*Proposed* Map Academy Charter School

Executive Summary

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

**Mission:** Map Academy helps youth find their way with individualized roadmaps designed to promote success in students for whom traditional school has not worked. Student-centered academics, a highly supportive culture, and career development opportunities equip students with the knowledge, mindsets, and skills to meet the high standards necessary for postsecondary education and meaningful employment.

**Vision:** The vision of Map Academy is to be a haven for disconnected and underserved students, and to empower them toward high school graduation and beyond. We envision a collaborative community, rich with local partnerships shifting the paradigm from competition to collaboration, providing more opportunities for greater Plymouth’s most vulnerable students. This model meets demand for high quality pathways for youth whose needs are not being met by traditional high schools, and can be replicated in other communities in Massachusetts and beyond.

**Rationale:** Map Academy will serve students in the greater Plymouth area who are disengaged from or have dropped out of high school. When students on the South Shore are on the verge of walking away from school, they have extremely limited options. These students can feel alienated from the educational system that was designed to help them. The stakes are high, as these students walk a tightrope; for them, giving up is a perpetual temptation. Map Academy is designed for these youth who often lose their way in traditional high schools.

Map Academy is unique and distinct from traditional public schools in that we will specifically recruit students who are off-track due to a wide range of risk factors and complicated personal and school histories. Our competency-based, community-infused model couples high expectations with intense support to restore hope and cultivate a growth mindset, empowering students to progress toward graduation, postsecondary success, and livable wage jobs.

As current managers of Plymouth Public Schools’ Alternative Programs, we are deeply invested in creating a high-quality option to better serve this target population in the Greater Plymouth area. The MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Early Warning Indicator System data clearly demonstrates a need, showing that approximately 1700 high-risk students in our proposed region of Plymouth, Carver, and Wareham will enter high school in the next decade. In this same catchment area, 430 students dropped out of the cohorts of 2011-2015. Failing to serve this sector poses severe consequences for Plymouth and the surrounding region. Societal costs of students who leave high school without graduating are significant, including drastically reduced lifetime earnings, increased incarceration rates, health issues, and increased demand for social services. If given a chance, many of these students would be viable candidates to return and finish high school. Map Academy will provide that opportunity, allowing them to reach their full potential.

**Philosophy:** Map Academy is founded on a belief that every student can succeed, but that for some students, the path toward success does not fit the model of traditional high schools. There is no one size fits all educational model, or one size fits all timeline toward a high school diploma. There is no such thing as an average or typical student. We will meet students at their current level of engagement and resilience and increase expectations as they develop the academic, personal, and social tools they need for success in high school and life after graduation.

Our educational philosophy, core beliefs, and values will inform every aspect of Map Academy. As a truly student- centered school, Map Academy commits to:

1. Making graduation real and meaningful for every student, so that a high school diploma represents true readiness for life after high school.
2. Maintaining a learning community where staff and students demonstrate mutual respect and foster trust.
3. Holding all students to common high academic standards with a competency-based approach to instruction and assessment.
4. Identifying, cultivating, and building upon each student’s unique strengths, interests, and talents.
5. Providing flexible pathways to graduation and multiple opportunities to develop the knowledge, mindsets, and skills necessary to succeed in school and in life.
6. Incorporating personalized wraparound services to prevent obstacles in students’ lives from impeding their academic success.
7. Reimagining the traditional school day and year so appropriate supports and staff are accessible all day, year round.
8. Ensuring that students feel connected and comfortable reaching out when they have lost hope and need someone to give them a reason to try again.
9. Offering flexible scheduling, career education opportunities, and a variety of dual enrollment, blended, and face- to-face instructional options.

**The Map Model:** The time has come to reimagine high school to meet the needs of all students. Every aspect of Map Academy is intentionally designed to meet the unique needs of off-track youth. Our exclusive recruitment of youth who are off-track due to a wide range of risk factors and complicated personal and school histories is what sets Map Academy apart from traditional schools, thus filling a need for both the students and districts. Map Academy is founded on three primary key design elements: a student-centered learning environment, a highly supportive culture, and career development education. These research-based key design elements have proven successful with Map Academy’s target population, and will create a highly effective learning environment for the region’s most vulnerable youth.

