

Gloucester Community Arts Charter School Executive Summary

Prepared by the founding group of the proposed Gloucester Community Arts Charter School.

The parents of Gloucester want options in their choice of public schooling. Gloucester Community Arts Charter School (GCA) will take an innovative approach to K-8 education that will offer Gloucester families a genuine alternative, right here in our own town.

GCA is planned as a small, K-8 public school, designed to educate Gloucester's student population in creative and compelling ways. GCA will appreciate the natural human diversity of learning and teaching styles, while also understanding that connection and community are vital to the learning process.

GCA curriculum will integrate the arts as a common language across all disciplines - and draw coursework from the rich cultural and maritime resources of Cape Ann. The curriculum will blend state standards, integrated subjects and themes, and hands-on experiences drawn from five disciplines:

- English Language Arts
- Mathematics
- Expressive Arts
- Science
- Social Studies

Throughout the program, students will be challenged to demonstrate their academic accomplishments, intellectual curiosity, and civic commitment. GCA will be geared to preparing each student for success in their high school, college, and graduate studies—encouraging and equipping them to grow as active, engaged citizens who truly and visibly care for their local, regional, national, and global communities.

GCA Approach to Learning

The heart of the school's philosophy rests on these core beliefs:

- learning is about making meaning of life's events and challenges
- all children crave and strive to find meaning in whatever they witness
- students learn best in a community of supportive parents and respected teachers.

GCA graduates will demonstrate proficiency within the framework of the Massachusetts learning standards -- as they discover, define, and explore their own questions and learn to think critically and work collaboratively to find solutions to contemporary issues. They will gain the skills and knowledge needed to tackle challenging tasks throughout their lives, whether in school or on their chosen life path.

GCA will create a strong school culture that fosters academic success and the emotional well-being of all students. GCA will place great importance on respecting the expertise of professional teachers, and on dedicating significant time to collaborative teaching and learning.

GCA will engage and work with parents to be effective partners in their children's education - forging an essential link between the classroom and home life that is the most vital key to supporting and enriching student achievement.

GCA Mission

GCA will graduate academically accomplished, intellectually curious, and civically engaged young people who can tackle challenges diligently and creatively:

- **Academically accomplished** students will read and communicate effectively – through speaking and presentation, the written word, and the arts. They will calculate and solve problems logically and accurately, and they will research and organize information logically for a given purpose.
- **Intellectually curious** students will find personal connections and relevance in learning, apply their learning across disciplines, and demonstrate an active awareness of their own ways of learning.
- **Civically engaged** students will take an active role in the classroom and their school communities, take part in improving the community of Gloucester, and demonstrate an ability to consider issues from different perspectives.

GCA Founding Group

The founding group of GCA gathered in May 2007 to create a school where students are intensely engaged in learning; where the arts serve as a common language; and where parents, teachers and students all actively contribute to an academic community that promotes both the mastery of challenging material and the social-emotional well-being of all students. This group has roughly 20 members, all of whom have deep and caring connections to the community of Gloucester. They possess the proven skills and experience in education, management, finance, and evaluation needed for the creation and successful development of a charter school.

Rediscovery Academy Charter School Executive Summary

Prepared by the founding group of the proposed Rediscovery Academy Charter School.

Mission

The mission of Rediscovery Academy Charter School is to educate and prepare resilient young adults for full participation in the workforce, higher education, and society.

We seek to educate an invisible and geographically scattered population known as youth at-risk of disconnection from society. In order to achieve high levels of personal and professional success, students will engage in a rigorous, project-based curriculum, including extended academic time and will be supported by adults who know them well and are invested in their success. We aim to graduate students who are academically and vocationally successful, thoughtful, principled, and respectful leaders of the next generation.

Population

The two populations that Rediscovery Academy seeks to educate are *disconnected youth* and *youth at risk of disconnection (at-risk youth)*. Disconnected youth are those youth aged 16-24 who are out of school, unemployed, and without ready access to social and family supports. At-risk youth are statistically identified as members of any one of several target populations including youth who are high school dropouts, youth in the juvenile or criminal justice system, youth currently or previously in foster care, unmarried mothers under the age of 18, homeless youth, and youth with disabilities. These youth share a set of life circumstances including fractured or unstable home lives, experiences of trauma and abuse, emotional disorders and disabilities, as well as histories of educational failure. Because of these conditions, disconnected and at-risk youth lack the skills and guidance needed to succeed in a typical high school, secure long-term employment, or develop meaningful relationships with other members of society. These youth typically spend most of their lives in poverty, in prison, unemployed, and dependent on costly social services.

