

# PROPOSED LIBERTAS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*This was prepared by the Libertas Academy Charter School applicant group.*

### A. MISSION

Through rigorous academics, character development, and strong supports for every learner, Libertas Academy Charter School prepares all sixth through twelfth grade students to succeed within the college of their choice and to be positive, engaged members of their communities.

### B. KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

#### VISION

We propose a high expectations, high achieving, and seamless 6-12 school that replicates the successful models of other high performing charter schools in Massachusetts and across the country.

Within an achievement-oriented culture in which expectations are clear and routines are consistent, and in which the joy of learning, the power of intellectual curiosity, and the development of life-building values are at the center of our 6-12 model currently unavailable to families residing within Springfield, all learners build the skills, knowledge, and character required for college and professional success and a life of positive community engagement.

To remediate academic gaps and accelerate learning for students currently achieving in the lowest decile of performance in The Commonwealth, and informed by the mandate of our mission, we focus intensively on literacy and mathematics and dedicate extended time to support students in meeting the cognitive and academic demands outlined within the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCFs) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS). To ensure that students have the character traits that will allow them to succeed, no matter the challenge, we champion, teach, develop, and celebrate common values across the school, starting day one. To deliver success for every learner, we provide a robust set of supports within the classroom, provide additional services beyond the classroom, and prioritize our extended time model to reach the needs of all students. Every day, our staff, families, and students are driven by our mission and vision, which combined inform the core elements of our school design.

**Rigorous Academics** are present across the school - from morning Brain Breakfast Academics, to extended day rigorous, MCF- and CCSS-aligned classrooms, to afternoon Homework Support and Tutoring. Middle school students seamlessly matriculate into high school where they are personally known, academically challenged, and perform at levels competitive with students from across The Commonwealth. High school students graduate with the ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and apply their learning across multiple domains. All 6-12 students work with complex texts and build knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and fiction, demonstrate their understanding through text-based writing, and apply their conceptual thinking in mathematics and the sciences in multiple ways. All learners are prepared for the college of their choice and ready to build lives rich with opportunity for themselves and their

families.

**Character Development** is a priority, starting day one – with families during annual Home Visits, across the community via multiple Information Sessions, and during transformative Annual Orientations with students and families at the start of each year. Serving a large percentage of students who will be the first in their families to graduate from college, and, in many instances the first to earn a high school diploma, we will be a values-based school community that lives by our FIRST values of Focus, Integrity, Respect, Selfless Service, and Tenacity. We believe in the limitless potential of our students, and we will do whatever it takes to help students achieve their personal and professional goals and become positive, engaged members of the community.

**Strong Supports for Every Learner** are critical to the successful execution of our mission. Students with disabilities benefit from a full-inclusion model and are assured adequate time for small group and one-on-one interventions and other supports as indicated in their IEPs. English language learners (ELLs) benefit from our expanded learning time, particularly beneficial to them, as ELLs will be supported to develop cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), and not simply the basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) of social language. As they accelerate in their learning, all students will be provided with enrichment opportunities within the extended school day.

## **COMMUNITY(IES) TO BE SERVED**

Springfield Public Schools (SPS) is the second largest in New England, with approximately 27,000 students, across nearly 60 schools. Massachusetts places schools and districts on a five-level scale, ranking the highest performing in Level 1 and lowest performing in Level 5. Level 4 schools are the state's most struggling schools based on an analysis of four-year trends in absolute achievement, student growth, and improvement trends as measured by student achievement results on state assessments. Springfield is rated as Level 4 overall; currently, 11 schools (3 elementary, 6 middle, 2 high) are designated as Level 4.<sup>1</sup> District proficiency rates in ELA are 41% and 33% in Math, compared to state proficiency rates in ELA of 69% and in Math of 60%.<sup>2</sup> The district graduation rate is 55%, compared to 85% for the state.<sup>3</sup> Springfield's averaged combined SAT score is 1,149; the average combined SAT scores in Massachusetts is 1,526.<sup>4</sup>

