainstream classroom as well as ESL teachers available to provide push in and pull out. Pull out for the explicit language instruction. Push in for the content and academic language learning. When during the school day would pull out occur – during the foreign language classroom period. We would have to see where it makes the most sense. If they need additional time then it would probably be during a non-academic time – during one of the music classes – we would find ways – they are entitled to by law and we are required by law to provide those services based on the students’ proficiency level.

### **Assessment, Promotion, and Graduation Standards**

#### **2. Please describe the policies and standards for promoting students.**

- Our thinking behind that was to set pretty rigorous standards. Student would be expected to 75% of the content and skills in the standards. That is a pretty high standard for our district. We are aware of the damage to the student by retaining and with the mixed grade classrooms there is more room for students to catch up – twice as much time. It would be like many things in our school depending on the circumstances – a child may need extra time in the grade but you could also damage a student’s confidence.
- Closely monitoring student progress and providing supports. I would hope a decision would be made over a period of time. Eventually summer support...
- We are not pro-retention. It has been shown not to work for children in their later years. We will explore every other option available – retaining and retention is our last resort.



- We don't expect families to be resistant to our support service. But the possibility of retention may be a way to motivate students to participate in after school and summer programming.
- There are also quarterly reports which are academic assessments on a 4 point scale.

**2. How will students who require additional academic support be identified and supported in order to meet academic standards?**

- During the school day, there are small instructional groups. At Lawrence Family Day, we observed the school and talked with them about what their strategies are to be successful with these student populations. They said that we identify when there is a problem that day and get them into small instructional groups to get them the instructional support that they need. They put the students in small groups with an adult, drilling those kids on that skill, and giving them the attention that they need. For a kid who that is not enough, the after school program, we like to think of it as an extended day, with extensive academic support. We talk about the Learning in Two Languages program but we will have a lot of native speakers who need that extra academic support after school. That will be provided using progressive education methods just as during the school day with the many of the same classroom teachers to address the problems before they become big problems. To get kids seeing that they are making progress and gaining confidence. Once we can afford it we will offer summer session for students that need that support. We will do what is necessary to make sure students get what they need.
- We will have a lot of meeting time for classroom teachers, special education teachers, and ELL teachers. Strong leadership from a director and assistant director who will meet very regularly. Teachers will meet when students are at lunch recess and during extra-curriculars (music) when they have other supervision. Those staff meetings should address student needs not just logistics of the day.

**3. Who teaches the Learning in Two Languages Program (LiTL)? How will the LiTL programming be connected to the classroom? How will this optional programming track student performance?**

- Some will be regular bilingual teachers who would also teach during the school day, we have had many interested people, who would start the first half hour or hour of the program. They will be supported by teachers coming in on the second shift or contract teachers to take up the end. Ideally, the programs will be immersion in the world languages. The entire program would be performed in Spanish, Portuguese, etc. Regular teachers who can deliver that curriculum just as at ICS that can implement the program in the language – another person who is qualified would pick up the program after the bilingual teacher.
- Our afterschool program at ICS is a different set-up but we have had a lot of success. We teach in Spanish, Portuguese, and English in our program. We have a lot of paraprofessionals who work in the school that are aware of the model and we provide

them with professional development and they have the language skills in the Spanish and Portuguese to support the program.

- Time is an issue as it is in all schools –co-planning and having opportunities to use data to drive instruction are important. There are times in the day that we have not completely mapped out but there are times during the day that we will be scheduling for team meetings and chunks of time during the day for the director and AD to meet and meet with teachers. We know the importance of having time for teachers to meet, time to discuss student data, time for professional development. It is one of the things that we have not finalized.

### **School Characteristics**

#### **1. What programming at your proposed school will be provided or supported by community agencies and/or organizations?**

