

FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW 2013-2014

Proposed School Name:	Springfield Preparatory Charter School
Grades Served At Full Capacity:	K-8
Number of Students At Full Capacity:	486
Proposed School Location:	Springfield
Proposed Opening Year:	FY2016

Public Statement:

“Springfield Preparatory Charter School (“Springfield Prep”) 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. Springfield Prep will open with 54 kindergarteners and 54 first graders and grow one grade per year to serve 486 K-8 students when fully enrolled.”

Mission Statement:

“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.”

Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:

School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment
First Year	K, 1	108
Second Year	K, 1, 2	162
Third Year	K, 1, 2, 3	216
Fourth Year	K, 1, 2, 3, 4	270
Fifth Year	K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5	324

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

Primary Strengths

- The application communicated a strong mission and vision to create a highly structured K-8 school built on a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum, with an emphasis on literacy, located in the South End community of Springfield. (Section I.B.)
- The application discusses the reason for the selection of the community and provided a specific rationale for how this proposed school will enhance or expand the educational options for students and families in Springfield, specifically residents of the South End community. During the interview, the applicant group clearly articulated their commitment to

Primary Weaknesses

- None identified.

the selected neighborhood. (Section I.C.)

- In the application and during the interview, the applicant group outlined their on-going efforts to recruit students from the South End community, including canvassing housing developments, marketing through community agencies and organizations, and targeted campaigns using bilingual content. (Section I.C.)
- During the public hearing in Springfield, members of the community, as well as students and families of an existing charter school in Springfield spoke in support of increasing the number of high quality charter schools in Springfield. See public comment. (Section I.C.)

Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction

Primary Strengths

- The educational philosophy describes the applicant group's core beliefs and values, which include outstanding teaching within an inclusion model with individualized supports; a focus on character education, literacy instruction, and additional instructional time; systematized use of student data to inform instruction; and community and family partnerships. The philosophy builds on the school's mission and vision. (Section II.A.)
- The proposed curriculum and instruction align with the mission, vision, and educational philosophy of the proposed school. The application describes the use of engaging and rigorous curriculum, instructional methods that support diverse learning styles, and a proposed coaching model for teacher growth partnered with extensive professional development opportunities. Professional development is clearly described with three focus areas: classroom management, and school culture; curriculum, and instruction; and data, and assessment. The professional development schedule includes a three

Primary Weaknesses

- None identified.

week summer institute, weekly Friday afternoons, and eight full days during the school year. (Section III.D.)

- The application describes a clear plan and curricular components that will facilitate the on-going development, improvement, and refinement of curriculum, as well as the processes and procedures used to evaluate the successful implementation and, effectiveness of the proposed curriculum. (Section II.B.)
- Within the application and during the interview, the applicant group acknowledged the challenges of addressing the potential gaps in background knowledge of incoming students, and serving the needs of a variety of diverse learners. The proposed school intends to address these challenges, and support student achievement through implementation of a two-teacher classroom model in grades K-4, a Response to Intervention (RTI) model, targeted literacy development strategies, academic support blocks, and a school culture and climate that is conducive to accelerated learning. (Section II.B. and II.E.)
- The proposed school plans to implement a character education program in alignment with the proposed mission. The application provides a general plan for implementation, including draft character standards to measure student performance, based on the practices of other high quality charter schools, and structures to support a culture of recognition. (Section II.D.)

Assessment System, Performance, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

Primary Strengths

- Within the application and during the interview, the applicant group articulated a commitment to maintain rigorous standards to support student success but also acknowledged the challenges inherent with students entering far below

Primary Weaknesses

- None identified.

grade level or experiencing obstacles to their learning. The proposed school's promotion policy reflects consideration of adequate preparation for grade level success, the challenges of student retention, and input from members of their advisory council. The proposed leadership team will consider the individual performance trajectory of students in retention decisions. (Section II.C.)

