

## Springfield Collegiate Charter School

Questions as derived from Panel Review

### 1. How have your personal and professional experiences led you each to propose a K-8 charter school in Springfield?

- Gareth Ross, Board Member (Treasurer) – I am an executive at Mass Mutual. I have two young children. At my day job I hear a lot about educational issues of Springfield. The opportunity to have the chance to help 300-plus kids is important.
- Bill Spirer – I am the proposed Executive Director of Springfield Collegiate. I'm very proud to be here today with this team and I'm excited to share our vision. I've spent my entire career working in low income communities, primarily with children and families. I worked as public school teacher and then as a child welfare attorney in the juvenile court system in Massachusetts. I worked in schools that didn't always deliver for their students and I worked in others that did. The ones that did, and the ones that I have studied as part of my Building Excellence Schools fellowship are what motivate me because they are proof points of what is possible for kids even if they come from difficult circumstances. With all the foundation work we've done it has become even clearer how high the stakes are for families in Springfield. We look forward to working with families to make this school a reality.
- Susan Walsh, Chief Academic Officer for Building Excellent Schools – I'm from Building Excellent Schools. I'm the Chief Academic Officer with BES. I've been with organization since 2004. I'm the primary trainer of the fellowship and continue to support and grow quality charter schools. I work closely with Excel Academy and Boston Prep. I used to be principal at Boston Collegiate. I was a founding teacher of one of the first charter schools in the state. I am passionate about building quality charter schools, not just another school.
- John Brown, Board Member – I couldn't be more excited to be here today. I have a passion for education, which comes from my upbringing. My father worked for 30 years in the middle school in a district that was faced with some of the same challenges that Springfield faces. My mother was a community college admissions officer and she saw students that weren't very prepared for college and for life. I come with a background in real estate and finance. I look forward to drawing on that background and meshing my two passions: business and education.
- James Duda, Board Member (Chair) – I am a partner at a law firm in Springfield. I was raised in Springfield and I went to Springfield public schools. Since returning to the city about 20 years ago, I've been involved in a number of economic development and social service activities both as a board member and as a volunteer. I love the Springfield area and I care very deeply about the city. I recognize that single biggest factor that can drive the city forward is it's schools and educational system. I'm convinced Springfield Collegiate could be an important

part of that process. As a former member of two school committees in Massachusetts I understand the challenges this board will face and I know we all look forward to that challenge.

- Peter Ellis, Board Member – I’m the father of three daughters; six-year old, four-year old, and a newborn. I’m a local business owner in Springfield. I’ve been a business owner for eight-plus years. I’ve been really involved in the local business community and other voluntary community efforts. Being part of many different boards in Springfield, such as Young Professionals Society of Greater Springfield and Chamber of Commerce, there has been a lot of communication between leaders with concerns about the quality of education in Springfield and it’s availability to students. A drive for a future talent seeker such as myself is the quality of education available to draw from. I’m excited to bring a proven educational program to the kids of Springfield.
- Jennifer Gabriel, Board Member – I am the Vice President of community relations at TD Bank. I work in Springfield. I live in Springfield and I have a child in the Springfield school system in the age demographic that we’re referencing, so this is near and dear. As the community relations person at TD Bank, I’ve had the opportunity to go out and see a lot of different educational institutions and one thing that becomes very apparent quickly is that those that have the most structure and support in place, those children were thriving academically. I also sit on the Springfield Business Leaders for Education board and through that I can see that corporate leaders in the community support efforts coming in that will help our children excel. It’s important for me for all kids in Springfield to get quality educational opportunities.
- Kelvin Molina, Board Member – I’m a community organizer working in three of the more challenged neighborhoods in the city of Springfield including the south end which is the proposed site of Springfield Collegiate. I am a resident of Springfield and I’ve been there all my life. I’m also a product of the Springfield school system. My seven siblings are also products of the school system and currently I also have 8 nieces and nephews who are in the school system. So, I am well aware of the challenges that we’re facing as a city with our education. I work for HAP Housing, which is a large non-profit focused on home ownership and education. We’ve been in the south end for over 30 years so our organization has strong ties to the community and we have their full support. There is a great need for this school in the South End. The South End currently doesn’t have an elementary school that serves its students.
- Robin Olejarz, Board Member (Vice Chair) – I am a certified public accountant and also the CFO at the YMCA of greater Springfield. I was born and raised in Springfield and I am a product of the Springfield public schools. I’m also married to a retired high school teacher of Springfield public schools. He’s been in the public school system for 34 years. Through those years we’ve seen a decline in the preparedness of students for high school. At the YMCA, I am responsible for

approximately a \$12 million budget of which 40% is from government. So, I am well aware of the regulatory environment and the use of public funding. I also see the preschoolers everyday and I believe they deserve a chance to enter another quality program within their community.

