Applicant: Greenfield Public Schools

Attendees:

Paul Basset – proposed Board of Trustees appointee

Christopher Joseph – proposed Board of Trustees appointee

John Lunt – Greenfield School Committee chairperson

Susan Hollins – Superintendent and member of applicant group

Doris Doyle – Greenfield School Committee chairperson innovation school subcommittee

Daryl Essensa – Greenfield School Committee vice chairperson

Mayor Bill Martin – Greenfield School Committee member

Wesley Blixt – Greenfield School Committee candidate (unopposed)

Liz Gillman – Greenfield school district business administrator and member of applicant group

Maryelen Calderwood – Greenfield School Committee member

Carl T – current virtual school principal

Ryan Clepper – head program administrator

Michael Phillips – proposed Board of Trustees appointee absent

Part I. HOW WILL THE SCHOOL DEMONSTRATE ACADEMIC SUCCESS?

Section I.A: Guiding Principles and Core Values

- **What are the core values of the school?**
  - The goal of the school is to provide an academic opportunity for students who have health issues, social-emotional challenges, and other reasons that cause them to have difficulty in a traditional brick and mortar school.
  - The applicant group estimates that 1-2% of the Commonwealth's students fall into the categories listed above. The proposed school will focus on providing an option for students who would otherwise not have one (*referenced proposal for full list of target students*).
  - The proposed school will also offer a standards-based public school option.
  - The applicant group is also interested in serving Department of Youth Services students.

- **What weaknesses has the applicant identified over their first few years of operation?**
  - Funding: State funding and payment procedures were a challenge (unknown costs discovered during the Virtual Innovation School process). Example: State rules for billing districts for tuition required setting up a system for statewide district billing.

- Policy Changes: The Department made changes to policies and rules, and the school did not know about them in advance. Example: The Board capped enrollment at 500 students for K-8 and made the 2% local student requirement, which were not part of the original Virtual Innovation School proposal.

- Funding: The school choice level funding ($5K per pupil) is not sufficient to provide a good virtual school option.

- Innovation: Starting a public virtual school where there is not a model (like charter and private schools) was challenging.

- Testing: Administering statewide MCAS was a challenge (the school was not able to leverage free locations, which ended up being an unplanned cost).

- Performance: The school was surprised with the students' MCAS performance. The current school is based on a growth-model (mastery focused). No matter where a student is academically upon entering the school, he or she has a personalized learning trajectory and works towards that trajectory throughout the school year.

- Staff: The school started with teachers who were not previously virtual school teachers.

- Communications: The school had no one to manage press/public information (due to budget constraints). Other school districts did not understand the real purpose of a Virtual Innovation School.

- **What specific strategies will you use to improve academic outcomes?**

  - The school will work to retrain staff with the same professional development that is offered in the Greenfield brick-and-mortar schools. The professional development will include successful MCAS teachers providing insight into how to be more effective in teaching, in order to improve test scores.

  - The school will provide more professional development for coaches (who are at-home guardians who help facilitate the learning process, as part of the school's model), including sharing recorded sessions.

  - The school will spend more time assessing teaching techniques used to see if they impact students' achievement. Most of the faculty is new to virtual teaching. The current mastery-based model does not have a lot of testing embedded in it, so the school will work to better incorporate that into instruction.

  - The vendor (K12 Inc.) is working to update its curriculum to align with MA Framework (it is not currently aligned for all subjects/grades). The applicant group anticipates that the recalibration will be done shortly but has not confirmed this.

  - The applicant group noted most students do not start at grade level.

Section I.B: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

- **What is the process and timeline to being compliant with the current MA Curriculum Frameworks?**

  (addressed in Section I.A above)

- **How will physical education requirements be met in the CMVS?**

  - The school will be more focused on ensuring that every student has a physical education program. The applicant group is working to staff a health and physical education position. The applicant group met with the local YMCA director and found one other virtual school nationwide that is leveraging a partnership with the YMCA. The applicant group hopes that YMCAs all over the Commonwealth will give students memberships (but every student may not be able to travel to a YMCA). School staff would work with the YMCA and learning coaches to report on the percent of students engaged in the program and type of physical activity. (The current Virtual Innovation School requires physical education, but it does not have a method for checking to see if all students are meeting the requirements. The school occasionally asks the at-home learning coach but does not check up to confirm the coach's report.)

  - As part of the on-boarding process, the school will set expectations with the student and learning coach to ensure expectations are clear.

  - A parent has also volunteered to make videos for physical education to help the school integrate physical education into the online curriculum.

- **What type of formative assessments are used, how frequently are they administrated?**

  (addressed in Section I.A above)

- **Describe how a teacher monitors student progress and intervenes. What will a parent/guardian see in terms of student progress?**

  - All teachers have access to all of their student's grades/classes to monitor where their students are or are not making progress.