- Within the application and during the interview, the applicant group describes a clear assessment system, including the use of externally developed assessments, such as the Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP), Achievement Network (ANet), Terra Nova; as well as internally developed assessments, including do nows, exit tickets, essays, and performance-based assessments. (Section II.D.)
- Consistent with the applicant group's educational philosophy, the application describes the regular, consistent use of student achievement data to guide curriculum, and instruction; to provide systematic communication with students, and families regarding performance; and to inform decision-making by school leadership and the proposed school's board of trustees. (Section II.D.)
- Within the application and during the interview, the applicant group described how student achievement data will drive instruction in a systematic way, which includes analyzing student performance against the standards, informing the use of targeted interventions for individual students, and identifying effectiveness of curriculum and/or instruction for review and refinement. (Section II.D.)

School Characteristics

Primary Strengths

- The proposed school will implement an extended year of 190 days, and an extended day, with a shortened day on Fridays for 2.5 hours of teacher professional development. (Section II.E.)
- The applicant group proposes a school culture that is structured, joyful, and reflective of college aspirations and high expectations for all students, in alignment with the proposed mission and vision. Implementation of the proposed culture will flow from the values detailed in the PRIDE framework—Preparation, Respect, Integrity, Determination, and Enthusiasm—and includes implementation of a daily morning meeting, weekly community circle, and a culture of recognition through rewards and incentives linked to the PRIDE values, in an age-appropriate manner. (Section II.E.)
- Within the application, and during the interview, the applicant group described a clear student behavior philosophy that is consistent with the mission and educational philosophy, which emphasizes high quality student-centered instruction, strong teacher-student relationships, and positive school culture as the foundation of effective student discipline. (Section II.E.)
- The application describes how the proposed school plans to involve parents and guardians in their child’s education, and to engage the school community through such practices as a Family Orientation, an Open School Night, and College Nights; parent-teacher conferences; two family outings; daily, and weekly teacher communications through homework folders, and PRIDE reports; and monthly whole school newsletters. (Section II.E.)

Primary Weaknesses

- Based on the anticipated needs of the student population, reviewers noted concerns regarding the proposed selection and use of lunch/recess time during the day for the purposes of student detention, and the completion of overdue homework by students. During the interview, the applicant group noted that it was a conscious, operational decision to move detention from the end of the day to lunch/recess, so as to ensure student access to transportation home. (Section II.E.)

Special Student Populations and Student Services

Primary Strengths

- The application contains a detailed and robust description of plans for the identification, assessment, and service of students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs). The information contained in the application supports the applicant group’s capacity and ability to comply with state and federal laws and regulations as required. (Section II.F.)
- The application demonstrates a strong knowledge of student interventions, accommodations, and supports for diverse learners, including students receiving special education services and ELLs. The applicant group proposes to implement a structured learning environment within an inclusion model, with an emphasis on literacy instruction and increased instructional time. (Section II.F.)
- Since last year’s charter application, the applicant group conducted visits to charter schools, and public schools implementing an inclusion model; reviewed special education policies and programs, solicited guidance from experienced advisory council members, and recruited proposed board members with special education and English language development program experience in order to increase their capacity to serve special student populations. (Section II.F.)

Primary Weaknesses

- While the reviewers expressed concern over the adequacy of the proposed levels of special education staffing to support both the administration of the program, and the delivery of special education services during the first years of operation; during the interview, the applicant group indicated the intent and ability to reallocate funds, and increase the number of staff based on actual student enrollment, as necessary. (Section II.F.)

Enrollment and Recruitment

Primary Strengths

- The applicant group proposes to serve 108 students in kindergarten and first grade during the first year of operation in 2015-2016, allowing for an extended planning period to adequately prepare for opening. The applicant group proposes a slow growth model that will reach the full enrollment of 486 students in 2022-2023.

Primary Weaknesses

- None identified.

(Section III.A.)

- The proposed school will allow the entry of new students in all proposed grades by backfilling vacancies through the 8th grade, which exceeds the regulatory requirement. (Section III.A.)

Capacity and School Governance

Primary Strengths

- The proposed board members have a range of experience and qualifications, including finance, technology, community organizing, non-profit and business management, real estate, law, education, and governance of local public bodies and non-profit boards. Members include a current Director of College and Career Readiness for Hartford Public Schools, a certified speech-language pathologist, and the managing director of the ANet Western Massachusetts office. (Section III.B.)
- To address the Department's concerns regarding last year's charter application, the applicant group added three individuals to the board with various skills and qualifications in urban K-12 public education; special education; school leadership coaching; and school improvement. The applicant group also developed an advisory group comprised of qualified school leaders and board members from four high performing charter schools in the Commonwealth. Finally, the applicant group has continued to pursue board development through training in governance and finances, special education programming, and facility development. (Section III.B.)
- Additionally, in response to the Department's concerns from last year, William Spierer, the proposed Head of School, has developed elementary school leadership experience as the present Dean of Students at the Troy Preparatory Elementary School, a member of the Uncommon Schools network, in New

Primary Weaknesses

- None identified.