- Danielle Williams, Board Member (Secretary) – I am a former prosecutor. I am also the co-author and co-creator of a young adult super hero story called “Mighty Magical Majestics.” I also coordinate a program for young girls called “Lead to Succeed” which encourages young girls to reach their highest potential. I worked with young people in Springfield and I’ve seen firsthand what happens when young people don’t have an education and how discouraged they become and the poor choices they can make. I am honored to be part of this board and part of giving children foundations for competitive futures.
- Misha Charles, Director of Governance and Board Development at Building Excellent Schools – I am the Director of Governance and Board Development at Building Excellent Schools. I’ve worked with over a dozen charter school boards across the country as well as here in Massachusetts helping them to recruit the right kind of people for their boards, training them in the area of governance and preparing them to be really good stewards of the public trust. I am very excited to have this conversation today.

### **Mission, Vision, Description of the Community (ies) to be Served, and Capacity**

**2. What do you consider the most prevalent “barriers to learning” for your targeted student population? What programming will you implement at the proposed school to address these obstacles? What does a rigorous academic program for K and 1 mean in practice? How are you going to address the needs of the youngest students? What do you consider the unique challenges of an early education curriculum?**

- In many conversations with residents of the South End and across the city, we’ve learned three things: One is safety related to the long commute for students and another is access to the school. Parents struggle to be an active part of their child’s education. There are also language barriers in many cases. 60% of Springfield’s public school children are Latino, so there are a number of language barriers. Lastly, there are concerns about the rigor of academics in the schools. While college is talked about and referenced, the foundation in early years to lead up to a college preparatory high school curriculum is lacking in many city schools. We offer a safe and structured environment. There are challenges of being a student today. To have a quality education, students need to feel safe to have a successful education. We’ll be over-communicating with parents so they know what’s going at school wide level and student level. The rigor of academics is the single most important thing. We’re pulling best practices from schools in Massachusetts as well as nationally and providing remediation and acceleration for every student.

- We want our students to see education as fun and exciting. We want to cultivate a college preparatory atmosphere, but these are young children, so we want to be developmentally appropriate. There will be time for them to engage with classmates, such as during Turn and Talk and Choice Time. There will be time for them in the morning to be greeted with nicknames and fun handshakes, so there are elements of joy and warmth. With regard to rigor, literacy is very important, especially in the younger years. We imagine that we'd have no more than a 9-1 ratio for K-2 so that there is a lot of one-on-one between teachers and students. There would be literacy stations with a mixture of guided reading and reading mastery as well as a computer in order to develop vocabulary, phonics, and reading comprehension.

**3. What progress have you made since submitting your final application to engage families and the community in your vision? What outreach have you made to families in Springfield? How have you determined interest in this type of program for Springfield families? What partnerships have you been developing with community agencies to recruit and support potential students and their families? What external partnerships will you bring into the school?**

- Throughout process, we've logged in combined total 300 hours of outreach. We've also conducted information sessions within actual apartment complexes. We've made relationships with the management of the housing authorities. We're also hosting focus groups and telling everybody what we're all about. We've received over 300 signatures of endorsement from parents and stakeholders in the city. We continue to engage residents. People are well aware of our school. People are familiar and aware of the school and charter process.
- All of us have leveraged our personal and professional networks. We're all on other boards. We're planning many focus groups and mentions at board meetings. We're finding people that can help, and people who can help financially as well.

**Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction**

**1. Explain the selection of PRIDE values (Preparation, Respect, Integrity, Determination, and Enthusiasm.)**

- We're trying to build culture through a set of values. I've taken these values from previous schools that I've worked in. *Preparation* teaches students how to be prepared, which is such a vital part of their success. That means showing up on time, having desks organized, having homework done—even in kindergarten—and helping with developing them along with their personal growth. We added integrity from the prospectus. *Integrity* is a little harder to teach explicitly but it is a very important value. We added it because we've seen other schools use the value as high level as integrity with young students. Teaching them for example to do the right thing, even when no one is looking. These are important values to the school-wide community and be learned and exhibited by young students.

