

FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW 2014-2015

Proposed School Name (Horace Mann):	Bentley Academy Charter School
Grades Served At Full Capacity:	K-5
Number of Students At Full Capacity:	350
Proposed School Location:	Salem
Proposed Opening Year:	2015-2016

Mission Statement:

Bentley Academy Charter School prepares all of its students for personal and academic success to get to and through college. Through a combination of high academic standards, data-derived instructional methods, and community supports and partnerships, Bentley Academy Charter School establishes the critical foundation necessary for students to thrive as they advance in their academic careers.

NOTE: *Salem School Committee has selected the Bentley Elementary School for “restart” as a Horace Mann III charter school, subject to the approval of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. The Bentley Elementary School is currently operated as two programs, a K-2 program operated by the district under a turnaround plan approved by the Department, and a 3-5 program operated by Blueprint Schools Network under a turnaround/restart plan approved by the Department. The programs have distinct principals and faculty but share specialists to support the needs of students with disabilities and English language learners.*

Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:

School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment
First Year	K-5	275
Second Year	K-5	300
Third Year	K-5	325
Fourth Year	K-5	340
Fifth Year	K-5	350

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) has compiled a summary of the evidence identified through the review of the charter application, the responses provided by the applicant group during the subsequent interview, and the testimony and comment provided at the public hearing and during the public comment period. The summary describes the evidence identified that addresses the application criteria and identifies the areas of the application criteria where limited evidence was provided during the application process.

Public Comment:

The application received testimony and written comment in support during the public hearing and public comment period; including but not limited to Mayor Kimberley Driscoll, City Councilor Thomas Furey, members of the Salem School Committee, current Bentley 3-5 staff, and parents of children attending the Bentley 3-5.

The application received testimony and written comment in opposition during the public hearing and public comment period, including but not limited to representatives of the local collective bargaining units, a member of the Salem School Committee, current and retired Salem educators, and parents of children attending Salem Public Schools.

Mission and Key Design Elements (I.A. and I.B.)

Identified Evidence

- The mission defines the purpose of the school and indicates the key design elements proposed to achieve outcomes. The mission is consistent with high academic standards and student success. The focus of the mission is to “prepare students for personal and academic success” and to get students “to and through college.” (I.A.)
- While reviewers reported that the application did not convey a compelling image of the proposed school’s future or its connection to the anticipated student population, it was clear to reviewers that the strength of the vision is supported by the successful implementation of components of the proposed program in both charter and district schools throughout the Commonwealth. The program is clearly modeled on other quality district and charter schools that achieve strong outcomes with similar high need student populations in urban areas, such as Boston and Lawrence. (I.A. and I.B.)
- The key design elements identified for implementation at the proposed school are based on the strategies described in Mass Insight’s *The Turnaround Challenge*. The school proposes to implement a school climate and culture of high standards and expectations, curriculum and instruction to support individual student achievement, a longer school day and year, qualified and effective administrators and faculty to support student outcomes in an urban, high need district, and establish family and community partnerships. (I.B.)

Limited Evidence

- While some of the key design elements are explicitly stated in the school’s mission, “high academic standards, data-derived instructional methods, and community supports and partnerships,” not all key design elements are consistently reflected or fully realized in the application’s description of the educational program and its implementation. (I.A.)
- The applicant group has not yet determined how to track graduates of the proposed elementary school in order to measure progress toward the goal of Bentley graduates enrolling and graduating from a post-secondary institution. (I.A.)
- The application does not clearly describe how the core values of grit, integrity, collaboration, discipline, and zest are grounded in the group’s educational philosophy or how the values are integrated within the school’s climate and culture. During the interview, current employees of the Bentley 3-5 provided additional information regarding the use of the core values in discipline and behavior management systems. (I.B.)
- The application provided generalized examples of evidence that would be used to demonstrate how the school’s success would be measured, and did not clarify how the school would effectively measure these outcomes. Examples referenced student enthusiasm, “consistent” communication with families, parent understanding of the importance of education, curriculum that meets the needs of all students, and the success of former students in high school and college. The generalized nature of these benchmarks will require extensive discussion amongst the proposed board of trustees and school leadership to establish clear and measurable outcomes, beyond Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System test (MCAS) performance that will be used by stakeholders to monitor progress towards achievement of the mission. (I.B.)

Description of the Community to Be Served and Enrollment and Recruitment (I.C. and I.D.)