Need

Many of the factors that cause disconnected and at risk youth to fail at school are non-academic and cannot be addressed properly at a typical high school. These youth suffer social and emotional skills gaps that result in behavioral and learning disorders that prevent the youth from succeeding at school. Their education is compromised by logistic factors arising from involvement in multiple state systems. Further, due to their unstable living situations, these youth must become self-sufficient and employable at a younger age than a typical high school student. If these youth do not succeed at school and become gainfully employed, they become a hazard and a burden to the public.

- *There are as many as 177,000 at-risk youth in Massachusetts.*
- *Each at-risk youth who fails to graduate represents \$260,000 in lost taxable income.*
- *40% or more of these youth end up in prison—each one costing Massachusetts \$37,718 per year to support.*

Program

Rediscovery Academy will offer an educational program designed to draw disconnected and at-risk youth back to education and offer them a chance at success. The education program will be built utilizing project-based learning, Advisory, and Junior and Senior Institutes as the primary pedagogies employed. This model combination provides a design which will facilitate each youth progressing at a pace fitting to his or her individual skill level. A large portion of the program will be conducted through service-learning—a form of instruction in which education is conducted through projects that serve the surrounding community. Rediscovery Academy will also offer a vocational program that teaches employability skills as well as technical skills with a specialty in the growing field of sustainable and renewable energy. Social and emotional learning will be integrated in all aspects of the curriculum to facilitate the elimination of social and emotional skills gaps. Rediscovery Academy will be staffed by a faculty that is both sensitive to and prepared to deal with the specific set of life circumstances common to disconnected and at-risk youth.

Capacity

The founding group of Rediscovery Academy Charter School has the capacity to make the school a success based on their years and breadth of expertise, financial resources, vision, and drive. The unprecedented charter school that the founding group desires to create is based on years of analysis, work with youth from the populations targeted by the charter school in both educational and non-educational settings, and research. Members of the founding group have created and managed Rediscovery, Inc., a nonprofit organization that enjoys great success with these target populations, and have substantial experience with fundraising, public entities, as well as charter and public schools.

The founding group of Rediscovery Academy Charter School possess five Masters in Business Administration degrees. Three member hold the degree of Masters in Education and one member is an independently licensed clinician with a Masters Degree in Social Work. Two members hold Doctor of Education degrees. One of the founding group members is a co-founder of the McAuliffe Regional CPS. Two of the founders have been principals – one in a charter school and the other in both charter and public schools. Additionally, four of the founding board members have founded either a charter school, nonprofit or health insurance agency; all of which have been extremely successful. The success of youth at risk of disconnection is the primary goal of the founding group. This vision is what built Rediscovery, Inc., and what can successfully build Rediscovery Academy. Each of the founding members has made a commitment to facilitate the creation and solid foundation through which Rediscovery Academy Charter School and its youth can be most successful.

The Spirit of Knowledge Academy Charter School Executive Summary

Prepared by the founding group of the proposed Spirit of Knowledge Academy Charter School.

Our Mission

The Spirit of Knowledge Academy (SOKA) Charter School students will graduate with a solid academic foundation in math, science, technology and humanities, prepared for college and a gratifying career, and dedicated to humanistic values of life-long learning, personal responsibility, and the creation of value in their own lives, their communities, and society.

Our Vision

The SOKA vision is to provide a college preparatory education focused on high-standard math and sciences and intensive humanities studies - combined with and supported by a humanistic philosophy. SOKA will be a school where all students will have an opportunity to master academic subjects, score high on standardized state and national tests, participate in academic competitions, and will be well prepared to enter the best colleges of their choice. The students will be motivated to achieve, realize their full capacity, and acquire critical thinking skills and a life-long love for learning.

The SOKA humanistic philosophy is best articulated by Daisaku Ikeda, respected educator, and prolific author: "What our world most requires now is the kind of education that fosters love for humankind that develops character - that provides an intellectual basis for the realization of peace and empowers learners to contribute to and improve society." As such, SOKA will embrace a unique school culture based on the Humanistic principles of respect for self and others where students will be taught peaceful conflict resolution and the importance of protecting the environment. The SOKA humanistic principles will encompass parents, teachers, board members, and the community at large through its system of mentoring relationships. All will work together to instill in the SOKA students the idea that the self-motivated inner change of a single individual can positively affect the larger web of life and result in the rejuvenation of human society.

Our Teaching Principles

Consistent with our mission, the SOKA teaching approach is based on a firm belief that all children, regardless of their experience and environment, are able to learn abstract concepts at an early age and build on them as they develop. Central to the SOKA educational philosophy is a high-standard rigorous educational model, combining the best international schools' course structure, curriculum coherence, academic intensity of courses, and homework load with the best American school and college standards, Massachusetts frameworks, and modern scientific content¹. The SOKA teaching approach is based on the following principles:

- Subject-specific courses. For example, science will be taught in three separate subjects: physics, chemistry and biology. Social studies will be taught in two separate subjects: world history and geography. English language arts will be split into english language and world literature courses.
- The subjects will be taught over a multi-year timeframe. For example, the world history, literature, history of art and philosophy courses will be taught in a 7-year chronological sequence. In sciences, students will study biology in each of 7 years, chemistry and physics in each of 6 years, and computer science in each of 7 years.

