

FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW 2013-2014

Proposed School Name:	Academy for the Whole Child Charter School
Grades Served At Full Capacity:	K-4
Number of Students At Full Capacity:	278
Proposed School Location:	Fitchburg
Proposed Opening Year:	FY2015

Public Statement:

“The Academy for the Whole Child Charter School which will be located in Fitchburg, MA, will provide an exemplary education for 278 children from the City of Fitchburg in grades K–4. By combining academic rigor with artistic creativity; encouraging personal and social responsibility; and by addressing the intellectual, emotional, and social needs of each child, A4WCCS ensures that each child will attain his/her full potential and will be prepared to succeed in a global economy that demands 21st century skills.”

Mission Statement:

“The Academy for the Whole Child Charter School (A4WCCS) will be located in Fitchburg, MA, and will provide an exemplary education for 278 children from the City of Fitchburg in grades K-4. A4WCCS will provide a stimulating, nurturing and inclusive school community that is safe and joyful; encourages academic excellence and innovation; respects the developmental and individual learning styles of children; and recognizes families as a full partner in each child’s success. A4WCCS ensures that each child will attain his/her full potential and is prepared to succeed in a global economy that demands 21st century skills by combining academic rigor, utilizing research-based curricula resources and teacher created materials; development of artistic creativity through arts integration and community partnerships; encouraging personal and social responsibility; and by emphasizing the intellectual, emotional, and social needs of each child.”

Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:

School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment
First Year	K, 1, 2, 3	180
Second Year	K, 1, 2, 3, 4	234
Third Year	K, 1, 2, 3, 4	252
Fourth Year	K, 1, 2, 3, 4	270
Fifth Year	K, 1, 2, 3, 4	278

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

Primary Strengths

- The mission and vision define the purpose and values of the school; informs the public about the school; and is consistent with high academic standards, and student success. The applicant group proposes to provide a safe, and nurturing child-centered environment, which was

Primary Weaknesses

- The number of components described within the mission, and vision of the proposed school will pose challenges to effective, and successful implementation. All aspects of the mission and vision, such as 21st century skills, and academic rigor, are not consistently reflected

<p>reflected consistently by the applicant group during the interview. (Section I.A. & I.B.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant group demonstrated a passionate understanding of and connection to the proposed mission and vision during the interview, as well as a strong commitment to serve Fitchburg. (Section I.B.) • The application described how the proposed school will enhance or expand the education options through implementation of a longer school day, smaller class size, foreign language study, daily arts instruction and arts integration into core curriculum, and a Reggio-Emilia inspired approach. (Section I.C.) • The applicant group proposes to create a “Parents as Partners” program where parents are encouraged to visit the school; volunteer at the school; and attend monthly meetings, and orientation trainings so that parents may become involved in supporting the success of the school and their child. (Section I.C.) • The applicant group has received letters and/or testimony in support during the public hearing and public comment process, including but not limited to City Councilor Dean Tran, parents, charter school students, and other community members. The applicant group has also collected over 200 petition signatures in support of the proposed school. (Section I.C.) 	<p>throughout the application. (Section I.B.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the vision statement of the applicant group describes the ways in which the proposed school will positively impact its students, the application does not adequately address the impact on all stakeholders, nor does it serve as an organizing principal for the rest of the application. The applicant groups uses two sets of values designated by acronyms interchangeably, CHILD, and CARING. (Section I.B.) • While the applicant group did not provide sufficient evidence of parental support within Fitchburg, and the surrounding communities for the proposed educational program to support projected enrollment, during the interview, the applicant group described anecdotal evidence to illustrate demand and parental support for the proposed school. (Section I.C.) • The applicant group has received letters and/or testimony in opposition during the public hearing and public hearing comment process, including, but not limited to Representative Steven DiNatale, Senator Jennifer Flanagan, Mayor Lisa Wong, Superintendent Andre Ravenelle, City Councilor Nick Carbone, and several members of the Fitchburg School Committee. See public comment. (Section I.C.)
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Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction

Primary Strengths

- The application describes the group’s core beliefs and values about education, and 17 specific learning goals identified for students; the applicant group is committed to developing a student-centered educational program, which supports different learning styles, and is based on constructivism. (Section II.A.)
- The proposed school will implement curriculum consisting of both

Primary Weaknesses

- The curriculum outline provided in the application provides a limited and generalized description of the content and skills student will learn at the proposed school. Additionally, limited progress has been made on the selection and/or development of the core content area curricula to assess the proposed leadership team’s ability to effectively implement the necessary curricular

commercially available, and internally-developed curricula. Within the application and during the interview, the applicant group emphasized that teachers will be relied on for curriculum, and assessment development; and provided autonomy in the classroom to implement curriculum and instructional practices, with oversight by the proposed principal, and executive director. (Section II.B.)

