

PROPOSED SPRINGFIELD PREPARATORY CHARTER SCHOOL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This was prepared by the Springfield Preparatory Charter School applicant group.

Mission. Springfield Preparatory Charter School is an inclusive K-8 public charter school that prepares all students for success in high school, college, and life through a focus on rigorous academics and character development.

Vision. At Springfield Preparatory Charter School (“Springfield Prep”) we believe that all students have the right to an excellent education – regardless of race, socioeconomic status, home language, special education need, or zip code – and that fulfilling this right is our nation’s most pressing challenge. To ensure that our students are prepared for high school, college, and life, we will help our students to: (1) master academic fundamentals, (2) think analytically, and (2) exhibit good character. We will do this by developing rigorous and highly engaging curricula, setting high expectations for staff and students, and explicitly teaching the character skills that will help our students become good people, as well as good students. In founding Springfield Prep, we aim to join the growing ranks of gap-closing public schools and offer an education of the highest quality for the most underserved students of Springfield, Massachusetts.

Educational Program. Our philosophy consists of ten principles that are based on how students learn, particularly those who come from low income backgrounds and have disabilities and language barriers.

- 1. Outstanding teaching.** Great teachers make an enormous difference in the success of their students, both in class and later in life. At Springfield Prep, we will invest the necessary resources to ensure our teaching is rigorous, highly engaging, data driven, and individualized.
- 2. High expectations.** We will develop a culture with deeply ingrained college-going expectations and set high academic and behavioral expectations so that our students have the skills and drive to make college a reality.
- 3. Structured and joyful school culture.** With consistent routines and clear systems, we will create an environment where students are physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe. Our classrooms will be warm, bright, and welcoming; there will be a consistently positive tone across the school; and there will be frequent opportunities to celebrate student growth.
- 4. Inclusive model and individualized supports.** While we will hold all of our students to the same ambitious expectations, we will also provide individualized services to support all of our students’ unique needs. Our two-teacher model in K-4, “focus” blocks in grades 5-8, and inclusion model of special education will provide diverse learners and English language learners with the supports that will help them to succeed.
- 5. Rigorous and engaging academics.** Motivating students through engaging curriculum and instruction is one of the most effective ways to increase academic achievement. We will use carefully planned curriculum that both challenges our students and captures their attention and imagination.
- 6. Focus on character.** Success requires more than just academic achievement; it requires students to be good people. We will devote time to explicitly teaching our PRIDE values – Preparation, Respect, Integrity, Determination, and Enthusiasm – so that our students are confident leaders who can advocate for themselves as they progress through high school, college, and their careers.

7. **Emphasis on literacy.** We believe that reading is *the* skill. To ensure mastery of literacy skills, our program will provide a balance of explicit, systematic instruction in foundational skills along with immersion in rich and varied fiction and nonfiction texts.
8. **More instructional time.** Additional time in class will allow us to provide our students, many of whom will enter below grade level, with foundational academic skills, advanced work, and classes like music, physical education, and technology, so that our students are well-rounded learners and citizens.
9. **Thoughtful use of data.** We will use data from interim assessments so that we can quickly and flexibly respond to the needs of both struggling and advanced learners.
10. **Partnership with families and the community.** We will make school a welcoming place for families, provide frequent opportunities for face-to-face interactions with parents, and develop strong systems of communication so that parents are always aware of how their child is doing in school. We will actively engage with our community partners to provide the strongest education possible for our students.

Need. Although Massachusetts ranks first in the nation in reading and math according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 40% of Springfield students overall perform at grade level in ELA and only 29% do so in math. Springfield Public School (SPS) students lag far behind the state average on critical benchmarks like third grade reading proficiency and high school graduation rates (40% of SPS third graders are proficient in reading, compared to 61% statewide; the graduation rate in Springfield is 52%, versus 85% across the state). Springfield has the second highest rate of low income students in Massachusetts (88%) and the third highest rate of high needs students (89%). The South End neighborhood in particular faces numerous challenges: a median household income of \$14,244; extraordinarily low rates of educational attainment (32% of residents have high school diplomas and 7% have college degrees); and an unemployment rate that is more than twice the state average (19%). Ninety-six percent of South End students are classified as low income, 26% are identified as ELL, and 18% have IEPs. The academic results of South End students who enter the city's high schools indicate severe academic underperformance: nearly 50% of ninth graders fail Algebra 1; nearly 40% fail English; nearly 45% fail Science; and nearly 25% fail Social Studies. Despite the obvious need to provide improved educational opportunities to this community, the South End does not have an elementary school, which leaves 4,386 residents, 417 of whom are in grades K-5, without an easily accessible school.

Meeting the Need. In our outreach to parents, we have heard three primary concerns about the state of education in Springfield, and the South End in particular: (1) long travel times to school, which raises safety and accessibility issues, (2) lack of tutoring or extra support services, especially for those with special education and/or language needs, and (3) lack of order in local schools, which are sometimes unsafe as a result. Our model addresses these concerns head on. We are committed to serving families who live in the South End, and who currently lack high quality, and easily accessible, public educational options; our extended day and year coupled with a two-teacher model in K-4 will allow us to provide students, especially those with disabilities or language barriers, with the individualized attention they need; and our structured school model will provide routine and order so that students feel safe and supported. As a Commonwealth charter school, we will be sufficiently autonomous to implement these organizational and instructional practices efficiently and effectively to prepare all of our students for high school, college, and their careers.

Support. Our founding group has assessed parental support through targeted community outreach, including over ten information sessions and grassroots canvassing events. Our group has spoken with large numbers of parents, heard their excitement about Springfield Prep, and collected over 400 signatures of support. We have also met with over 100 community stakeholders – business, nonprofit, religious, philanthropic, and education leaders – many of whom have pledged their support for our work.

Capacity. The founding group of Springfield Prep is a high capacity team of professionals with diverse skills and experience in K-12 education, law, real estate, finance, accounting, management, and fundraising. We are supported by an Advisory Council of charter school leaders from across the state, as well as the national school charter support organization Building Excellent Schools (BES). Lead Founder and proposed Head of School Bill Spirer is an experienced educator and attorney who successfully completed the BES Fellowship in urban charter school development, which connects Mr. Spirer and the founding group to a network of high performing charter school leaders in Massachusetts and across the country. Mr. Spirer has worked as a teacher, teacher coach, Department Chair, and Grade Team Leader, and is currently Dean of Students at a higher performing K-8 charter school. Through extensive community outreach, targeted professional development, intensive school study, and a strategic school design process, the founding group has laid the groundwork to launch an effective public charter school.