**2. Bill Spirer: As the proposed Executive Director, what elementary education expertise do you have? What resources will you access to support curriculum (learning standards, scope and sequences) and assessment (interim assessments) development?**

- I was a high school teacher. I've given a lot of thought to this before making the proposal. We know that you can predict, with reasonable accuracy, high school graduation rates with third grade reading scores. Right now in Springfield and in many urban areas, reading scores are incredibly low. In Springfield, nearly 60% of third graders are not reading at grade level. I saw in my own students, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders, difficulty with reading grade level text because there was a lack of foundation. Starting in the earliest years is a powerful way to impact trajectory of a child's life. Through the BES fellowship I have been able to immerse myself in elementary education for the last year and that will continue in the planning year. I was able to spend a number of days with Capital Collegiate—a school with similar model in California. I spent time with teachers and leadership during professional development and into the opening weeks of schools. I developed new skills. I learned that elementary literacy and numeracy are very important and learned many new skills that are very different from my experience. I've also focused a lot on elementary early development. I spent a lot of time with leadership at the Edward Brooke Schools. I'm doing residency at University Prep in Denver soon, a school with a very similar model. I'm going to be in classrooms, giving reading mastery lessons, leading guided reading, working with school leaders, exploring emotional and behavioral issues and immersing myself as often as possible.

**3. During Summer Institute, teachers will utilize the learning standards and interim assessments produced during the planning year to develop plans for the coming school year, including lessons and unit plans. What is expected to have been produced by each teacher by the end of the Institute?**

- It's very important that we have a clear vision of what should be taught and when. One of priorities for the planning year will be developing a clear scope and sequence for the lower school. We will provide teachers the leadership team. We'll create assessments, interim and final, and we'll create the scope and sequence. Even before the Summer Institute, during conference calls and retreats in the spring, teachers will get the scope and sequence and learn about the process to create that. At the end of Summer Institute, teachers would be expected to have a yearlong scope. We would provide standards, while teachers plot by actionable learning objectives along calendar. The Summer Institute is focused less on lesson planning for the first month of school, but focused more on detailed planning for the first year so that teachers are focused on how to teach something well instead of what to teach.

**4. How will the various tools of the assessment system be linked to curriculum and instruction in the classroom?**

- There are a lot of assessments there. We chose those because they provide important data points and offer different types of data. STEP is a comprehensive data management and instructional tool and the anchor assessment of K -2 grades. STEP is driving curriculum. We would build in days to re-teach key standards and to allow some flexibility because there will be some changes to pacing of instruction depending on the needs of students coming in. STEP drives most of our instruction in K-2. ANet is focused on 2-8, so that we have clear picture of how well students are reading for content, and for math, how fluent they are with procedures for problem-solving. The standards would inform our planning and assessments drive our curriculum and standards, not the other way around. We have a backwards planning design. We'll meet regularly on data days to tweak instructions based on assessment data.

**5. Describe the instructional methods that we would expect to see in classrooms. Describe what teaching methods and strategies will be used for supporting a wide variety of students needs. What are the specific supports for struggling students?**

- We'll draw heavily from Teach Like a Champion. For example, we want 100% participation in classroom. We don't want one student to answer every question. We want everyone to participate. It might also look something like every student in a math class having a white board with their answers on it. We'll focus on literacy because it's so essential to our school. We'll have three rotating 45 minute learning block sessions for literacy. They'll be a guided reading lesson where a teacher is pushing the rigor for 45 minutes. Then there will be another 45 minutes with other teacher using the reader mastery curriculum to increase phonics, sound recognition, decoding, high frequency sight words, and fluency. Those two are the basis of our literacy curriculum. We'll push rigor and expectations, but also build a culture where students are excited. We'll have strategies that bring joy into the classroom, for example we'll have physical activities that bring students into lessons in a supportive way.
- We will have a Response to Intervention model. We want to make sure that all teachers and parents are aware of the RTI framework. Through the RTI frameworks we would offer support and interventions that could be as simple as moving a student's desk because he's distracting others or it could be as involved as involved one-on-one support. If we see that there is no response to our interventions, we would move into a comprehensive evaluation process and we would offer the full range of supports required under the law and also to make sure students are successful. So that means making sure that every student with a disability has an IEP and reviewing annually at very least to make sure the annual goals and services are appropriate. The inclusion model would be our primary model, but in some case a pullout model would be used when need be and we would have staffing to do that. It would depend on needs of the students. We

would look to do pull-out in a way that wouldn't detract from fundamental classes such as literacy or math, but not in away that would detract from key developmental times like choice time, recess, lunch; it's about taking them out at the right times so that it doesn't take away from their experience.

