

# YouthBuild Academy Charter School (YBACS) Executive Summary

Lawrence Family Development and Education Fund, Inc. (LFDEF) proposes to open YouthBuild Academy Charter School (YBACS), a Commonwealth independent charter high school in Lawrence, Massachusetts. YBACS will specialize in the academic and social development of youth and young adult residents (ages 16-22) of Lawrence, Massachusetts who have previously dropped out of high school, and re-engage them in a rigorous course of study based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks grades 9-12 leading to a high school diploma. It will also cultivate leadership and personal development through community service for career readiness and post-secondary matriculation.

YouthBuild Academy Charter School will be located in and serve students from Lawrence, Massachusetts, a city founded in 1847 to build textile fortunes with immigrant labor. As one of Massachusetts' true "Gateway Cities," Lawrence has been home to more than five generations of immigrants who speak more than 60 languages, and today is home to almost 80,000 residents of whom the great majority is Hispanic who struggle against the barriers of poverty, English language fluency, unemployment and a failed school system currently in State receivership. The city remains vibrant, culturally-relevant and holds tremendous unrealized potential given its links to the global understandings that can make a difference in the sustainability of its resources— human and natural.

This new academic program expands the Lawrence Family Development and Education Fund Inc.'s Proven Provider Status for high expectations and culturally-relevant, student-centered experiences which foster academic achievement and self-advocacy. LFDEF was founded in 1992 to create a management and fiscal structure for the Lawrence Youth Commission, then a public board developing new initiatives for youth in Lawrence. Core to all of its programs is the mission and vision of the organization: "strengthening families and building community through education." For the past twenty years, LFDEF has acquired property, formed partnerships and demonstrated experiences to create educational opportunities which improve the knowledge and skills for its stakeholders and the community: children, young adults, parents and families. The YouthBuild Academy Charter School will build on this experience and expertise with a rigorous high school program for young people whose futures have been placed "at risk" because of life and educational conditions or needs not met.

Edweek.org data indicates the national average graduation rate is 71.7%. The City of Lawrence graduation rate for all students is 32.4%. This is almost 40% below the national rate. A review of data on the website of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education demonstrates the magnitude of student dropout and graduation rates in Lawrence. In the 2010-11 school year, 2.7% of Massachusetts' students in grades nine through twelve dropped out of school. A dropout percentage in Lawrence of 8.6%, relative to 2.7% in Massachusetts, is a concern for these students and for the City of Lawrence. The four-year cohort graduation rate (2011) increased for Massachusetts' public high schools (83.4% from 82.1%). In Lawrence, the 2011 four-year cohort graduation rate was only 52%, relative to the state at 82%.

The Turnaround Plan for the Lawrence Public Schools states: "The graduation rate was 31 percentage points below the state average. 24% of ninth graders failed to be promoted to 10th grade, more than three times the state average; 8.6% of LPS students drop out each year. The district's retention rate, the percentage of students repeating the grade in which they were enrolled the previous year, is 5.2%, in comparison with a state average of 2.1%. Low baseline of performance: Of 24 "Gateway City" districts identified by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Lawrence ranks 22nd in academic achievement on MCAS across all grades in both Math and English Language Arts (ELA). LPS is ranked in the bottom five districts in the state in Math and ELA MCAS proficiency as well as graduation rate. In 2011, less than 30% of tested students were proficient in Math MCAS and only 41% of students were proficient in ELA MCAS."

YBACS will recruit dropouts and provide academic preparation and support so that its students move successfully to post-secondary education, training or careers. By adding a pathway for a high school diploma, YBACS builds on the seventeen year academic and job-training success of YouthBuild-Lawrence, which has prepared more than 400 youth/young adults for the GED and provided counseling, career direction and

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construction skills in the building and renovation of homes for low income families. To provide opportunities to earn a high school diploma and explore career pathways, the YBACS expands the current GED program offering and construction skills training with a separate but complementary academic program. After student enrollment, to address students' mental and physical readiness for re-engagement in an academic program and community service, YBACS will use a 2-week Transformation Orientation program along with a standards-based academic curriculum.

While providing additional time needed for credit recovery, individualized instruction and accelerated coursework, a trimester schedule of classes, a 200-day per school year calendar and support services will address issues surrounding retention and the development of academic skills. Within small class settings, the curriculum, focused on Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks grades 9-12, will motivate and re-engage students. Attention to each student's goals and progress will allow them to demonstrate competencies that are learned. These goals, and each student's progress will be tracked using a 1) Personal Success Blueprint, 2) ePortfolio, and 3) Student Academic Achievement Plan. The school will implement a Response to Intervention (RTI) high school model that will assure adequate, effective classroom intervention strategies that are embedded into instruction. Student progress will also be monitored through cross-disciplinary teacher common planning sessions. This will assure that all students, including those with special education and English Language Learning (ELL) needs, receive the necessary and appropriate support in order to obtain academic proficiencies.

Collaboration with post-secondary institutions, employers and community partners will impact the education, welfare, safety and economics of the YBACS students and the community of Lawrence at large. Staffing will be experienced educators and student support staff who are knowledgeable in their respective fields of: academic standards, the challenges of previously disengaged students' re-entry into secondary education, instruction for successful attainment of the requirements for the high school diploma, and transitions for entry and retention in post-secondary and employment settings. The use of technology will extend opportunities for individualized instruction and facilitate assessment methods. Communication with support service professionals and family (relevant and sponsoring caring adults) will holistically extend the opportunities of the academic program and help to ensure that students successfully move forward on a path to careers and college.

A governance structure will include board members from LFDEF, education professionals and area experts in academic, skills and career clusters. The board will also include a student, selected to serve on the Student Policy Council, whose voice and experience will provide authentic points for program development. The founding group is purposely composed of individuals who possess as much educational experience as significant exposure to high school youth—including individuals who were classified as "high risk" while in high school. The founding group and those recommended for the founding board represent committed stakeholders which ensure the success of this school and the lives of the students it serves.

YBACS anticipates enrolling 60 students in the first year with an anticipated growth of 40 students annually for each of the next four years, reaching a maximum of 173 students by the spring of 2017. The YouthBuild Academy Charter School will offer more than a "second chance" at earning a high school diploma. For many students it will offer their first chance at a rigorous academic program designed to engage their potential and build their future.