York. During the interview, Mr. Spirer indicated that his present employment has provided valuable training to support his ability to successfully guide implementation of the proposed educational program and make adjustments over time. (Section III.B.)

- The governance model presents a clear workable structure, and encourages an appropriate relationship between the board of trustees, school leader, and administration regarding the governance and management of the school. (Section III.C.)
- The application identifies criteria for the selection and evaluation of the proposed school leader. At the interview, the proposed board of trustees described how they will hold the proposed Head of School, William Spirer, accountable through the regular use of academic and financial dashboards, and the review of monthly key performance indicators and metrics. The application contains drafts of the proposed dashboards and tools to be used by the proposed board to review the proposed school’s performance. (Section III.C.)
- The proposed board of trustees plans to use multiple strategies to support strong governance practices, including the selection of an online charter school board development program, and general board development services from Building Excellent Schools’ (BES) “Connect to Excellence” program, that include support in developing processes related to board member recruitment, strategic planning, and succession planning. (Section III.C.)

Management

Primary Strengths

- The application describes clearly delineated roles and responsibilities for the school leader, and other administrative staff. During the interview,

Primary Weaknesses

- While reviewers noted concerns regarding the salaries proposed to attract and retain highly qualified staff in comparison to Springfield Public Schools; e.g. the

the applicant group explained the rationale for its leadership structure, its implementation as the school grows to full enrollment and grade span, and the intent to develop the director of curriculum and instruction for the principal position. (Section III.D.)

- The applicant group, in the application and during the interview, detailed a robust recruitment plan for instructional staff, which utilizes several resources and networks that include Teach For America, Match Teacher Residency Program, as well as local organizations and universities. (Section III.D)
- The application detailed a comprehensive retention plan that includes career growth opportunities for teachers, including the lead teacher role within the two teacher teams in grades K-4, grade level chair roles, and administrative leadership positions that will be implemented during the school’s development. (Section III.D.)
- BES’ “Connect to Excellence” program will provide on-going support for the proposed head of school and leadership team in the areas of leadership and school culture, including regular coaching, consultation, and training; assistance with recruitment and hiring of staff; cultural audits; and access to the BES network of high performing schools and school leaders. (Section III.D.)

proposed salary for the student support coordinator and ELL coordinator are approximately \$50,000 annually; the applicant group reported the ability to offer more competitive salaries as needed through adjusted resource allocation, and the additional funding available through fundraising, and the federal Charter School Planning (CSP) grant. The applicant group also noted that the proposed \$46,000 annual salary is an average between the proposed lead and associate teacher roles in the K-4 classrooms. (Section III.D.)

- Reviewers also noted concerns regarding the sustainability of a 9.5 hour work day proposed for instructional staff. At the interview, the applicant group stated that the proposed school’s mission will appeal to teachers, and the intent is to develop and sustain faculty over time. The applicant group may consider implementing flexible hours and staffing arrangements to accommodate teacher needs and retain high quality teachers once the school is fully expanded. (Section III.D.)

Facilities, Transportation, and Finances

Primary Strengths

- The application describes a viable process for identifying an adequate facility. The applicant group has identified a number of potential buildings for the location of the proposed school in or near the desired neighborhood in preparation for the proposed opening in 2015-2016. (Section III.E.)
- The application provides a structure and process for managing school finances with specific fiscal controls. The applicant group proposes to develop a clear plan for tracking finances in the

Primary Weaknesses

- None identified.

daily business operations based on the *Massachusetts Charter School Recommended Fiscal Policies and Procedures Guide*. (Section III.F.)

- At the interview, the proposed board of trustees indicated their commitment to fundraising. The board has received the financial support of the Davis Foundation for the planning year if funding from the federal CSP grant program was unavailable. (Section III.F.)