To address this educational crisis, SPS, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Springfield Education Association have partnered to rapidly improve outcomes for a majority of Springfield's middle school students through creation of the Springfield Empowerment Zone. The partnership is targeting eight failing middle schools within the district: Chestnut South, Chestnut North, Chestnut Talented and Gifted, Kiley, Kennedy, Forest Park, Duggan, and Van Sickle. In addition, SPS has partnered with Teach For America

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level4/default.html>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/reportcard/districtreportcardoverview.aspx?linkid=37&orgcode=02810000&fycode=2014&orgtypecode=5&>

<sup>3</sup> <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/reportcard/districtreportcardoverview.aspx?linkid=37&orgcode=02810000&fycode=2014&orgtypecode=5&>

<sup>4</sup> <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/reportcard/districtreportcardoverview.aspx?linkid=37&orgcode=02810000&fycode=2014&orgtypecode=5&>  
<https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/sat/sat-percentile-ranks-composite-crit-reading-math-writing-2014.pdf> .

for the first time so as to diversify its talent pipeline. This type of energy is exciting and may lead to improved results.

We agree with SPS Superintendent Warwick that “as a district, we’ve been diligent about improving middle school performance; including adding five new schools to create smaller learning communities; assigning leaders with track records of success; and implementing good, sound strategies that have had measurable outcomes. Still, we need more.”<sup>5</sup> The Empowerment Zone provides principals with increased autonomy and support from an education consulting agency of their choice.<sup>6</sup> While this provides an opportunity to implement some best practices associated with high-performing charter schools, principals do not have the full autonomies of a Commonwealth Charter. Further, the sole focus of the turnaround work is currently on the failing middle schools and ignores high schools in need of support. We believe that providing a unique and seamless 6-12 high-quality public school option to families is a key part of a powerful, comprehensive set of solutions - one that brings the full autonomies of a Commonwealth Charter informed by proven design elements, which themselves are based on good, sound strategies that have brought measurable outcomes for other high-risk communities. Our focus on supporting students’ transition from middle to high school and persistence within a high school college preparatory curriculum uniquely positions us to meaningfully contribute to the district’s efforts to turn around Springfield schools and bring quality choice to families and students at every grade level.

We propose a high expectations, high-achieving 6-12 charter school that replicates the successful models of other high performing charter schools in Massachusetts and across the country. As a Commonwealth Charter School, proposed in partnership with and bringing the training, support, and guidance of Proven Provider Building Excellent Schools, we will offer Springfield families a unique, seamless 6-12 college preparatory education uniquely designed to aggressively remediate academic gaps and accelerate student learning – all within a small, values-based 6-12 school community. Drawing on effective practices of top performing urban charter schools here in The Commonwealth and across the nation, and informed by the work of Harvard University’s Dr. Roland Fryer, we are prepared to found, govern, and lead a school whose unique design supports our ambitious mission and measurable goals. The fullest autonomies of a Commonwealth Charter, and specifically our ability to recruit, hire, train and retain staff aligned to and prepared to deliver on our mission, along with our ability to bring together those unique elements that will best serve our students and allow us to achieve our mission, and with the ability to control our finances in direct support of our mission, best allow us to be one of the strong answers to Springfield’s academic crisis, particularly within the middle and high school grades. Our small middle school size (270 students at capacity) offers families a meaningful alternative to the district middle school populations of 400 students or more, and small high school size (360 students at capacity) offers a strong alternative to high school populations of up to 1400 students. We will leverage our small school size to ensure that all students receive the individualized attention necessary to graduate on time and are able to matriculate and excel at the college of their choice. We look forward to collaborating with the wider educational initiatives within the city, and as a school based upon learning from others, we are committed to such partnership within the local district and charter community. Following a “seeing is believing”

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.springfieldpublicschools.com/pages/sezp>.