- During the interview, the applicant group described the social emotional needs of their anticipated student population, and the curriculum the proposed school plans to implement to address these needs, including the use of MindUp. (Section II.B and II.E.)

components for their proposed opening in the fall of 2014 with 180 students in grades K-3. (Section II.B.)

- While the application provides a clear plan for ‘continuous improvement’ that will facilitate the ongoing development, improvement, and refinement of the curriculum, during the interview, the collaborative processes and procedures to evaluate the effectiveness and successful implementation of the curriculum remained generalized and unclear. (Section II.B.)
- Within the application, and during the interview, the process that will be used to align the curriculum to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF) was not clearly described. During the interview, the applicant group stated that Kim L’Ecuyer, the proposed principal, has already begun curriculum mapping using the Common Core State Standards, and developing pacing guides with a group of teachers, some of whom may become employees at the proposed school. (Section II.B.)
- The application contains limited information regarding the systems and schedules to support teacher collaboration and professional development. While it is clear that proposed opportunities will occur for a week during the summer, two Wednesday afternoons per month, and within the school day, the applicant group was unable to clearly articulate its implementation within the proposed teacher schedule, and school year. (Section II.B.)
- While the proposed leadership team stated that they would consider adopting parts of the Department’s evaluation system after reviewing its effectiveness and seeking input from the faculty, the teacher evaluation system remains underdeveloped. (Section II.B.)

Assessment System, Performance, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

Primary Strengths

- The applicant group provides detailed descriptions of the external assessments, such as Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP), Achievement Network (ANet), and Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating system (STAR) that will be implemented to support student learning. (Section II.D.)
- While the applicant group has indicated it has not finished selecting the tools to implement within the proposed assessment system, it is clear that the system will provide multiple measures of student growth, and student performance that can be used to facilitate adjustments to the educational program, and inform a staff development plan that will support the goal of improved student learning. (Section II.D.)

Primary Weaknesses

- By proposing to serve students in grades K-3 during the first year of operation, it remains unclear how students significantly below grade level will be supported to be engaged and successful within the proposed educational program. While high expectations are evident in the described promotion policy, the applicant group does not appear to have considered the strong likelihood of serving students far below grade level, and the potential for a high retention rate. (Section II.C.)
- While the assessment system proposed involves a variety of assessments, it remains unclear how teachers will be supported to effectively use student achievement data to improve student learning. (Section II.D.)
- The assessment system does not describe a meaningful approach to measuring student progress toward attaining non-academic goals, such as the personal and social responsibility aspect of the proposed school's mission. The application indicates the use of standard metrics, such as attendance, and discipline. (Section II.D.)

School Characteristics

Primary Strengths

- The applicant group proposes to implement Mass Insight Education & Research Institute's Readiness Model to effectively develop, implement, and refine the educational program over time to produce a high performing charter school serving an anticipated high poverty student population. (Section II.E.)

Primary Weaknesses

- While during the interview and within the application, the applicant group explained the intent to implement a joyful, happy, and healthy school culture; consistent with the school's mission, educational philosophy, and educational program; the strategies to implement school culture were generalized and limited. (Section II.E.)
- While the applicant group proposes to incorporate a before-school 'early birds' program, and an after-school 'Learning Enrichment Time' program, it remains unclear who will be responsible for

implementing these programs, how these programs will be assessed, and how students will be transported to and from school to take advantage of these proposed opportunities. (Section II.E.)

Special Student Populations and Student Services

Primary Strengths

- The application provides a generalized description of the process and procedures to identify, assess, and serve students who are English Language Learners (ELLs), including how the proposed school will provide ELLs access to the general education curriculum. While limited, the information was sufficient to indicate knowledge of the obligations of the proposed school to serve ELLs within the proposed educational program. (Section II.F.)
- The application provides a generalized description of the process and procedures to identify, assess, and serve students with disabilities. While limited, the information was sufficient to indicate knowledge of the obligations of the proposed school to serve students with disabilities within the proposed educational program. (Section II.F.)

Primary Weaknesses

- The special student populations section did not provide sufficient details to fully address the required criteria regarding the programs to serve students with disabilities, and ELLs, including how the English Language Development (ELD) program will be evaluated. (Section II.F.)
- The application indicates special education staffing levels during the first five years of operation that may be inadequate to meet the needs of the anticipated population of students with disabilities within the proposed educational program. (Section II.F.)

Enrollment and Recruitment

Primary Strengths

- Reviewers noted the variety of recruitment strategies listed in the application to recruit students, and attract a student population reflective of Fitchburg, including supplying information about the school in multiple languages, and detailing the services that will be provided to address the needs of all students. (Section III.A.)

