

City on a Hill II and City on a Hill New Bedford Charter School

Questions as derived from panel and documentation review

1. For the record, please introduce yourself and indicate your position on the board or at the existing and/or proposed school(s). Please include the number of years you've been involved with the organization and a brief description of your history with the organization. If a board member, please also describe the areas of expertise you bring to the board and which committees you are involved in as well.

- Erica Brown, Executive Director – I'm the current executive director at City on a Hill. I also serve as an Ex-Officio member of the board of trustees and serve on the human resources, finance, and strategic planning committees. I've been with COH since 1998. I have been a full-time English teacher, lead teacher of English, data coordinator, and was the principal before I became the executive director.
- Paul Hays, Chief Academic Officer – I'm the current principal at City on a Hill Charter Public School. I'm one of the founding teachers and helped open the school in 1995. I've served on the board of trustees as only a member of the sub-committees, not as a voting member of the board. I'm on the academic performance committee. In the future, as part of the proposal of our network, I will be serving at the Chief Academic Officer. I will oversee the school, the principals will report to me, and I will report directly to the executive director, Erica Brown.
- Kristie Loftus, Director of Development and Community Relations – I'm the director of development and community relations at City on a Hill. This is my fifth year at the school.
- Wanda Nascimento, Chief Financial Officer – I'm the controller at City on a Hill for the past two and a half years in a half-time capacity. I serve on the finance committee. I also hold a director of finance position for 11 years at a non-profit.
- Sonya Pratt-Masso, Principal CoaH II – I've been with City on a Hill since 2002. I am currently the vice principal at COH. I'm still a history teacher. One part of the dean of citizenship at the school, dealing with the discipline and I'm the proposed principal for City on a Hill II.
- Bob Mazzearella, Board Chair – I'm chair of the board, also chair of the foundations board. I've been chair of the board for the last six years. I serve on most of the committees. I am a retired Fidelity Investments veteran for some 20 years, most recently the president of Fidelity Brokerage. As a day job, I work on a number of public boards, private boards, non-profit boards and also work with venture capitalist firms to develop new companies.
- Michael Grossman, Board Vice Chair – I've been involved with City on a Hill for a little over 10 years now. I've been on the board for seven years. I currently serve

as the vice chair. In the past I've served as the head of the development committee and the finance committee, and now the trustees committee. I'm also the treasurer of the foundation board. I've been in that role for eight years. During the day, I am an investment officer at MFS Investments.

- Michael Rosen, Human Resources Committee Chair, School Performance Committee Member – I chair the human resources committee. I've been on the board for about two and a half years and for several years before that I was on the foundation board and several years before that I was helping the school on a pro bono capacity through my law firm, which is my regular day job, where I've been a partner for about 20 years where I specialize in labor and employment law.
- Lori Stevens, Trustees Committee Chair – I'm on the board of trustees. I've been on the board for about 2 ½ years. I chair the trustees committee. I'm the vice president for gross strategy and development for Mission Continues. Before that I was Chief Development Officer at Citizen Schools for six years.
- Kim Wechtenhiser, Governance Committee Chair, School Performance Committee Member – I'm a board member. I serve on the governance, strategic planning and academic performance committees. I've been involved with the school for several years. I first started at COH as a teacher in 1999. I've been serving on the board for the last three years. I'm currently the president of School Works.
- Jeff Jablow, Strategic Planning Committee Member – I am a trustee. I've been on the board for almost a year now. I am the senior vice president of strategy and operations at City Year. I've been there for about 8 years. I serve on the strategic planning and academic performance committees.
- Cara Stillings Candal – I'm on the board of trustees. I'm the chair of the academic performance committee. This is my second year on the board. In my day-to-day life, I am the director of research and curriculum for the National Academy of Advanced Teacher Education. I'm also a faculty member at Boston University.

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

1. Why replicate? How did the board decide to replicate the existing high school model in Boston and New Bedford rather than expand the existing school to include a middle school and/or grow to a K-12?

- Having been involved with school for a long time, the school has gone through many stages, from the learning stages to more stable stages. We bought a building which tested board financial capability. Once we got settled, we added an addition to the school. We felt like we were getting our legs under us and preparing for the future. We felt like we could do so much more. We were looking at lotteries where we had 700-800 kids waiting to get into the school. It was shame that we

couldn't do more. So, what do we do? It was a long process; do we do middle school, a high school? We got to the point where we said we do high school very well and there is a huge need for high school. This made sense to us. We felt good about our ability financially. It was time to move ahead.