  - Teachers can schedule whole class, small group, and/or individual instruction time based on the students' learning needs. Learning coaches also help identify areas where students need more support.

  - Both administrators and teachers can view what students are doing (including time-minute equivalents spent on each assignment). The at-home learning coaches validate that the work was done by the student by entering information into the learning management system regarding how long the task took and what the outcomes were.

- After 5 days, if a student has not been working on assignments, a teacher intervenes by reaching out directly to the student and their at-home learning coach (phone and/or email). At 10 days, the administration does a follow up (phone and/or email) requesting a meeting. After 15 days, the administration sends a formal letter saying that the student is no longer enrolled (if there is no response), and the resident district will be notified. (The school estimates that they attempt to contact the student and learning coach up to 10 times before identifying a student as truant.)

- **What information will be sent to a school if a student is only taking a few classes from the CMVS?**

  - A letter goes out to the superintendent of the sending school district once a student is accepted; identifying the specific course(s) the student is enrolled in.

  - When a student withdraws, there is a similar process.

  - Full-time and part-time students are communicated to districts via an October 1 communication.

  - Typically there is more communication with the sending school district where there are SPED students, which includes working with the sending district's SPED director.

  - Teachers and administrators in the brick-and-mortar school do not currently get much information about a student's progress in an online class when a student is taking just a few classes. (There was discussion on the feasibility of this kind of reporting going forward and how it could benefit the students' and brick-and-mortar teacher.)

- **What if a student decides to transfer back into the brick-and-mortar setting, what information is shared with the school?**

  - Currently, the virtual school does not send anything related to academics to the sending school district when the student withdrawals. (There was discussion on the feasibility of this going forward and how it could benefit the student.)

- **How much is the CMVS charging a district for a class (is that the same for all districts/classes)? How many students do you anticipate will be taking individual classes or part-time enrolled?**

  - Costs vary by course (based on material costs), with an estimate of between $300 to $350 per course.

- **ESE provided clarification to application: Part-time is still a student from a district, not a CMVS student.**

  - According to the state's current statute and regulations, a part-time student is still a student of the sending district. Only a full-time CMVS student will count as a CMVS student. Applicant identifies a full-time student as 5 courses plus physical education.

  - The applicant group suggested that the Department think through how part-time students are counted toward a CMVS and what this looks like in blended learning for students.

  - The applicant group comments that it is unfair for the CMVS to be responsible for pushing districts to allow the part-time option; since the part-time enrollment does not fall under school choice.

Section I.C: Student Services and Supports

- **Does the applicant plan to serve English language learners?**

  - Currently, the school conducts a home language survey with every student; the school does not currently have students receiving ELL services. Currently there are no ELL staff in the virtual school (not budgeted).

  - K12 Inc. (the content vendor) does not currently offer content in multiple languages, but it does offer access to some courses in other languages. The applicant group anticipates that the Board of Trustees and/or K12 Inc. may be able to subcontract services for ELLs if an ELL student enrolls.

- **How will introductory courses assess a student's ability to be a self-directed learner? What additional supports are provided if the student is not identified as a strong self-directed learner, in order to ensure that the student thrives in an online environment?**

  - The school typically gets the last report card for incoming students (this occasionally provides some insights into their self-directed learning ability). As part of the on-boarding, the school does a basic screening for risk categories, mostly by interviewing the parent and screening school materials.

  - Every student receives an introduction to online learning, including what steps are needed to be an effective self-directed learner. Students must complete this introduction before they can start the coursework. The introduction includes training for the at-home learning coach on how to ensure that the student will be a good self directed learner.

  - Going forward, the applicant group's goal is to do this introduction in person with the student, learning coach, teacher, and school administrator in select locations across the state (per the proposed increase in per-student funding).

  - In today's model, the at-home learning coach or teacher typically identifies students who are not good self-directed learners.

  - Interventions, as stated in the proposal, include assistance from a guidance counselor, social work services, and Title I supports.

  - The learning growth model also has benchmarks that each student is trying to reach throughout the year (indicating percents to be mastered by specific dates) which also helps identify students who are struggling.

- **Describe the proposed process for serving students with an IEP in more detail (including how the funding will flow).**

  - The applicant group proposes to continue having the CMVS SPED director work with the SPED director in a student's sending district. The group does not want the virtual school to second-guess the home district's IEP teams, but rather, work with the IEP team from the sending district to ensure that the student is receiving the services in their IEP.

  - The applicant group proposes that the sending district identify students who may not be successful as virtual students.