### **Assessment, Promotion, and Graduation Standards**

**1. Explain the standards-based grading system you have chosen to use. What experience, Bill, do you have with this type of system? How will assessments be integrated into the grading system?**

- We talked to many school leaders and the standards-based grading is the choice for many schools because it aligns for schools that are data driven. It's the most accurate and objective way to track skills; that's what I believe. It's more valuable for parents to have that level of detail, rather than a letter grade that doesn't give enough detail. The downside is that it could be a lot for a parent to take in; the language may not be what they are used to on a report card. We want to make sure that we are educating parents on standards. We'd provide school average and a standard, so parents could see quick snapshot in addition to detail.

**2. Describe the development of the proposed standards for promotion for the different grades. How will you adjust your promotion policy for English language learners and/or students with disabilities?**

- We'll certainly have a complaint process in place. As a general rule, issue will be brought to teacher first, if that doesn't work than it'll be brought to Executive Director, then if that doesn't work, the board will get involved.
- The board will also have dashboard assessment looking at the results of what we're suppose to meet. We'll know in advance, before something comes up. Overall to us, literacy at young level is important. We understand students will have varying abilities and we'll have the staff and expertise so that we can maintain the rigor and the results we need to meet. There will be a process for the board to communicate with the managers and the teachers to assess and deal with any situation.
- The goal is the success of the student. We'll make changes and adjustments so that the student succeeds. Maybe that success is measured slightly differently than an average assessment. The teachers are the experts and the judges as to where the student should be.
- As a board, we don't have particular expectations about retention levels. We'll be looking at results and seeing if we are succeeding as a school. Individual curriculum decisions are not going to be our decisions; we'll turn to management for that. If those management decisions aren't working then we'll need to take

further steps. In terms of a specific student, we will adhere to the procedure, unless there is a problem.

**3. With your commitment to accept new students through 6<sup>th</sup> grade, the proposed school will encounter the need to provide targeted remediation for students who enter far below grade level. Tell us about the strategies that will be implemented to address the needs of these students. Describe how tutorials and Saturday Academy will support struggling students to be successful and limit the retention of students.**

- These are complicated questions that schools struggle with on a regular basis. The most important thing here is that we are constantly communicating with parents with any concerns we have and what our plan is. We want to make sure their child is ready to move to high school and college. We'll know in advance if students are below certain levels. This is the benefit of a data-driven school where we know far in advance if a student is struggling. We want to be up front with parents and frontload the conversation and say you know "your child is at a below pre-reader level in the second grade. We're excited but there is a chance your kid won't make up enough ground." In talking to other school leaders with high ELL populations, in the early years there is much less struggle with ELL retention because kindergarten is such a time of rapid language acquisition anyway that kindergarteners are getting up to speed. For example, I was just speaking with a leader at a school I will be spending time at and he said that 100% of his ELLs in kindergarten were at grade level. It's more of an issue in the later grades if we take in new students. That might be the place that I struggle with the most as a school leader.
- The board supports that model. It's a tough model and at times there will be decisions that make it hard, but that is the model we are adopting. That's the no excuses model that says "ELL is not an excuse for not being at grade level."
- So there's that cultural piece of coming into a new school environment that is probably foreign to a lot of students in traditional district schools. We'd offer a class: Springfield Collegiate 101. We'd give implicit instructions; this is how it looks different here; it's fun, students like it and we want to help you make transition. In terms of the remediation, in the K-2 years, the two teacher model has extra support. Beyond that it's really looking towards pull-out intervention as much as necessary. That could be a substantial amount of pull-out intervention. We'll have to be conservative in our budget and be agile and flexible to support more learning needs. The balance for us means making sure we are including students in the inclusion model, in the classroom in incidences that advances their skills, but do pullout interventions at times where it would benefit them.
- One of the issues my father had as a middle school guidance counselor was attendance. We have a true focus on attendance because nothing that we described will work if the student is not attending class.