- There are three reasons: One, our mission is to not ignore crisis in public education. Two, the number of applicants every year and parents looking for opportunity for their kids. Three, we have done a good job on holding onto our staff for a long period of time.
- The biggest thing that stood out when we were talking about this was that there is a huge need for high school. I thought it would be middle school at first, but after looking at the data and talking with leadership, there is a large need for a high school. Our financial condition is as strong as it's ever been, so we need to invest.
- There's so much innovation within the traditional schools in Boston, so we want to increase opportunity for kids in the traditional system.
- We do high school well. We pride ourselves in the fact that we can do all different students, whether they came from a charter school or a traditional public school. Boston needs more high quality high schools.
- This board understands how to be a board. We know we don't run the school; we are responsible for the oversight on the school. Our decisions are based on the people who are running the school.

2. Why New Bedford? What have you learned about the community of New Bedford that leads you to believe that it is a good fit for your model? How will New Bedford be different from Boston? How do you respond to members of the New Bedford community who strongly oppose the proposal?

- At my day job, I had the opportunity to be at a new charter school in New Bedford, Alma Del Mar, a couple weeks ago. I toured the school and spoke with the principal. He was also at our public hearing in New Bedford and spoke very eloquently about the need for a school there. There are fewer options in New Bedford. We are responding to that call.
- There is a tremendous need for choice in New Bedford. They only have one high school other than the charter which is a 5-12. Vocational Technical High School there is loaded and you really can't get into it.
- At the Mayor's forum, we heard from parents that there was a need and that they needed better options.
- It's important to know this was a very thoughtful process. We looked at nine gateway cities and weighed the pros and cons for each.

- We didn't want to be put in a box that we are just Boston. We believe we can move out of Boston and do something great for that community. Not all communities are the same, so there will be things that we have to change. We are a very adaptive school. We find needs and adapt to meet those needs. In the Boston area, students have a lot of other opportunities, there's less of that opportunity in New Bedford, which means we'll have to change somehow. We won't low our standards though.
- At the end of quarter one, at the first year in New Bedford, the teachers in civics history 1 will be administering the same assessments as the civics teacher at CoaH II and CoaH I, on the same day and we'll get the results that same day. How we respond to that as a network and how New Bedford responds to it as we continue with our dedication to teacher leadership, that's part of our mission, it's not going away. We'll have fundamental part of our network that are standardize and nonnegotiable, but the day-to-day instruction and implementation of the culture must be unique to New Bedford.
- The concrete things that will have to be done differently in New Bedford are transportation, because all of young people currently receive bus passes and use the MBTA to get to school. Another one is special populations; we know that we'll always have to be responsive and add staff where necessary when special populations change. I believe the ELL population is under represented in their data, so this will be a change that we'll have to make as we roll out our program. The partnerships in Boston allow us to be very successful. They offer a wide range of services to our students. Those partners won't necessarily translate to New Bedford.
- We're going to have a pre-opening advisory council that will be made up of parents and local leaders and members of our board to look at things like real estate and how the school might operate. That will morph into the school site council which is required that we have. We plan to have 1/3 of our board be from the New Bedford area, which will give them a lot of input with regard to the school.
- We've been very direct with everyone. There was a gentleman at the meeting that was very negative about us. We approached him to figure out what his issues were. We want to know why they are opposing, and then show them we're willing to plan and sometimes re-educate them. We understand there is going to be some resistance. I heard very little about children from opposition. I heard a lot of politics and funding, but not much about children. We're going to work with them though. We'll continue to take the high road.
- The lottery is a good example of how our approach would need to change in New Bedford. We don't want to get caught up in a dynamic of district vs. charter or union vs. non-union. What's unique about being in a city that has one

comprehensive high school is that we have an opportunity for practice sharing as a high school only operator in a way that is fundamentally different than being in Boston or large cities. It's our goal to build a school in which the community believes that it is there school and they helped build it.

- I'm proud to be a member of this board, because of the way the members respond to criticism; they do it with a great deal of humility. It's not just a defensive "no", we have a real openness.
- There are some good practices that are happening in New Bedford that we believe we can use and learn from. We also have a great deal to teach. We would say to opposition "let's work together to improve education and help young people."
- It's myself and the principal at COH New Bedford that will be reaching out to the district because we'll be the ones scheduling the meetings.

Enrollment and Recruitment

1. Have you considered how retention and attrition patterns may be different in New Bedford? What if the pattern does not follow Boston and the school experiences limited attrition but similar retention patterns to Boston (low teens)? How will you adjust enrollment at the 9th grade? How will this impact the proposed staffing plans?