Identified Evidence

- The Bentley Elementary School has been identified as Level 4 under the state's accountability system, and was placed on a turnaround plan in 2012. The implementation of the transformation model has not resulted in the anticipated improvement of student outcomes. The district has partnered with Empower Schools, and Blueprint Schools Network to establish the Bentley 3-5 program during the 2014-2015 school year (restart plan) and to pursue a conversion to a Horace Mann charter school serving grades K-5 for the 2015-2016 school year. Members of the applicant group include the current principal, school administrators, and faculty of the Bentley 3-5. The Bentley 3-5 program is a precursor to the implementation of the proposed educational program for the full K-5 grade span at the proposed Horace Mann charter school. (I.C.)
- The partner organizations and district identified the Horace Mann charter school model as the desired pathway to maintain the autonomy accessed under the current restart model of the Bentley 3-5. The autonomies include the ability to hire and fire staff, implement an extended day and year, and maintain school-based decision-making regarding curriculum, instruction, assessments, and professional development. (I.B. and I.C.)
- The Bentley Elementary School has historically served a disproportionately high percentage of the district's high needs student population. The enrollment process for the proposed Horace Mann charter school will ensure preference for students currently attending the district school and their siblings. The applicant group has also committed to fill vacancies at all grades, exceeding current requirements. (I.C.)
- The applicant group and the district are committed to ensuring that all Salem residents with age eligible children have access to the proposed Horace Mann charter school. The applicant group and the district are collaborating on an enrollment process that provides an application for admission to all families in the district with children entering kindergarten. The group is investigating methods to institute a similar process with students entering grades 1-5 who are not current students of the Bentley Elementary School. (I.D.)

Limited Evidence

- The restart plan is governed by an executed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) amongst the district, Blueprint Schools Network (current school operator), and Empower Schools. This MOU was developed with specific provisions to permit its use as the Horace Mann MOU, if chartered. If chartered, the proposed board of trustees must participate in the development and establishment of a proposed MOU with the district for review and revision by the Department, and the approval of the Commissioner. (I.C.)
- The application contains inconsistent language regarding the enrollment process required for Horace Mann charter schools. The application contained a draft enrollment policy based on the enrollment requirements of a Commonwealth charter school rather than a Horace Mann charter school. (I.D.)

Overview of Program Delivery and Curriculum and Instruction (II.A. and II.B.)

Identified Evidence

- During the interview, the current principal and staff at the Bentley 3-5 provided clear and detailed information regarding the strategies, systems, and structures implemented at the school to support the Department's understanding of what is being proposed for implementation at the school as a Horace Mann charter school. (II.A.)
- The application describes practices currently implemented at a variety of quality district and charter schools, including the use of intervention/enrichment blocks within the daily schedule, a longer school day and year, and an instructional focus on literacy and numeracy that implements 150 minutes of instruction daily for ELA and mathematics. The proposed extended year includes two weeks in the summer to build school culture and establish school norms. The proposed educational program will include visual art, music, and physical education classes weekly for all students. The proposed school will also provide optional Saturday and vacation break programming for all students. (II.A. and II.B.)
- The application describes a school culture and climate that will be supported by home visits, daily morning meetings, a focus on developing successful learning habits and skills in all students, and the use of core values to support behavior management. (III.A.)
- The application describes a variety of instructional approaches, including the use of interventionists within the general education classroom during the extended English language arts (ELA) and mathematics blocks which was described as co-teaching by the applicant group. The application describes gradual release (I do, we do, you do) as the primary mode of instruction and the intent to differentiate in the general education classroom. The proposed educational program incorporates additional strategies for struggling students, such as daily tutoring by Math Fellows provided by the current school operator of the Bentley 3-5, Blueprint Schools Network. (II.B.)

Limited Evidence

- While the application clearly intends to communicate an educational program based on high standards, the various strategies presented are not integrated into a cohesive and comprehensive educational program. The limited connections made amongst the variety of different elements did not result in a clear plan for implementation. The generalized narrative belies the fact that practices, as described in the application, are currently implemented at the Bentley 3-5 by members of the applicant group who are experienced in the type of model proposed. The timing of the submission of the application in early November when the restart plan had been two months into implementation may have contributed to the areas of weakness identified in the application's narrative. (II.A.)
- The application does not provide a clear understanding of the differences between the early education program and the current program implemented for grades 3-5. It is unclear how the K-1 grades will benefit from a similar data-driven culture to provide individualized supports. (II.A. and II.B.)
- The application provides an unclear distinction between strategies for the first year of operation, and subsequent years of operation. For example, it is unclear how the summer springboard program will change in implementation between the first year of operation and subsequent years when both new and current students are in attendance. (I.A. and II.B.)
- Based on the description of the proposed Friday choice time within the application and during the interview, it is unclear if a student who is struggling in academics or behavior, requires special education services, or is learning the English language will have the same access to opportunities for additional enrichment as their peers. (II.B.)