- The existing Virtual Innovation School has typically let the sending district offer IEP services and receive funds for SPED students. However, the CMVS will find a partner for a student if the sending district does not wish to fulfill the student's IEP. The goal of the applicant group is to continue with the current model and focus on what is best for each student.

- **How will the CMVS support the social-emotional needs of younger students?**

  - The applicant group wants to focus on allowing students and families in the school to make connections.

  - The applicant group will plan events every month in every region (some of which will be face to face). Example: 170 people traveled to the Worcester zoo recently.

  - Parents are asked at time of admission if they would like their name shared with other parents.

  - The school also offers clubs to students, spelling bees, and so on. The current proposal includes adding staff to help in this space.

- **Have all of the tools and materials been verified as accessible by a trusted third party?**

  - The applicant group is unsure. They will have to get back to the Department on this question.

- **Describe the ways the CMVS prepares its graduating students for post-secondary success.**

  - The current proposal includes adding a guidance counselor.

  - The applicant group plans to adhere to MassCore in high school. The proposed curriculum also includes a few courses targeted to help prepare students for postsecondary.

Part II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY: HOW WILL THE SCHOOL DEMONSTRATE ITS CAPACITY TO DELIVER PROPOSED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES?

Section II.A: Governance

- **How was the Board of Trustees selected?**

  - The Greenfield School Committee noted a story that was put in the local newspaper stating that the district was taking applications. All parents in the school were also notified of an opportunity to be a Board of Trustees member (the group wanted to ensure that at least one member was a parent of a student in the virtual school).

  - The Greenfield School Committee's Virtual Innovation School subcommittee also reached out to some potential candidates directly.

  - Approximately 15 applications were received.

  - The Greenfield School Committee's Virtual Innovation School subcommittee was put in charge of identifying candidates, but they did ask all committee members if they had recommended board of trustee nominations. The Virtual Innovation School subcommittee narrowed the applicant pool down to nine.

- Of the nine finalists, four dropped out, so there are five candidates.

- Members of the Board of Trustees will receive $200 per meeting, not to exceed $2,400 a year.

- Some candidates were selected based on their current role or breadth of knowledge, for example in fields such as finance and medical.

- An official trustee job description was not developed (the position did not require knowledge of how children learn online). All 15 original applicants were told the position would be similar to that of a school committee position, although it is not an elected position.

- **What do you think are the primary challenges the Board and school may face?**

  - The new Board of Trustees will have a very short learning curve, with the Board of Education's decision in June and the need to open the new school in July. The Board of Trustees will rely on the Greenfield School District to help with launching the school.

  - One challenge will be providing the public with enough information on the on pros and cons of the virtual school option for their children.

  - Board of Trustees members noted that some individuals are opposed to virtual schools in general, but not this school specifically. This puts an additional burden on clear communications and could have impacts to MAVA students that read about it).

  - Another challenge will be public/private partnerships and how the Board of Trustees will effectively manage and maintain relationships with vendors. The number of relationships with entities: K12 Inc., Greenfield School District, YMCA, and so on.

- **Has the Board of Trustees selected a school leader, and how was/will the leaders be selected, evaluated, etc.?**

  - The new Board of Trustees has not yet selected a school leader. Superintendent Hollins will help in the transition. The existing Greenfield School Committee did not make a candidate recommendation to the Board of Trustees.

  - There has been no discussion to date on how the school leader would be evaluated (but the group has looked at some models).

- **Please provide examples of Board versus administrative decision making.**

  - The Greenfield School Committee recommended that the Board of Trustees adopt the current Greenfield governance and Virtual Innovation School policies due to the short transition time, and then amend them over time as they learn more. The Board of Trustees is newly appointed and still needs time to assess its priorities.

  - The goal is to not to overstep, but to let the school leader make decisions and support the school leader or provide direction when needed.

Section II.B: Partnerships

- **Can you provide a draft contract between Greenfield and the proposed CMVS?**

    • The Board of Trustees does not currently have a draft contract with the Greenfield School District for operational services. The applicant group is still working to train the newly appointed Board of Trustees, and these transition activities are resulting in a lot of productive discussions. Up front, the contract will focus on providing key services and will work in changes as needed.

    • The applicant group noted that the revenues will go to the new entity, not to the Greenfield district.

    • The group anticipates that the transition period will be months, not years. The Greenfield School Committee plans to help with the transition in the short term.

    • An individual from applicant group voiced concern that the Greenfield staff will be spending too much time supporting the new school and not Greenfield district and that without a contract, this remains unclear.

    • Referenced page 19 of proposal.

- **How was the proposed partnership with K12 vetted (criteria, etc.)? How were other partnerships vetted (criteria, etc.)?**

    • For the existing Virtual Innovation School, the City of Greenfield's financial officer researched curriculum providers/virtual school service providers. After doing research and having some preliminary discussions with providers, an RFP was launched and K12 was selected. No other groups responded to the RFP.