- Will the 9th graders that we take in stay with us or not? Sonya and I have difficult conversations with parents at the end of their 9th grade year after they went to summer school. Students get upset when they aren't on a typically schedule, the timeframe. I talk to them about their growth scores and see that they've grown over a full grade in one year. They get upset because they might still be in 9th grade again. They're growing but are they growing fast enough. Those are the type of students we lose. They may be improved, but not fast enough so that they see themselves graduating any time soon. So they leave to graduate sooner somewhere else.
- In terms of enrollment pattern, the conversations that we are having in New Bedford that people don't understand is that dropout rate does not equal graduation rate does not equal enrollment pattern. Whether our young people are graduating in four years or five years or six years, we say internally as a reality and that's a number that changes every year. The number of sections changes every year in order to meet the number of young people who have met the academic benchmarks to move on to that grade level. Some years we have three junior sections, some years we have four, some years we have two. That flexibility has been part of our model since the beginning. We take in the number of 9th graders in the lottery that we believe will get us to the 280 number, based on our data analysis.

[Follow-up: “Why is 280 the right number?”]

- There’s two pieces to the 280 number: number one, we can all fit in one room and can have a town meeting, which is an important piece of our program. Number two, the young people have to be known. Teenagers are excessively good at slipping through cracks. We have found that 280 is the right number.
- It also plays into freshman class, because we only take in incoming freshman. We want to have the right section size and the right amount of advisories. That advisory should take them through their four years and keep them on track. We’ve have six sections, we’ve had four. We’ve learned what the best size is. Our advisors have to be close to our students.
- On average 20% of our 9th graders have to spend two years in 9th grade, so that freshman class always looks bloated because so many of our students require more time.
- Every cohort is different and you really don’t know. From a board standpoint, one thing we are always interested in understanding is: how many kids are leaving and why? It could be simple or it could mean we aren’t doing a good job, and we have to get to the bottom of that.

[Follow-up: “Are you comfortable with the analysis of the reasons for departure?”]

- We’ve been working on understanding why our students are leaving for a while. Are we comfortable with it? No. I don’t think we should be until every kid that enters our school is graduating.

[Follow-up: “Are you comfortable with the model and design that includes a high level of 9th grade retention?”]

- Freshman students would never repeat a class that they passed. If you did not pass a class but got between a 60-69, you can go to summer school and pass the class and then you won’t have to take that class again. If you fail the class, less than 50, you don’t know half of the material, so you should be taking that class again. You will never repeat a class that you passed. We built our program around knowing that we do have students that will repeat certain classes and may be off level, but still making sure there is a rigorous program for them.
- We could have every kid graduate in four years, but we don’t want that because we don’t want to lower standards. Our kids graduate when they’ve earned the right to graduate. They graduate if they get to pre-calculus, not when they’ve sat through four years of math. They sit through four classes and one of them is pre-calculus. Everyone does that because we don’t have tracking in our school. We also created our tutorial program five years ago to get remediation during the day. It’s no coincidence that this year we’ll have the largest amount of juniors and next

year we'll have the largest amount of seniors. We're going to have to change our sections. Taking algebra 1 with remediation wasn't working for about 20% of our students, so we stopped and we now take pre-algebra and today all the students in pre-algebra, for the first time—these are our lowest 25 students in the building—are all passing math.

- We never promised parents this would take four years. We're telling parents way in advance how long it is going to take to graduate, based on their math skills. They might need pre-algebra to get to grade level. This is a new initiative this year to speak to parents before they start school.

[Follow up: “How do you address the psychological effects of retention for students?]

- We thought about this a lot and we thought about how we would do this in a way without putting a stigma on the students. We give them their own advisory. We used to have them identify as a freshman or a ninth-grader, but now they identify by their advisory name. This hasn't been an issue with students at all.

2. How does the board ensure equity and access of the educational program to all students? Are there modifications and accommodations to help reach standards? Are student supports effective in accelerating learning and filling learning gaps? Are subgroups disproportionately represented in retention and attrition numbers? How does this impact your enrollment?