## **School Characteristics**

### **1. What strategies will you use to establish your school culture?**

- The Springfield 101 is a catch up on culture.
- It's funny, when I walked into the room I shook Alyssa's hand and everyone shook her hand because it's common practice. At schools, to say this is a threshold, you are crossing into a school, this is sacred space, and even for kindergarten we teach them to shake hands and say good morning. Uniforms are part of that. We want to make sure students know the importance of appearing prepared and part of a team. There are also strategies that involve building culture at classroom level and school level. Classrooms will be named after the alma mater of the teacher and would learn a fight song of that teacher's alma mater. We probably won't call them "fight song"; that's probably not politically correct anymore. We'll have celebrations of achievement every single day and week. This will be a big part of school culture. We want parents to be very involved in schools. Weekly pride award for exhibiting good work where parents will come in to celebrate. Part of the culture is wanting to do well; it's not "cool" to push back, it is "cool" to embrace it. We'll give out various awards. We'll give out cum laude, magna cum laude, summa cum laude awards so students can develop the language of college but also so they can develop the sense that their performance is something that they should care about. There will a lot of little things as well, such as cheers after student gets question right. There will be constant reinforcement that it's good to do things right.
- To the board, this is also important. We'll see data every week, we will probably use Kickboard to see the progress of the PRIDE awards; so we'll see how it's working.

### **2. Describe the co-teaching model proposed for K-2 classrooms.**

- We base this primarily on the importance of a low teacher-to-student ratio. All the research shows that small class size matters the most in the K-2 years. Having the two teacher model, during the literacy instruction, there will be three stations. There will 8-9 kids in each reading group, grouped by ability and students could move based on skill level. One teacher will do a direct discussion on phonics. One teacher will focus on reading comprehension. One teacher will be at computer application reading station, where students can get a lot of reading practice. Those lessons will really be driven by STEP. There are clear benefits for literacy. For math it allows a teacher to do one lesson to the class, and then the other teacher small pullout, or more supportive work in back of classroom. Differentiation is one of the most challenging, but also one of the most important. Two teachers increase our ability to differentiate.

**[Follow-up: “Is it a teacher and a teacher assistant or two teachers? What’s the model for staffing?”]**

- There will be two fully certified teachers. We wouldn’t call them fellow. There will most likely be three slightly more experienced teachers, then three relatively new teachers. But it depends on staffing; if we get more experienced teachers, then we might have more lead teachers. A pay difference would exist between lead and associate teachers, but it would be slight, depending on experience levels. Lead teachers would take on most critical lessons. So give the associate teacher a chance to develop important skills.
- Both teachers would have same work labor, unless a lead teacher took on leadership opportunities. We don’t view it as a pathway to teaching. You’re a full time teacher whether you are associate or lead. Students and parents wouldn’t even know that there was a lead and an associate. It’s more for salary and strategic purposes.

**3. How are teachers supported by school leadership to create sustainable working conditions?**

- Sustainability is such an important issue in all schools and charter schools. The model that we have proposed has built into it some mechanisms to increase sustainability. For example, the two teacher model; they can split lesson planning duties strategically and have support in classroom that makes the daily challenge of a teacher more manageable. Shared lesson plans can be used effectively to create quality plans. The main draw is that it is a supportive atmosphere. With regard to support, I will be in classes for a large majority of the day. We can support and coach teachers on the spot; telling a student to sit up straight or get on task. At a community level, we are in it together. Teachers want the extra professional development so they can grow. We make sure teachers have time for professional development and data analysis. The teacher culture is important.
- From the board’s prospective, regarding retention of teachers, we have a teacher-centric school and this is critical. We also have an incremental pay grade for teachers, which helps as well.
- There is an academic draw and financial draw. Teachers enter field with pride to teach children and we will show that excitement which in turn will re-motivate children.

**4. Why is the upper school day an hour longer (the schedule does not indicate what is happening in the last hour) and what is the rationale for a similar curricular structure in the upper grades when presumably the gaps have been closed for students who have attended Springfield Collegiate for 5 years prior?**

- The common core has a strong focus on informational texts. There is starting to be a 50/50 balance on the need to focus on informational texts as much as literary

texts. I think having a non-fiction class and a literature class is important for developing both those skill sets. In terms of Math, the common core is focused on procedural fluency balanced with conceptual understanding. There's a problem-solving class and a procedures class where students can work on concepts and foundational skills. Students should be at grade level, but we want to push beyond and those two blocks allow us to do that.

- We heard from parents that they wanted additional programs for academic support and enrichment. In upper schools we can introduce more enrichment in that time. That extra hour can be used for detention/or homework club. Also sports and enrichment would be offered. We don't want to sacrifice important parts of a whole education by adding more literacy and math. That extra hour is for enrichment; arts, yoga, and sports. The time is for homework, discipline, but the double dismissal period allows for sports and enrichment. It could be used in different ways. We could be talking about an hour and half of homework for upper grades. The focus block on the schedule could be used for a study hall block, enrichment, or catch up or for excelling students. It would be critical time for students who are behind grade level who need to catch up.