- There has been a lot of focus on Tufts. We not only have not changed our relationship with Tufts but we are actually working with Tufts currently. Tufts' Center for Engineering and Education Outreach (CEEEO) received a grant from NASA and came to us about collaborating on science education desperate to spend the grant funds. We put together a proposal in June to design these five STEM workshops, inquiry –based, hands on afterschool workshops. We analyzed the STEM standards together with an individual from the Museum of Science who is on our advisory board that were giving kids the hardest time. We met with a group in Somerville called Arts and Crafts, who run progressive, innovative science workshops, and said we need you to design something that will target these standards and we want to be able to test the kids before and after to see that they learned the standards. We piloted these two or three afterschool projects at Prospect Hill – the kids love them and they are learning these standards in these after school workshops. We will continue to refine and we want to get the biggest bang for our buck in terms of teaching the curriculum. This is the first run. We will take the most popular and successful of these five workshops and we will offer it in Spanish at this event on Sunday afternoon to let the Latino community experience what it is like to attend a school like this. We'll also have programs for the younger kids that will demonstrate that as well. This is what you didn't hear about at the hearing. But this is already happening and we have a solid relationship with these people at CEEEO set up by Jamila who knows these people. An integrated school has the resources to bring for the kids who don't have the resources.
- Lesley clarified that their relationship which is dependent upon whether we get the charter. It would involve discounted teacher professional development and certification programming for our teachers. They have a big progressive education program at Lesley and they are very interested in putting student teachers in a progressive school mentored by a leader like Heidi.
- As I stated earlier, the Museum of Science is working with us donating materials and would provide discounted corporate passes for students.

- Our community partners are solid. Some of them have had to withdraw their names because of political reasons. Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS) is totally supportive of what we are doing. One of their missions is to promote the next generation learning Portuguese and becoming literate in Portuguese. They have committed to continue working with us in recruiting but they had to remove their name because the city of Somerville leases them buildings as below market rent. They felt pressure and they had to do it.
- One of the things about Tufts is that they are not one group that will make one decision and stick with it. We have friends at not only at the engineering department but at the school of education. Their interest is not unselfish. They have told us that it would be awesome to have a place where they could work on their projects. They tried to use grant monies in the city of Somerville to offer a summer program a few years ago that would be free for all Somerville residents at the Healey school. I would die for something like that – I pay \$500 a week for that programming. They had a problem with the building and the union whatever but they could not implement it for the custodian to open the building. My former Somerville neighbors, they found out a way to offer free French lessons at the Kennedy School last year for free for anyone who wanted it. The system turned then down because they worried about favoring one ethnic group over the other. It is very frustrating to work with a large bureaucracy – we are nimble to make decisions. I am fully confident and I have no doubts.
- One of our goals –most of us are Somerville residents and we are concerned about public education for all of Somerville. Some people claim that we absconding with the money and building a special school for special kids which is ridiculous because there is a lottery anyhow. Our goal is not just to build just an outstanding school for the kids that go there. Part of the idea behind charter schools – to take what we learn, what we can prove and take the methodologies and take what works and package them up to bring it to other schools.
- So there is a parent group, Progress Together for Somerville, which has formed that is not necessarily to just fight this charter application – that is not the main goal. The main goal is to improve public education in Somerville overall. A lot of the people are our friends and our children play together – we have the same goal to improve public education in Somerville. I have talked about our similarities and differences with Michael Chui on this issue. We really would like to work with them to see parents help improve the district as much as they can and we have met with the school board as well as to how we can work with them. We are really open to that. We are not just concentrated on this school.
- There is a lot a history – we have been corresponding and we have community connections that we can work on. What we have seen in the past month or two, it is a direct consequence of the city of Somerville's actions. They go to the group that they know will react first, the Brown middle class parents, and they say if this is approved we will have to close your school which creates an emotional reaction. It takes a while to

come down. I really believe that once we get that charter – we are here and you just have to deal with it. Once we get there we are on good terms.

- You are talking about the community – a lot of those people have been fed by fear and moderate misinformation. I understand how they have been delivered and received. You heard a lot of people at the hearing say they do not have a problem with charter schools – just this one. By becoming vaguely into existence, they suddenly love PHA. Watching what happened with PHA, how PHA developed a relationship with the superintendent and providing professional development – PHA has greased the rails for us to exist. When PHA came, there were not the community relationships among parents and schools. We, as a group, we are ventricles into many aspects of the community. Because the fight is here there is big push back but my experience after a quarter of a century in this city, we will be able to ameliorate.

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

#### **1. How will the proposed school identify, assess, and provide specialized instruction to students with limited English proficiency?**

- At home visits, it will be clear which families may have another language. The home language surveys that most districts are using do not give a lot of information. We must go beyond it and talk to the parents about the language that they use and their experiences with English. There is a big difference between parents who may graduate students who are here and studied English and went to an American university or parents from other countries where there did not finish 8<sup>th</sup> grade and are here maybe a short time. The home visits are essential to identify who might need services.
- Once it is established that there is a likelihood that the student may be in need of English language services, we would test them with one of the DESE approved instruments pre-LAS for 4, 5, 6 year olds, LAS links for older students or IPT. I am not necessarily satisfied with any of them. They do provide some basic data around the four domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). It is possible to misidentify students and it becomes clear within a very short period of time. It may be that a five year old child has very good oral language skills and may speak as clearly as a native speaker but may not have the depth or breadth of English language use in the home and as the class proceeds they may not have the background. Much more difficult for kids to catch up in the upper grades if a student has been misidentified in the initial identification. Teachers will be trained to identify when a student is encountering trouble and to identify whether it is a special education issue or the presence of a second language that will make it difficult for students.