¹ Our model is an expanded version of that developed by the Advanced Math & Science Academy Charter School, Marlborough, MA (www.amsacs.org). The academic success of AMSA over the three years of its existence confirms applicability and demonstrates the effectiveness of this educational model.

- Each course will be organized as a logical sequence and each subsequent year of learning will be built upon the foundation laid in the prior years.
- All courses will be tightly coordinated to complement and mutually reinforce each other.
- To ensure high achievement of the entire student body, all students will take the same sequence of courses in the middle school.
- To ensure that all students are served, they will be offered a choice of two concentrations, or pathways, starting in 9th grade: math-science and humanities pathways.

To ensure that all students are engaged and challenged appropriately, the Academy will teach a number of subjects such as math, physics and chemistry on flexible, differentiated levels of difficulty.

To ensure that all students successfully meet our academic standards we incorporated a strong system of support penetrating every subject, level, grade, and classroom. To this end, our entering 6th grade will be a two-year program with the option to test out into the one-year option. Other support elements include smaller class size for math; teacher assistants in the core classrooms; individual and small group tutoring; optional for most students, but mandatory for some, longer day with extensive after school academic program.

Our Culture, Philosophy and Values

SOKA will support its rigorous curriculum with a philosophical, ethical, and social and discipline system of values, which will serve as a basis for our school culture. The system is based on the humanistic, value-creating model of Japanese Soka education philosophy. “*Soka*” is a Japanese word that means "to create value." Soka educational principles were first formulated by the Japanese educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), a supporter of many of John Dewey’s educational principles, and further developed by Daisaku Ikeda who founded a network of secular Soka schools worldwide as well as Soka Universities in Japan and the United States (www.soka.ed.jp).

Each member of the school community - starting with the board of trustees and continuing to administrators, teachers, students, and parents - will strive to establish a school culture that imbues our mission, vision, and goals of achieving a high-standard of learning along with a humanistic vision.

These values will be promoted and celebrated through the daily routine, policies and procedures, code of conduct, traditions, practices, the school’s physical environment, the way of communication within the entire school community, assemblies, and school-wide events. Following the personal example of adults at SOKA, the students will:

- Bring forth inner courage, wisdom, and compassion – through active participation in SOKA’s every day life, learning from interaction with teachers and peers, and through the school-wide mentoring system. At our school we will respect and support each other!
- Develop intellectual curiosity and love for learning - through high standards and knowledge in math, science, technology, and humanities. At our school it will be “cool” to know more!
- Develop a sense of individual responsibility for one’s own life and success - through taking on responsibilities and carrying through. At our school everyone will know: it is up to me to make my life better!
- Prepare to work for and guard world peace, freedom, and develop appreciation for diversity - through the understanding of world history and cultures. At our school being different will not mean to be a stranger!
- Learn to respect, protect, and nourish the environment - through the understanding of natural sciences and knowledge of the laws of the universe. At our school we will learn that the world is our home!

The Student Population and the Need

If successfully chartered, SOKA Charter School will open in September 2010 with 368 students in grades 6 through 9. It will grow one grade a year and, when at full capacity in the fourth year, it will serve 585 students in grades 6 through 12. SOKA will be a regional charter school, serving students from Worcester, Oxford, and Leicester.

The need for a high-standards, academically rigorous school in the service area is evident from standardized academic test results that are below or substantially below the state average in many categories. By combining the rigorous math, science, and humanities curriculum with the supporting, value-creating philosophy and ethics system, the Academy will serve students with a wide range of abilities and socio-economic backgrounds and help them to compete for colleges and jobs locally and globally, to realize their highest potential and create value in their lives. Students with disabilities, English language learners, and at-risk students will be exposed to higher standards, more social interaction, and feel part of a community focused on attaining success through education.

In addition, the Worcester area has a long history of attracting immigrant populations from all over the world, initially because of the large number of manufacturing jobs and more recently as a major center for hospitals, bio-tech companies, and colleges. The Academy's focus on both math and science and world studies speaks both to the multicultural population as well as this shift from primarily manufacturing to high tech industries.

Capacity

The SOKA Charter School founding group currently consists of 16 members from the community: parents, educators, school administrators, professionals, and community activists. The founding group members are highly motivated and committed to the development of the school. About 350 residents of the core districts signed a petition of support for SOKA and 12 letters of endorsement from prominent institutions such as; Bose Corporation, Becker College, WPI, YMCA, Great Brook Valley Health Center, Northeastern University, SAORI Worcester and UMASS Medical School; as well as parents from the core districts.