### **Special Student Populations and Services**

**1. How was the special student populations and student services section developed? What expertise does the founding group have presently regarding English language learners and students with disabilities?**

- With the ELLs, as a board we looked to the "Massachusetts Primer on Special Education and Charter Schools" to give us a foundation. In terms of when school is in session, we understand that those ELL communities will be served even more than some of our standard students as the routines and the structures that are going to be in place have been shown to really benefit those communities. As a board, we've also gone through the research as to how these techniques will work towards our special ed and ELL learners.

**2. The application clearly states the commitment to meet regulatory requirements in responding to students' needs. Please provide examples of how the proposed school will respond to different students' needs.**

- We'll be having family orientation with every family coming into the school, explaining parents' rights of students with disabilities, types of accommodations we can offer to students with disabilities and what we can offer. The most important thing is that we are an inclusive school; in our recruiting in both English and Spanish. We'll have bilingual community meetings so our ELL population is aware of the services at the school. A lot of our work is educating people that this is for everyone; the programs and structures will serve everyone. In terms of service provision, we'll be providing a full range of services and

accessing as many resources as possible to provide those services. We'll be flexible in our budget depending on students' service needs. We will be aggressive about being compliant with laws. In my previous job, I represented child clients in special education and disciplinary proceedings. Following disciplinary implications of the special education population is something we need to constantly be aware of.

**3. What is your rationale for special education and ELL staffing decisions? Please explain the special education staffing model for Years 1 and 2?**

- There's a compliance side of special education, then there's making sure we are serving every single child. Those two dovetail often. In terms of special education teachers, we had initially proposed .5. In hindsight a full FTE makes more sense given the likely numbers and then supplement that with the administrative tasks whether through additional stipend or just a .5 FTE position. These are our best guesses, but we have to be flexible and budget conservatively. In terms of ELL, we are expecting 16% according to the district numbers. We may face more language difficulties in early grades. There are efforts in the Department to increase teacher certification opportunities. So we'll look to that for our teachers. Those staffing levels are somewhat fluid. Especially the special education level is something that we want to increase.
- When we are talking about evaluating, from board's angle, as part of review process, one of the evaluation processes is to check teachers' licensure, certifications, etc. every year. We're seeing this information on a higher level and are we meeting those needs and being fluid.

**4. Describe your plan for nutrition and ancillary services at the proposed school.**

- Nutrition and the full health of the student is important. We'll have fitness classes and a lot of activity during the day to support the overall health of students. We would look to service providers that offer high quality food with a high level of nutrition. Springfield has some limitations as to which providers are serving district. We take it very seriously; if a student isn't eating well, they aren't learning well. There will be an opportunity for breakfast every day for every student. There will be an opportunity for a snack, and of course lunch. This supports our academic program.
- There is a line in the budget for other student services like occupational therapy and counseling. We would add to that and supplement with Medicaid funding where it is appropriate. Depending on needs of the students, we have flexibility in budget to add counseling services. In year two we would hire a Dean of Students and Culture with a counseling or social work background to integrate our behavioral model of the school. In first year, given our size, we would not have an onsite psychologist or counselor, but we'd contract out with area providers. We

would have a part-time nurse on site.

- We haven't firmed up any commitments yet. As a board we do know that we have to leverage our networks and do outreach and form collaborations.
- There is a strong relationship with Square One, a large non-profit in area that specializes in social development and interested in offering such services to parents. They are on board short of an official endorsement.
- I had lunch with CEO of Mass Mutual, and he's receptive to supporting us when the time is right. Mass Mutual gives million of dollars a year to education.
- We have financial support from Davis Foundation. They can help us with fundraising.

### Enrollment and Recruitment

**1. Describe your rationale for creating an initial enrollment “bubble” of 81 kindergarten students which does not align with the remaining grow-out structure of 48 students. Why not open initially with kindergarten and first grade?**

- The goal of enrollment plan is to retain a small school size, while also paying teachers and staff competitive salaries. We think that the 48 per year is the right number for school size. In terms of start-up needs, having a larger kindergarten made sense. We didn't want to start K and 1 so that we get the culture and curriculum right. We'll build it slowly over the years, rather than that stagger model where our resources are split between K and 1. Economically and foundationally, with that one-year less of foundation that we think is important, we don't want to miss that year.