- I had a question when this was first proposed as to whether this would become our de facto special education class. We were watching very closely for that. With regard to ninth-graders repeating, we've started a program in response to the work that we've been doing at the board level and at the administrative level, identifying this challenge of what happens when students spend two years in the grade. This is a response to the data. We expect four and five years from now, that students will have persisted through the program as a result of the action we're taking now. If it doesn't work then we won't hold on to it, but we want to give it enough time to see if it works.
- There are a lot of students on IEPs who actually tested high enough to be in a regular algebra class. This was about a gap that was happening in math for this group of students. It was not about any sort of skill level or special education or English being your first language, it was really about the gap that they missed because they had a poor middle school.
- The students that leave us, it is not disproportional with special education or ELL students. We actually have more SPED students than the district.

- We don't get value added for our repeaters. They have huge gains on MCAS, but we don't get any credit for it because they aren't in their original cohort.
- This school works all year round; we have kids in the summer. Every year this board gets hungrier for data. Our analysis is based on data. With regard to replication, we don't want any damage to our flagship school, we want to improve.
- With enrollment, by no means are we satisfied with the current state. That's why we are adding programs like the tutorial and pre-algebra. We want to dive into early warning signs of our 9th graders. The opportunity with our expansion is that we'll actually learn more. We're going to see a change at New Bedford that will inform our work at COAH 1 and 2.

School Characteristics

1. How do you respond to concerns about high suspension rates for students?

- This is something we looked at and had detailed conversations about. In the research we've done, we actually interviewed kids that left City on a Hill. We asked: why did you leave? By and large, I don't think that there is a relationship between suspension and attrition.
- There is a relationship between suspension and attrition; however it becomes qualitative and mucky very fast. The negative things and profound emotional situations that kids are experiencing are outside of the building, so the correlation requires a more qualitative look. We could lower our suspension numbers tomorrow, but that would require lowering our standards, which we won't want to do.
- We have to revisit this every year as we have a primarily younger staff. So these are 23-year olds that get their kids Day 1. Students cannot access academic material unless they can productively communicate with peers and adults. It is a testimony to how the learning curve isn't only academic but also social.
- We're not satisfied with the current state and we'll continue to work on that. There is a need for greater wrap around support.
- What I'm hearing from the people doing that analysis is that the relationship between suspension and attrition isn't causal. Suspension doesn't cause attrition. Our responsibility is to teach good behavior to young people. We teach behavior that facilitates learning. We're getting better at that. Our suspension rates are decreasing over a five-year span. We teach behaviors that keep kids in the classroom. There is a lot of evidence that suspensions change behavior. Kids don't want to be suspended. The suspension rate is the number of kids that have been suspended for just one day. We don't have a lot of kids who have been

suspended for many days. We have a 95% attendance rate.

- Some students use suspension as a vehicle to go to a different school. They break rules so that they can go to a public school when their parents want them to stay at City on a Hill.

Special Student Populations and Services

1. Please describe how CoaH has addressed the changes required under the implementation of WIDA standards, ACCESS assessments, and RETELL professional development.

- Our certified ESL coordinator has already updated our curriculum to all new requirements. All of our certification plans for our teachers, many of whom have already done the two parts of the SEI, are going through the processes of either taking the MTEL or the going through the certification programs, and our teachers who have no ESL classes or one SEI class are in the process of working towards certification this spring. It will be mandated for every teacher who doesn't have the requirements by September will be engaged in 2013-14.
- They'll be taking the ACCESS, yes.

Capacity

1. Tell us about the plans to recruit additional members who could contribute to the skills and qualifications of the board as well as reflect the proposed new community to be served. What qualifications would the board look for in potential new trustees? Please describe the process to recruit, select, and orient new board members.

- We've already reached out to a number of people in New Bedford, leaders and diverse groups. We talked to them about our need for their representation on our board. Being on this board requires a lot of time commitment. We told them the kind of people we need and why and the representation we are looking for. We're continuing to reach out. We're at a quiet period. Do we reach out now? Or wait until we get our seats? We think we've gone as far we can. We're going to wait until we have the seats. We've identified candidates.
- I have 15 candidates on my list for advisory committee. They are community leaders of a wide range of backgrounds over the course of the last year. We've met with a whole range of folks; parents whose kids are in the New Bedford district schools and charter schools, folks who started in New Bedford and went through New Bedford schools, went on to great universities. There are a lot who came back to help education in New Bedford. Also, some folks from New

Bedford historical societies.

- We know that we're going to have to do some things so that the community feels and knows that they are involved. We've reached out to folks at Alma De Mar to be on advisory committee.
- We've made a decision to grow our board. We'll have at least 1/3 of board members from New Bedford. We already have strong committee work but we'll have more robust committee reports. We have a summer retreat every summer. We really want to build cohesion. We've look at best practices and they indicate that one board works the best. It's not simple and we need to be responsive.