<sup>6</sup> Modesto Montero met with Matt Matera on 10/22/2105 to better understand the how the Empowerment Zone will function.

mindset, we will create a robust visitation program that allows educators to witness first-hand the Libertas Academy experience and build in structures for sharing of resources and documentation developed by our school.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT / RELATIONSHIPS

With over 4,200 families on waiting lists to one of the five charter schools in Springfield, we know that the demand is very high. Early assessment of parental demand for a school like Libertas Academy has been established through the experiences of founding Board members, who have continuing and close ties to the community, as well as through initial meetings with community stakeholders. Please see **Attachment M** [of the final application] for a list of stakeholder meetings. Each of these individuals continues to express the community’s desire for a school such as Libertas Academy, designed and prepared to address the deep needs that exist at the middle and high school levels most particularly. In addition, we have collected letters of support from some of our strongest community supporters.<sup>7</sup>

## STRATEGIES TO ASSESS DEMAND AND ESTABLISH SUPPORT

In order to successfully network with families, we held information sessions during the fall months and attended various community events. See **Attachment N** [of the final application] for a sample flyer for our information sessions. For those families who may be less aware of public school options, we conducted two door-to-door marketing campaigns, “Boots on the Ground,” specifically within the North End neighborhood. The events took place on October 17<sup>th</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup>. See **Attachment O** [of the final application] for an example of the petition we asked families to sign. We will continue to offer information sessions and hold “Boots on the Ground” events until we conduct our lottery in 2017 to ensure equitable access to our school. For more information about our recruitment strategies, please see **Attachment B** [of the final application].

## PROPOSED SCHOOL GROWTH

Beginning in August 2017, Libertas Academy Charter School (“Libertas Academy”) proposes to open our doors to 90 sixth grade students (three classes of 30 students each). Using a slow growth model, Libertas Academy will reach maximum capacity of 630 students, educating students in grades 6-12 in 2023-2024.

Grade	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
6		90	90	90	90	90	90	90
7			90	90	90	90	90	90
8				90	90	90	90	90
MS		90	180	270	270	270	270	270

<sup>7</sup> See **Attachment K** [of the final application].

Grade	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
9					90	90	90	90
10						90	90	90
11							90	90
12								90
HS					90	180	270	360
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>90</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>630</b>

**FOUNDING CAPACITY**

Modesto Montero, Lead Founder and proposed Head of School, is a teacher, leader, and Building Excellent Schools Fellow, who brings to Libertas Academy a strong background in urban education, professional development design, ESL instruction, and adult coaching. Mr. Montero taught middle school ESL, was a Common Core Coach for the state of Tennessee, as well as a Professional Learning Community Leader-ESL and a Manager of Teacher Leadership Development with Teach For America. During his tenure as an educator in Memphis, Mr. Montero led his students to dramatic gains in reading. As a TFA staff member, Mr. Montero created the Vision of Excellence for ESL instruction for TFA-Memphis, which was based on sound research and best practices. As a TFA alum and having worked as a teacher coach, Mr. Montero brings an extensive network of educators from which to recruit and with whom to work as he oversees the program’s implementation. Under his leadership, and with the support of a high capacity founding team drawn from Springfield’s education, business, and community leadership, and with the support of Proven Provider Building Excellent Schools, we propose a seamless 6-12 college preparatory education uniquely designed to meet the needs of all learners and determined to be part of the larger solution to the chronic academic underachievement within the City of Springfield. The founding team brings: (a) the Lead Founder’s professional and personal ties within the community and his national network of professional colleagues; (b) the support of the Davis Foundation, the largest local foundation that has been critical in the city’s education reform efforts; (c) the Libertas Academy Board membership of the Davis Foundation’s Executive Director Mary Walachy; the Board membership and extensive network of Dora Robinson, President and CEO of United Way of Pioneer Valley; the educational leadership and educational network of Kwame Webster, Managing Director of Teach For America in Western Massachusetts; the extensive community knowledge of Springfield/North End native and Executive Director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, David Silva; the Board membership of a parent of three graduates of Sabis International Charter School and Account Manager at Health New England, Inc., Rosemarie Marks-Paige; the 30+ years of legal expertise of William MacDonald, Manning Partner, Law Offices of William MacDonald; the wealth of knowledge of Anthony Surette, a native of Springfield, who has over a decade of experience as an accountant at Corbin & Tapases, P.C; and the deep local commitment and Board membership of Program Officer, Women’s Fund of Western Massachusetts, Ellen Moorhouse.