    • One member noted that preliminary contract negotiations/discussions with K12 were started before the RFP was launched. The state got involved to push this RFP.

    • The group was unclear regarding how partnerships would be vetted going forward.

- **How long is the current contract with K12?**

    • The contract is currently being negotiated for the new CMVS.

Section II.C: Staff

- **Elaborate on your recruiting and training strategy.**

    • The new Board of Trustees has not developed a new recruiting and training strategy and plans to leverage Greenfield's strategy in the interim. See Section II.A of the proposal.

Section II.D: School Finances

- **Clarify understanding that if the Board of Education does not approve a higher per student allocation, the CMVS will not offer the services highlighted on page 37.**

  - The applicant group communicated they would not move forward with a school if only the student choice amount of $5,000 per pupil was offered. The applicant also wanted the Department to provide more guidance on requirements to provide services to SPED students, including whether their current model is acceptable.

  - The applicant group also noted that the budget does not include an allowance for school lunches. The applicant group would like more guidance from the Department on providing school lunches in a virtual school.

  - The applicant group noted that the current school is running at a deficit. When asked to prioritize the recommended increases, the group indicated that all of the recommended increases are of high priority.

  - With the current $5,000 per pupil, the Virtual Innovation School is taking a loss of approximately $700 per student. The new model requires adding more staff due to state/statutory requirements: ELL, nurse, psychologist services, tutoring, reading teacher service, other student services etc. (not including SPED), data services, and so on, so it will cost more to run a school with this CMVS model.

  - The proposed new school will no longer be a Greenfield school. Services that the Greenfield district currently provides for free to the Virtual Innovation School will now cost money in the new CMVS model.

- **Who is funding start-up costs?**

  - This was unclear. The applicant group asked if the state could help. The group has had some preliminary discussion with the vendor on how start-up costs might work.

- **What extra-curricular activities does the current Virtual Innovation School offer?**

  - See Section I.C above

- **The budget did not include funding for student supplies. Is that in another area of the proposed budget?**

  - The student supply costs are rolled into the vendor line item (K12 cost). The school sends a lot of supplies (including textbooks) to students. There are many activities that are not done on the computer.

- **What if your estimation is inaccurate and revenue is significantly less? What adjustments will you make?**

  • Assuming a 10% reduction in number of estimated students, most costs/supports would not shift with the adjusted enrollments. As a result, the teaching staff (FTEs) would need to change. The previous contract required K12 to absorb any loss if enrollment targets were not met.

  • There is an existing challenge with 500 students and a $700 per pupil loss.

Part III. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY: HOW WILL THE SCHOOL MANAGE OPERATIONS?

Section III.A: School Characteristics

- **How does the school communicate with guardians who are not English proficient?**

  • The school will follow the regulations and include an ELL person on the staff. The school will provide services as required but have not come across the need for ELL services yet. The school will have to use contingency funding from budget to provide these services.

- **Clarify understanding; the applicant group is not seeking a seat time waiver.**

  • The applicant group plans to run the school similar to the current Virtual Innovation School; applicant is not seeking a seat time waiver and will meet statutory student learning time requirements.

Section III.B. School Operations

- **Clarify understanding: CMVS does not plan to serve lunch to students outside of the Greenfield school districts.**

  • The applicant group confirmed that this is not in the current budget. The applicant group would like to receive additional guidance from the Department.

- **Does the school have sufficient time to ramp the high school if the certificate is granted at the June board meeting?**

  • Yes, the applicant group feels they can achieve the projected enrollment. The school is implanting a "smart growth" model, offering open new high school enrollments to only 9th and 10th grade students in the first year, with 11th and 12th grade enrollments as an exception

- **Will the school give enrollment preferences?**

  • The applicant group anticipates that student enrollment limits will be driven by the 2% local student requirement. The school will have teachers certified at each grade level and will ensure that it maintains the target student-to- teacher ratio.

- The school will follow the charter school model for a lottery if one is needed. There will be one-month open enrollment period and move students to a waitlist after that, in order of enrollment/preference.

- The applicant group would like the Department to provide more guidance on how the preferences in the statute can be incorporated into a lottery

PART IV. HOW WILL THE SCHOOL DEMONSTRATE IT IS FAITHFUL TO ITS MISSION AND THE TERMS OF ITS CERTIFICATE?

Section IV.A Process

(no questions)

Section IV.B. Accountability Plan Objectives

- **Clarify understanding, what are the proposed SMART goals. Who will be working on the Accountability Plan?**

  - The applicant group mentioned they have recently been learning more about SMART goals through the education evaluation training via a consultant, and the school is open to setting SMART goals.