Student Performance, Assessment, and Program Evaluation (II.C.)

Identified Evidence

- During the interview and in the application, the applicant group provided a clear and detailed description of the variety of assessments proposed for measuring and reporting performance, as well as the rationale supporting their choices of assessments. The applicant group intends to continue use of the ELA and mathematics interim assessments of the Achievement Network (ANet) assessment system, and the Scholastic Reading Inventory in addition to internally developed unit tests. (II.C.)
- During the interview, current teachers at the Bentley 3-5 provided additional detail regarding the data cycle used by faculty and administrators to support improved student learning. Additional information provided during the interview reinforced the commitment and capacity of the applicant group to implement the “data-driven” components of the proposed educational program. (II.C.)
- In addition to the Department’s regular accountability site visits to the proposed school during its five year charter term, the applicant group described in both the application and during the interview the intent to continue receiving a minimum of four site visits annually from the current Bentley 3-5 operator, Blueprint Schools Network. Blueprint Schools Network will provide an external assessment of the school’s program implementation, and provide stakeholders an additional lens through which to identify and target improvements. (II.C.)

Limited Evidence

- The application does not provide a clear sense of the expectations for assessment, including homework, and program evaluation for the early education component of the proposed educational program. The application does indicate the intent to use two commercially available reading assessments, Fountas and Pinnell, and STEP (Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress) assessments, in grades K-2. (II.C.)

Supports for Diverse Learners (II.D.)

Identified Evidence

- During the interview, the applicant group clearly indicated the intent to access district services to provide special education programming and English as a Second (ESL) language programming for students. (II.D.)
- The applicant group includes individuals who are qualified as special educators, including the proposed Director of Curriculum and Instruction (DCI). (II.D.)
- The application clearly states the intent to provide the staffing necessary to serve the needs of students receiving special education services and students requiring English language instruction. The application narrative and subsequent staffing chart indicates that each grade will have a minimum of one licensed special educator and one licensed ESL teacher. (II.D.)

Limited Evidence

- The narrative of the application did not adequately address the required criteria regarding the implementation of programming to serve students with disabilities or students with limited English proficiency. It remains unclear when pull out services, when required, will be delivered during the school day outside of the thirty minute intervention block. Based on the description of staffing, it was unclear to reviewers how students would be grouped to support the effective implementation of interventionists where they are needed most, and to implement the proposed co-teaching model of instruction. (II.D.)

Culture and Family Engagement (II.E.)

Identified Evidence

- The application describes strategies to establish a school culture and climate consistent with the mission of the proposed school. Strategies include opportunities to reinforce core values and perform recognition for student academic and non-academic progress through classroom morning meetings, whole school town hall on Fridays, and the summer springboard program. (II.E.)
- The proposed administration includes positions to support student outcomes aligned with the proposed mission. The role of the Dean of Student Success is to support the growth and development of social-emotional skills and self-discipline to support student success. (II.E.)
- The application describes a modified behavior management approach for lower and upper grades to support student learning and growth. (II.E.)
- The application describes a variety of strategies to involve parents/guardians as partners in the education of their children, and the building and maintaining of family-school partnerships. Strategies include home visits, weekly reports on student academic and non-academic progress, a monthly phone call from a member of the school staff, and nightly reviews of student homework agendas. (II.E.)
- The governance model of the proposed board of trustees includes board membership earmarked for a parent/guardian of student(s) enrolled at the proposed charter school. (II.E.)

Limited Evidence

- The applicant group has not integrated community partnerships and supports as stated in the mission into the proposed educational program in a meaningful manner, and efforts by the applicant group to access partners are not supported through the inclusion of letters of support from local organizations named in the application narrative. The application contains a letter of support from the President/Chief Executive Officer of the local YMCA which provides afterschool programming for the current school. (II.E.)

Capacity and Governance (III.A. and III.B.)