Primary Weaknesses

- The application contained a draft recruitment and retention plan that did not include the retention plan as required. (Section III.A.)

Capacity and School Governance

Primary Strengths

- The proposed board members have a range of experiences and qualifications in areas such as finance, management, and communications media and arts; and have tangible ties to the community the school will serve. Members include the former mayor of Fitchburg. (Section III.B.)
- The proposed employees have significant skills and experiences in areas such as K-12 education, program development, special education, creative arts, and after-school programming; as well as tangible ties to the community the school will serve. Members include a former superintendent, and veteran teachers with experience in Fitchburg Public Schools. (Section III.B.)

Primary Weaknesses

- The proposed board lacks a member with an education background to assist in monitoring the proposed school's academic performance, and the school leader's effectiveness in developing and implementing the proposed academic program. During the interview, the applicant group acknowledged that they needed to diversify their proposed board of trustees and recruit additional members of the Fitchburg community with finance, K-12 education, and special education expertise. (Section III.B.)
- A proposed member of the board of trustees has formally withdrawn from the applicant group. (Section III.B.)
- The proposed board of trustees is in the early stages of development as a proposed governing body, and does not demonstrate the necessary understanding of the role of a charter school trustee. During the interview, the applicant group was unable to provide adequate examples to describe the differences in decision making between the board and administration. (Section III.C. & III.D.)
- The draft policies, and action plan submitted within the application are boilerplate in nature, and limit the ability to assess the applicant group's understanding of the obligations and responsibilities as proposed charter school employees, and board members. (Section III.C.)
- The proposed governance model within the application does not encourage an appropriate relationship between the board of trustees, and the school's leadership regarding the governance and management of the proposed school. The proposed board of trustee membership includes two parents, two teachers, the executive director, and principal as non-voting ex officio members. If the proposed board has its maximum of 11 members, only 6 voting members will

play the required role in the governance of the school. (Section III.C.)

- Within the application, and during the interview, the proposed board of trustees did not describe a clear process or criteria for the selection of the school leader, as well as the process and criteria the board would use for its own evaluation and development. Additionally, there is not yet a clearly developed process or measurable criteria for the evaluation of the proposed executive director. (Section III.C.)

Management

Primary Strengths

- The applicant group has identified highly qualified educators for leadership roles at the proposed school. The proposed executive director is a former superintendent; and the proposed principal is a veteran educator with 20 years of experience; both individuals are members of the design team, and primary authors of the charter application. (Section III.D.)
- The application describes the school's plan for recruiting high quality teachers, which is consistent with the proposed school's mission, vision, and educational philosophy. (Section III.D.)

Primary Weaknesses

- There is limited evidence to support the implementation of five administrators for a proposed school that will serve 278 students once fully enrolled. It is unclear how the proposed collaborative decision-making by a five person leadership team encourages clearly delineated roles and responsibilities. For example, there is limited distinction between the role and responsibilities of the executive director, assistant executive director, and principal. (Section III.D.)
- While the application provides the proposed compensation for teachers, it does not clearly indicate the salary schedules for administrators, and non-instructional staff, and indicates it is still being developed. (Section III.D.)
- Reviewers noted concerns regarding the sustainability of a 9.5 hour work day proposed for instructional staff. The working conditions of classroom teachers remains unclear; including responsibilities for curriculum and assessment development; duties outside the classroom; and common planning times amongst grade level teams and specialists. (Section III.D.)
- The application states that a teaching assistant will be assigned to each class to aid the teacher; however, the proposed staffing chart and budget does not

accurately reflect this commitment. Additionally, the proposed staffing reflected in the three operational years of the draft budget exceeds the staffing plan by approximately 10 hires annually. (Section III.D. and III.F.)

Facilities, Transportation, and Finances

Primary Strengths

- The applicant group has identified two potential facility options for the proposed opening date of 2014-2015, which have both previously housed a charter school. During the interview, the applicant group stated that both locations would require renovations prior to use. (Section III.E.)

Primary Weaknesses

- The application provides a limited description of the fiscal controls and financial management policies the proposed board of trustees will employ to maintain financial viability, and remain informed of the school's financial position. (Section III.F.)
- The application contains a proposed budget that does not accurately reflect all of the commitments proposed in the application. During the interview, the proposed board of trustees stated they had not reviewed the budget prior to submission, but that they have reviewed the corrected budget that has recently been developed. (Section III.F.)
- The budget narrative submitted in the application does not provide sufficient details to explain projected amounts in the draft budget, including descriptions of administrative, and instructional staff, and other operating expenses. Without additional information, it is unclear if the applicant group has sufficient knowledge of the practical matters related to the operation of a charter school. (Section III.F.)