#### **2. How will the proposed school identify, assess, and provide specialized instruction to each student in need of special education services?**

- Assuming that many of the students will come with IEPs but that is where the Response to Intervention piece comes in. If not identified, we will use the process for RTI, unless it

is very obviously identifiable as a special need. Students are assessed when they come into the school and they go into the regular classroom. It would be a tiered intervention and if they do not succeed then we will gather a team and see if they need to be assessed for special education. Parents are involved throughout the entire process. If the child is receiving a tiered intervention – the parents are involved in second and third tiers. We will have strong communication with parents. We will be in fairly constant communication with the parents - they will know what we know about the child. If a parent requests an evaluation then it would occur.

### **Enrollment and Recruitment**

#### **1. What are the advantages and challenges of opening the proposed school with the full range of grades?**

- 180 students is a number that we partly arrived at because of the economics to be able to support the fixed costs, the administrative cost, and real estate. Anything below that and you will run into problems. With 180 students with 20 students per classroom, you have to hire a certain number of teachers. We could have done the double strand in the lower grades. It would still be the same hiring scenario of highly qualified teachers but the challenge is the amount of curriculum. In a city where there is no bussing, immigrant families will not enter a lottery unless they can have all students attend the school. They will not enter the lottery because with their limited resources they can't shuttle children to a number of different schools.
- Because of the culture that we are setting up of mentorship, modeling of older students – we can't have that culture with only younger students. We need the older, more mature and sophisticated students to carry out the democratic model.
- One question might be why a parent would shift their child for just two or three years. But again there is a huge crisis, middle school is particularly rocky in Somerville – kids are moving. There are a bunch of schools that only go to 6th grade and then groups of kids get channeled into a limited number of schools that have space. Within our city students are moving for 6th – 8th grade, there is already that pattern. People are aware of it and people do it. There are many families interested in the higher grade levels.
- Our location in the Boston metro area that allows us to attract highly qualified staff. With all of the colleges, there is the potential for many qualified candidates. We have a pretty good pool of over 20 strong candidates. Other schools do not have that advantage of location yet still attract strong teachers because of the school's quality.
- Families want kids to go to one place. There is no bussing in Somerville so getting your kids to different schools impacts the flexibility of families with multiple children.
- Families are in the situation of not having flexibility. My job does not allow me to have flexible time during the day and many families are in that situation.

## **Capacity, Governance, and Management**

### **1. Please describe how the founding group came together to form this proposed school and why the group is united to establish the proposed school.**

- It came together piece by piece in that we were all interconnected and spiraled out.
- It was built out of frustration – we knew each other because we were trying to change the system. It grew by word of mouth. What is not being said is that half of the founding group is immigrants and there is a level of connection and it was very personal. We have a way to influence other immigrants.
- Another half of the group is former Healey Choice parents (17-18 individuals). When the school committee made that decision to dissolve the program, was the final stake in the coffin - once the Choice program ended we lost faith about changing from within.
- Many of us had been working with the system for many, many years. It is easy to get to know each other that way in Somerville when you are that actively involved in the schools as parents.
- Many of us had children who were not doing well and advocated for changes that we were not able to make for our children. We have gotten to know the special education and English language learner programs. Whether immigrant or not immigrant, a lot of us had kids that had struggled.
- My son was at the Healey for kindergarten and first grade. I don't remember the name of the committee that I was on but I went faithfully to these meetings and we'd meet and meet and meet and nothing really got done. There were many excuses as to why we couldn't get things done and I hung in as long as I could because it was my intent to help and change things. But it wasn't working. The atmosphere at the school with changes in leadership – I can't have my son in the school. My son was in the Somerville charter school when it first opened and it was the same type of thing– this too shall pass –it seems a little bit more venomous now but this is the same kind of fear.
- To add a piece of history here, I was one of the people that fought when PHA was being approved - one of the people against them. I was in the pride together group.