**[Follow-up: “Are you committed to backfilling?”]**

- In our prospectus we indicated that our ideal number would be 72 students, 24 per grade. We made a slight modification so that our budget was conservative, given that we couldn't include the CSP funding at certain levels; we couldn't guarantee which levels they'd be offered at. We increased slightly the number without making the student-to-teacher ratio unfavorable. Our intent would be to start with 72 and go back to that target number. We are committed to backfilling.

### Governance and Management

**1. What do you think are the primary challenges the board and school may face if chartered? What skills and knowledge does the founding group possess to address these challenges? Tell us about the daylong board retreat that was held in September.**

- Over the next two years, our two biggest challenges are finding facilities and the recruiting of teachers. Great teachers are critical in the success of our model.
- A facility is a challenge. We've reached out to local governmental organizations and local non-profit and for-profit developers who have worked with charter schools. On the governmental side, the local office of economic development has been very helpful on helping us think through our site location and which sites are owned by state or the city. On the private side we are speaking with two developers, Appleton Corporation and Bill Baldwin. We've located about five sites today, including one primary site. We are on top of the facility search.
- The slow growth model allows us to be flexible with facilities, from lease to ownership angles.
- We recognize that we are a public body. We take on a new set of responsibilities. Our retreat was mostly about that; it was a governance retreat. We went through a range of issues with BES, including basic board responsibilities, the difference between management and board in terms of responsibilities and decision-making, handling conflicts, conflicts of interest issues and even things like requirements for financial disclosures annually. We've all learned a lot and continue to learn. And we've been meeting very frequently and reviewing other issues like open meeting law.

**2. Please provide examples of board versus administrative decision-making.**

- Complaints should not be a board matter. Board should not be dealing with individual students. It's staff concern, then a management concern. If they can't be resolved at management level, then perhaps we can get involved. If it's a single issue, I don't know if we would get involved unless it's a legal issue or harassment, then we cross into the area, because it's a board concern.
- Management will do employment, except for Executive Director. Budget, fund distribution, is the board's responsibility.
- Curriculum design is management's domain. Beyond the charter, the implementation is the domain of management.

**3. What resources did you use to develop your enrollment policy, recruitment and retention plan, and board bylaws?**

- This is a different entity than what we are used to, so we've been using BES resources for bylaws and borrowed from. We are comfortable with bylaws in application. We have also discussed attendance policies and conflicts of interest.

- The enrollment policy at this stage is under management's guide. If we adopt as a policy, the board will become more familiar with it.
- Our mission to serve community informs the enrollment policy. Our mission drives everything and informs bylaws and happens to be consistent with BES model.
- It's critically important to all of us that this school reflects the community. Our enrollment policy is predicated on the fact that we want to reflect our community.

**4. What plans does the proposed board have to recruit additional members who could contribute to the existing diverse skills and qualifications of this proposed board? What qualifications are lacking from the proposed board presently?**

- We don't have dedicated human resources experience, but we all have cultivated experience together that has brought us to a high level of expertise in human resources.

**[Follow up regarding how comfortable board feels in its ability to oversee the Executive Director as no one on the board has substantial education experience]**

- We recognize that our Executive Director is our only hire and a large portion of how we oversee the school is going to be going through him. We have mechanisms in place, such as the dashboards, which we will be monitoring performance with, both academically and financially. We recognize our three overall responsibilities: academic success of the institution, the financial viability of the charter, and being true to our charter. We'll have ability on a monthly basis to monitor these are coming along. We're in an excellence position to monitor the Executive Director's performance.
- Data driven model helps us evaluate Bill. We all have frequent interaction with him with the added transparency that comes with the data, we have the skills as a board to oversee.

**5. What support will BES provide to the board if the proposed charter school is granted a charter?**

- I think it's reflected in budget that we're looking at a three-year contract initially with BES. They'll help with governance area, strategic planning, ongoing training, and assistance with selection of board members, which are services they've already provided. We would be looking at about 120 hours. We see them as a resource of experience and expertise. Any areas that we don't have expertise, we look to them for help.
- They'll help with professional development, training and support in that area.

**6. Tell us about the process the board will use to evaluate its own effectiveness as a governing body.**

- We have a board dashboard for ourselves with probably 40-50 points and questions we need to answer, from small to big concerns whether its attendance, agendas, etc. We'll look at our minutes, committee formations, our committee reports, financial committee and our budget. We will follow the dashboard that we will have in place. That was one of the issues that we struggled with early on that BES helped us a lot with this. As long as we do our job the school will do well.
- All board members understand how important our roles are. We will have checks and balances throughout board.
- We recognize that the school is on our shoulders.

