

# *PROPOSED OLD STURBRIDGE ACADEMY CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL*

## *EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

*This was prepared by the Old Sturbridge Academy Charter Public School applicant group.*

The Old Sturbridge Academy Charter Public School (hereinafter “OSACPS”) is the result of an exciting partnership between Old Sturbridge Village (hereinafter “OSV”) and Expeditionary Learning (hereinafter “EL”) – two proven organizations with strong track records of success in educating hundreds of thousands of students.

On the cusp of celebrating its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, OSV provides educational experiences to over 60,000 schoolchildren each year. These experiences range in academic depth from self-guided school visits to hands-on classes and workshops to summer programs and internships. OSV educators have been developing programs tied to the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for years. OSV has also served as a professional development resource for teachers from around the state, region, and nationally.

Early in his tenure as President and CEO of OSV, Jim Donahue began hearing from the community that there was a need for a high-quality alternative to the traditional public school – especially for at-risk students and for children who learn differently. Families who could afford to send their children to private day schools were doing so. As the founder and CEO of the Highlander Charter School in Providence, Rhode Island, Jim always believed that OSV would be the ideal setting for a school. As he discussed the idea with colleagues and members of the community-at-large, a vision emerged for a school that would provide children with rigorous learning experiences rooted in the context of the real world. It would be a school where children of differing learning styles and abilities could find academic success. It would be a school where teachers and students would model the values of OSV: authenticity, integrity, quality, compassion, and kindness. And, most importantly, it would be a school where children at-risk for learning due to poverty, language or learning differences would thrive.

While in Providence, Jim had the opportunity to visit Ron Berger’s classroom in Shutesbury, Massachusetts and talked with Ron about his work in helping schools to create a “culture of quality” in their classrooms and in the building. In fact, in their conversation, they talked about thinking about student work as if it were going to be displayed in a museum. With that in mind, it was no surprise that EL was recommended to the museum as a school-design partner. Our shared vision for rigorous teaching, authentic learning experiences, differentiated instruction, teacher efficacy and robust assessment practices would lead us to a ground-breaking partnership.

In identifying the communities to be served by the school, the founding group was first interested in serving students whose schools had been identified as underperforming by the state of Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. We then sought to include nearby and neighboring communities that served a significant population of low-income children – recognizing that the rural poor have not been the focus of charter school founders, who tend to open schools in more urban settings.

To these children and their families, Old Sturbridge Academy Charter Public School will offer a learning environment that is both unique because of its access to OSV and exciting because of the many ways that the museum will be able to support teaching and learning. We want children to rise every morning with the same sense of excitement, passion and wonder as they do on a day when they are preparing to go on a field trip – away from school. The work of Reach Advisors has shown the transformative power of early museum visits among children in their book *Life Stages of the Museum Visitor: Building Engagement Over a Lifetime* (Susie Wilkening and James Chung, American Alliance of Museums Press, May 15, 2009). People who visit museums self-identify as lifelong learners, and children who visit museums are more likely to be museum visitors in the future. *Our students* will actually grow up at a museum – developing essential habits of scholarship and good character. This will be especially true for students for whom the traditional classroom setting can present learning challenges. In addition, OSA would be the only school in the identified region that is using EL as a school-design model.

We will open with grades k-2. Each grade will include two classrooms, with an enrollment of no more than twenty students per room. Total enrollment in the first year will be 120. The school will accept an incoming class of kindergarten students each year until it reaches its full capacity of 360 students in grades k-8.

Our Principal will serve as the day-to-day instructional leader of the school, supported by Jim Donahue and a plethora of management resources from OSV that includes accounting, finance, human resources, food service, information technology, maintenance, and fund development. We will implement the core practices of EL as we establish the five key dimensions of life in the school: 1) curriculum; 2) instruction; 3) assessment; 4) culture; and 5) character and leadership. Consistent with the belief that a culture that supports positive behavior and helps students develop habits of goodness requires intentionality, we will also employ Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (hereinafter “PBIS”) – again, giving students, teachers and parents a common language and a clear framework. We will ensure that our Principal and teachers have support in integrating the tools provided through PBIS with EL’s framework for teaching and assessing positive behavior through Habits of Scholarship and relational character. The two must blend effectively.

Parents and caregivers will be an essential part of our school community. At the end of the summer, teachers will conduct home visits with each of their students to meet families in a setting that is most comfortable for them as they prepare for the first day of school. Full-school events for families - such as barbecues, potluck dinners, exhibition nights, student-led conferences and other celebrations, will happen at least quarterly. Parents will be welcomed as volunteers in classrooms and in the school. Each OSACPS family will receive a family membership to OSV *at no cost to them or to the school*, allowing them to visit the museum for free on weekends and during vacations. In the future, we will work to offer parents adult education opportunities and workforce development resources in partnership with OSV. OSV will be an extension of the classroom for teachers and students. With a campus of over 200 acres, the museum offers an idyllic setting with hundreds of resources to support learning. Not only will we bring our students into the museum, but we will bring the museum into our school. Resources include a robust Research Library, a greenhouse, a full working farm, a number of gardens, a 300-seat theater, a pottery shop and a kiln, a woodworking studio, and several hiking

trails – all situated along the Quinebaug River.

When students graduate from OSACPS, they will do so as excellent communicators, mathematicians, scientists and historians. They will have clear habits of both scholarship and relational character. They will have discovered other passions and talents as well – whether in woodworking or gardening, music or painting. They will have produced academic work that is “museum quality” and will have engaged in real-world learning at every grade level. They will be able to describe how *they* learn best and will be able to advocate for the tools they need when they are struggling.

OSV looks forward to OSACPS students returning to the museum after graduation as summer interns while they are in high school and college. After college, some will find their way back to Sturbridge to begin careers at the school or at the museum. Others will also enter careers that they love - fueled by a passion for quality and for lifelong learning. Our graduates will be capable and competent, caring and compassionate.