Identified Evidence

- The proposed board members have a range of experience and qualifications, including K-12 education, charter school operations and leadership, finance, non-profit and business management, and the governance of non-profit organizations and local governmental bodies. Members include a former school leader of a Commonwealth charter school in Salem and current Salem school committee member; a current parent of a Bentley 3-5 student who is also a human resources professional; a former ELL student who is currently a legislative aide, a policy director of a local non-profit organization involved in school turnaround, and a retired Salem Public Schools music educator. (III.A.)
- The proposed board of trustees have tangible ties to the Salem community and Salem district and charter public schools. The applicant group provides a broad and diverse representation of professionals committed to improving public education in Salem. The board is reflective of the proposed school's mission and educational program. (III.A.)
- The application provides sufficient information to establish general understanding regarding the role of the board in oversight of the proposed school, including the responsibilities of board officers, and the role of committees of the proposed board. (III.B.)
- The proposed board of trustees and district have selected the current principal of the Bentley 3-5, Justin Vernon, as the proposed school leader for the Bentley Academy Charter School. Mr. Vernon has established a successful track record as the school leader of an Innovation School in Boston, the Roger Clapp Innovation School. He led the school during a period of time when it moved from Level 3 to Level 1 status in the state's accountability system. (III.B. and III.C.)

Limited Evidence

- A Horace Mann charter school is currently operating in Salem, the New Liberty Charter School (formerly Salem Community Charter School), which opened in 2011 as a drop-out recovery program serving a high needs, at-risk student population. The current Horace Mann charter school has had challenges during its first charter term and was recently removed from conditions in late 2014. It is unclear the extent to which the district has contributed to or assisted in mitigating the school's challenges during its first charter term. (III.A.)
- While members of the proposed board demonstrated a clear commitment to the success of the proposed school and the community of Salem during the interview, the generalized narrative of the application and responses during the interview provide the Department with limited understanding of the proposed board's approach to oversight of the performance of the school. (III.B.)

Management (III.C.)

Identified Evidence

- All but one of the three proposed school administrators have been identified and are currently working at the Bentley 3-5. In addition to the proposed principal, the applicant group has identified the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Marlina Afonso, a qualified special educator, who is currently the head of operations for the Bentley 3-5. Ms. Afonso previously worked in a charter school in Rhode Island and speaks both Spanish and Portuguese. The applicant group has also identified the Head of Family and Community Engagement, Brenda Pena, who currently plays the same role at the Bentley 3-5 and will play an essential role in the recruitment and enrollment of current Bentley students at the proposed Horace Mann charter school. (III.C.)
- The application describes the intent to implement an evaluation system for teachers that is aligned to state requirements. The system will be supported by frequent observations of faculty by members of the leadership team (Head of School, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and Head of Operations). (II.B. and III.C.)
- The application describes a minimum of 100 hours of professional development annually for faculty to support the development of curriculum, and effective instruction to meet the needs of all students. The minimum 100 hours includes professional development during the summer and two opportunities per month after school. During the interview and in the application, the applicant group reported current coordination with the district for Bentley 3-5 faculty to access professional development opportunities, and the intent to continue the partnership as a Horace Mann charter school. (II.B. and III.C.)
- The application describes a proposed model to ensure faculty have leadership opportunities within the proposed school, including opportunities to mentor novice teachers, lead professional development sessions, coach other teachers, and facilitate common planning time. During the interview, current Bentley 3-5 faculty provided a clear sense of the importance of the proposed collaborative and supportive professional culture. (III.C.)

Limited Evidence

- Criteria adequately addressed.

Facilities, Student Transportation and Finances (III.D. and III.E.)

Identified Evidence

- The district will provide the facility of the Bentley Elementary School upon the school's closing if the Horace Mann charter is granted. (III.D.)
- The district will provide transportation to students of the proposed charter school in adherence with district policies. (III.D.)
- The draft MOU contains a clear financial arrangement, and describes the basis for calculating the district's payments to the proposed school. The proposed Horace Mann charter school will be subject to the same tuition formula used for district schools based on the needs of the student population. (III.E.)
- While the budget and cash flow projections do not accurately reflect the full implementation of the proposed educational program, including access to professional development from external partners or providers, the applicant group was able to explain some of the assumptions made in the budget during the interview. The applicant group clarified how expenditures that would normally be much greater, such as technology and assessments, were limited due to access to district resources. For example, the school would access a variety of assessments, including the ANet assessment system and services, and technology, such as interactive whiteboards, through the district and resources already acquired by the current school. If chartered, the MOU must be updated to accurately reflect the extent of such arrangements between the proposed school and the district. (III.E.)

Limited Evidence

- The applicant group did not provide a financial narrative to explain the budget, or the assumptions behind the proposed revenue and expenditures. With the limited information provided during the interview, the Department has limited ability to determine the capacity of the applicant group to provide sufficient financial management and oversight for the proposed school. (III.E.)