**Student-Centered Learning Environment**

* Competency-based model incorporates academics, social-emotional, and career readiness benchmarks, and guides each student to a high quality high school diploma and postsecondary success.
* Students begin their Map Academy career with a cohort-based orientation to build community and finish with a trimester focused on postsecondary planning.
* Rigorous and relevant academic programs culminate with students enrolling in and passing English and math courses through Quincy College at Plymouth.
* Customized program guided by individualized learning plans is designed to meet students at their current level of engagement and resilience and gradually increase expectations.
* Morning, midday, and afternoon classes allow for tailored scheduling to accommodate students’ lives and out-of-school responsibilities.
* Twelve-week trimesters and a flexible summer session enable four enrollment opportunities and multiple graduation ceremonies.
* Online, blended, dual enrollment, and face-to-face options facilitate personalized schedules and a variety of opportunities to access content.

**Highly-Supportive Culture**

* Relentless social-emotional support enables students to meet the high academic expectations necessary for postsecondary success.
* Priority is placed on developing a culture in which every adult’s primary responsibility is to support student success, leading to mutual respect.
* Model embeds wraparound services and leverages partnerships with community-based organizations.
* Trauma-sensitive practices create a culture and physical environment where every student can thrive.
* Restorative justice model replaces traditional discipline, helping students develop social-emotional competencies.

**Career Development Education**

* Career exploration and postsecondary planning are embedded into each student’s individualized learning plan.
* Students explore career and postsecondary options to increase their motivation and prepare them to make informed decisions about their futures.
* Practical career development opportunities allow students to apply their learning and hone career readiness skills.
* Career training opportunities are available to students as they progress toward graduation.

Student success is measured not solely by academic achievement, but also on levels of student persistence, student expectations, and the extent to which a student’s learning experience at Map Academy prepares them for a successful future. Our student-centered model eschews traditional grade-based grouping of students, relying on a competency-based program that requires students to master a certain set of skills and knowledge before moving on, ensuring that a student’s learning journey is set on a strong foundation. Thus, competence is the sole measure of success and the standard for promotion rather than age, grades, credits, seat time, or calendars, ensuring that Map Academy graduates meet high academic standards and acquire the knowledge, mindsets, and skills necessary for postsecondary success.

**Our Plan:** Map Academy plans to open in September of 2017 with an enrollment of 130 students; in our fifth year of operation we anticipate serving 250 students, and by the seventh year of operation 300 students—our projected maximum enrollment. Map Academy is intentionally designed to replace competition with collaboration and eliminate the divisive atmosphere that has frequently surrounded charter schools throughout the past decade. As a Commonwealth charter school, Map Academy has been endorsed by Plymouth Public Schools central administration and School Committee. By embedding cooperation throughout our plan, we will meet a district and regional need and make a targeted investment in our most vulnerable youth.

We are deeply invested in creating a high-quality option to better serve the region’s most underserved youth and have forged many rich relationships with community organizations that support our commitment to serving off-track students. The Map Academy leadership team has established relationships with key community stakeholders to make the mission and vision a reality.

We imagine Map Academy as a thriving learning community that serves off-track youth by preparing them for successful postsecondary endeavors and meaningful careers. We will continue to cultivate rich relationships with community organizations and businesses that support our students by offering valuable career education opportunities. To ensure urgent social-emotional needs are immediately addressed, some of our most frequently utilized community-based partners will eventually co-locate within our school. Our execution of a student-centered competency-based instructional program coupled with wraparound services and career development education will serve as an exemplary model for other schools.

**Our Team:** The Co-Founders of Map Academy, Josh Charpentier and Rachel Babcock, will serve as the Co-Directors of the school. Josh and Rachel have extensive experience working with at-risk youth and collectively possess expertise in all areas of alternative education administration. They have dedicated the past three years to researching, networking, visiting schools, tracking data, and compiling best practices to inform the design of Map Academy. The Founding Dean of Culture, Kevin Avitabile, has over a decade of experience as an adolescent social worker, and has expertise in crisis management, knowledge of systemic resources, as well as developing and maintaining positive relationships with high-risk youth. In addition, the Founding Board of Trustees consists of six diverse, highly capable professionals who collectively hold expertise in the areas critical to Map Academy’s educational success, legal compliance, and fiscal viability. These Founding Board members were selected because their philosophies and expertise align with and reflect Map Academy’s mission and vision. Thus, the Board and Co-Founders have demonstrated their capacity to be successful in founding and governing a high-quality charter school and achieving the school’s mission and vision.

In our ongoing work with off-track youth, the theme of their experiences is consistent. They feel overwhelmed by life both in and out of school and disengaged from the education they want and know that they need. Well-intentioned policies, structures, and curriculum delivery of traditional high schools drive too many of them away. These are the youth who most need our support, those whose struggles in and out of school make success a steep uphill climb. They need and deserve more. Map Academy Charter School at Plymouth is designed for them.