**[Follow up on Executive Director Succession Plan]**

- We've discussed, but we're waiting to see if get chartered on this item. It's one of the first things we'd do if get chartered, who would be an interim successor; leadership needs to be in place before succession plan is developed.

**[Follow-up: "You are prepared to move full steam ahead if Bill steps down?"]**

- We've discussed finding certain directors and then identifying whether or not these are people that could step in. Bill will select a potential leader of the school should he step down. BES also has people that they can appoint should we need them.

**7. Describe how Bill Spirer was selected as the proposed Executive Director and why he is the best candidate for the role.**

- Bill is committed to mission and familiar with the no excuses model and has experience in urban schools. His background around working as lawyer on behalf of kids in urban environments and teaching kids is critical experience. He brings a network of teachers through Teach for America for recruiting of new teachers. He's already been in a role of teaching teachers. He has familiarity with K – 8 schools. He has perspective of principals at K – 8 schools and has gone to the best schools in the nation and picked up best practices. The board also has skill sets that compliment him. That plus BES makes him a great choice.

**8. Sue Walsh or Misha Charles: Describe the support services provided by Building Excellent Schools to the proposed school if chartered.**

- We help with key things such as doing student enrollment and doing public lottery correctly. These areas are critical in terms of family buy-in and legal



requirements. We also assist with staffing, hiring the right people, screening resumes, phone screens, and being part of the final process of Bill's decisions. We'll also be in schools to provide culture audits and curriculum audits. We'll be there to assist leaders through the challenges of the first year. We'd support from year 1, year 2 and well beyond.

- We're deeply invested in the work of the school leader and his board. We'll continue to work with him through Connect to Excellence. Through the program we offer a number of supports in the areas of governance, strategic planning sessions, and goals and action plans; something that the committees can act on immediately. I'll work with them on general board development work, process for evaluating Bill and themselves, understand expectations as governors and not as managers, and recruiting right people; every year they are assessing the gaps of expertise on the board.

### **Facilities and School Finances**

#### **1. How was your budget developed? How would the receipt of a Charter School Planning Grant change the school's allocation of funding?**

- I was lead developer of that, but Robin for example is a CPA and works as the CFO at the YMCA, so we talked about certain assumptions we could make in the region. John has background in finance and real estate, so we talked about some real estate assumptions. Beyond that I've done extensive finance training through fellowship program, as well as operations training. We spoke to charter school consultant to review our assumptions. We also went to other schools and compared numbers, for example unemployment insurance, utilities, etc.
- I spend most of my life looking at financial models and the assumptions from my perspective look reasonable.

#### **2. How will the proposed board achieve their fundraising goals (\$30K commitment annually (line item 8))? Explain the \$200K private grant indicated in FY2014 (pre-operational year).**

- There will be personal donations from each of us, but that won't be \$30K. There will also be fundraising events, using our networks for grant opportunities, and we know that we have backing of foundations. We have verbal support, not commitments, but support from funding organizations including Mass Mutual, Davis Foundation, Community Foundation in Western MA, and others.
- Davis Foundation commitment is if federal charter school planning money doesn't come through; it's not a commitment to match exactly \$200K level.
- There is strong support from Davis. They are eager for us to continue our work.

**3. How did you determine the salary structure for your teaching and operations staff, including special education, ESL teachers, and part-time nurse? Are these salaries competitive for the area? In recruiting high quality teachers, what specific qualifications will you look for in general education teachers and special education teachers? What are your priorities in hiring staffing?**

- They are competitive for the Springfield area. The average of \$45K/year is chosen based on other schools in area. We are 10-15% higher over the first 0-10 years of a teachers' career. That is part to compensate for extended day and year, which also compares to other schools in Massachusetts. I believe our salary structure is very similar to Veritas Preparatory Charter School. I don't know how it compares to others.
- A bonus program is something that we may consider depending on funding. This is largely dependent on funding, so it's not a fully flushed out program yet. It would be school wide bonus program though, not one teacher's scores vs. another.
- We want experienced teachers, but reality may change that, we may need to hire novice teachers.
- Priority number one is alignment to the mission. Hired teachers must truly believe that every child deserves the education that we are proposing and is dedicated to working hard to deliver that education. They need to be committed to mission, committed to the model, and have the right mindset. We'll take this very seriously in recruiting. Teachers should have a growth mindset and be able to instill that growth mindset into their students.