### **2. What is the fundraising capacity of your proposed board?**

- First of all, we will be very aggressive with all kinds of grants, all public, private, and federal. We have someone that we know that is an experienced grant writer who is excited to work with us. She has experience with grant writing.
- We were told by a member of the physics department at Tufts that there is so much money for STEM education and that when they have a community partner, we will have so much chance to tap into private foundation capacity.

- We are working on a pay as you go with the grant writer – she has things in place and ready to roll. We hope that as we are more successful and raise more money, she will evolve into something more permanent. She has worked with the Boston Foundation, private funding and afterschool programming. We will pursue afterschool grants that she has identified for us. The timing is the issue.
- In the past one year and a half, all of those here and others, we have worked like dogs to understand these things, write these things and bring people in. Besides grants, Somerville has parents that are committed – we have a lot of confidence in her, the grant writer, but this group is ready to be sure that the school is up and running.
- We have a lot of support that is not in the form of cash, it is about how we will marshal the community resources. We have a paid position – the programming director to go out there and get that low hanging fruit. How shocking it was to meet with people at higher education who are eager to give funding to public schools and it is difficult to deal with the bureaucracy. It is a tremendous resource that we are tapping into. We have a board member whose job it is to manage development and a paid staff member, development director, to target potential partners and perform fundraising.
- There are lots of little things – there is a program at Tufts where college students come to teach students to read. It is free help – we do not have to pay for it.

**3. For Heidi Lyne and Julie Nora: Please describe your roles and responsibilities at your respective schools. How is the proposed school similar to and different from Neighborhood House Charter School in Boston and the International Charter School in Pawtucket, Rhode Island?**

- Heidi Lyne: I am the head of the lower school at the Neighborhood House Charter School which has fairly similar income demographics but slightly different groups of children. NHCS is similar in that it is about the same size; it is less progressive than what we are looking at but the lower school has become more progressive under my leadership. I have brought in progressive values and practices. The teachers are very excited about them. The Somerville school will look even more progressive. In my time there I have learned how important it is to do both of those things. I have a mix of experience that I bring from the Mission Hill School, which is a very progressive school which I helped found, and my later experience with a less progressive school at the Lee Academy, a pilot school, and then Neighborhood House. What I can bring from NHCS is a dedication to make sure that every child is well educated in the academic sense of the word, the skill and content sense of the word, in the MCAS sense. What I can bring from Mission Hill is my deep understanding of progressive education – I have brought in as much of that as I can into NHCS while we maintain the scores that we need. I have learned a lot there. I am excited to put that into place.
- Julie Nora: I am the Director at the International Charter School, an independent charter school. My career has been with educating immigrant students and ESL students from

advocacy, to technical assistance, to being a teacher and now the school director. The similarities are multiple. The programming as well as the experience of the starting of a charter school is similar. I work to use the language and cultures of the children as the key ingredient in the education of all students and how that resonates with family relationships as well as the academic content and the instruction in terms of language. It is a key similarity, our philosophy, though the programming is slightly different. We have used the Math Investigations throughout the school's history. Our Social Studies curriculum we developed ourselves and based on Understanding by Design and we just presented it at the NCCS conference I was talking about earlier. A difference would be that this school has a much stronger STEM focus. I am looking forward to learning from them. Some of the tools of family engagement, and of student learning, we have individual learning plans, the home visits are similar. I started at the school during the third year by providing technical assistance to the school while I was at Brown University. The original director was hired the July before the school opened right after charter granting – there was a lack of continuity. I helped to built it up to a very high performing school – a nationally recognized school that serves English language learners. I know what it is like to build the structures and watching it develop and how to develop those structures and the trajectory of being a charter school; it is exciting to do something different. I have worked in traditional public schools so I have seen the frustrations that have resonated with this group. I know what it means to build it ourselves is not so simple - you don't just avoid the problems because you leave them. The experience that I have with board governance and board development and the many aspects of being a charter school.

## **Finances**

### **1. Please explain the steps you used to develop the proposed school's budget.**

- Bruce was the primary author of the budget. I started with the International Charter School's budget as a guideline and built it from the ground up. My experience is not in education. I have started a number of small businesses – I currently run a multi-million dollar business. I used the ICS' budget as a template and built it up from there.
- It was developed with a fair amount of discussion among the board. I used information from Massachusetts as well.
- I did use early 2012 projections and I know that they have been reduced. That presents additional challenges.

### **2. Under operating revenues, the budget indicates under line item 36 'other' \$162K for FY13 and FY14 as well as \$216K for FY15. What are these amounts referring to?**

- Afterschool programming fees that will be collected.