Governance

1. Describe the current evaluation process in place for Erica Brown, the current Executive Director of CoaH. How will the evaluation process evolve to evaluate the performance of the network Executive Director?

- We've taken a structure here that is a traditional organizational structure with the CEO or executive director reporting to the board. The CEO would then have a COA, who would be responsible for the principals and the academic programs in the schools. On their other side they would have a chief operations officer and a finance officer. We'd have an operational side, which would be much more central, and an academic side, which would be much more central. The process of evaluation starts with her evaluating her own performance. Then that would go to the human resources committee. The human resources committee makes a recommendation and commentary to the executive committee, and then we come up with final part of the process in making the recommendation. Then there is a public review of the executive director's performance. In addition to that, Erica has a very good relation with board, so there will be mentoring taking place.
- Historically we've had a set of goals, a self evaluation process. The substance of the metrics that we have been evaluating is very closely aligned with the rubric. We're in the process of aligning the existing with the rubric. As the network grows, there will be an emphasis on executive director managing more managers.
- The rubrics are very high on subjectivity and very low on metrics. We'll have to translate those rubrics into metrics that we want to judge Erica's performance on.
- We're a little bit a head of the game. We've already started getting more specific with regard to job functions. What the network is going to take is more managerial performance; managing managers.
- Evaluation is always part of a cycle. My evaluation process is rigorous and extensive. The board makes commitments to help me in certain areas and grow my expertise. The board of trustees always finds areas where I can grow.

Management

1. Clarify the timeline for hiring network personnel and school leadership positions. Explain the fractional staffing model on pages 46-47 and how the allocation of network staff over the three schools would be determined and accomplished. If you are not granted both charters, how will the proposed central office/network structure be affected? How will school level employees play a fractional role at the network level? How will that work in practice? What discussions has the board and school leadership had regarding the challenges of the proximity of Boston and New Bedford in facilitating network wide collaboration and network staff oversight of school employees?

- As far of the allocation model, it is the flagship model, which we've talked about with our auditors. We allocate people based on time spent at each organization. The network would not be a profit center or a separate entity. We've analyzed what we think the workload will be based on the current school. We don't feel that three schools is triple the work for certain positions. So, there are certain proficiencies that we've built into the staffing plan.
- We clearly understand that spending per pupil stays within the walls of each school.
- The fractional roles grow over time. It's not going take three times as much time for three schools for the final financial report. We know that this is true because we planned for this work across both Boston schools. We treat New Bedford a little separately, because we're not as readily able to share resources because of its geographic location and the wall of funding between two municipalities. With regard to fractional roles, we do a lot of fractional roles now; it's a big piece of who we are.
- When we move teachers to leadership, we aren't taking them out of the classroom forever.
- It's really a manifestation of a key component of our mission, which is teacher leadership.
- These positions are formalized; they are not tied to personality. These positions are the formal network positions that we believe will be most effectively implemented by the people who are in the building they are overseeing and working with the people they must support, in addition to working toward student outcomes.
- Some of the discussion we had prior to the network, we considered everything, but we came to the network conclusion because we wanted the brand to be consistent throughout the entire organization.

- Most positions will be thought through and changed over time.
- With regard to only getting one school, we can make it work. We want to help a lot of kids. We talked about only getting Boston. We'd have to change allocation, but we can make it work. Only getting New Bedford would be the toughest, because it shakes the model the most. We'll make it work, but it shakes the model the most because our fundraising capacity is Boston-based. It's our intent to prove to a base of funders that we can do replication and then bring them down with us to New Bedford and increase the pool of funds that are available in New Bedford. We want to cluster expertise in Boston and then move that expertise. If one school that's to falter, the expertise is a three minute drive away.
- The beauty of three separate professional learning communities is that they are stand alone. The budget was based on local salaries, local rent, all based on that community.
- With regard to the challenges of the proximity of Boston and New Bedford in facilitating network wide collaboration, there's built in consistencies across the whole networks. The assessments are the same across all schools. The technology is already built in. Sharing is driven by data first. So you share data across the network and then you address areas that need be fixed based on the data that you get. A key in that sharing is the consistent assessments across network. It'll be easier for schools that are geographically closer, but with that said New Bedford isn't Mars, we only need a vehicle to get there. Leadership is something we talk about. One thing we do to grow leaders is put two people in the same job so they share an FTE and share best practices. They share an office for that reason, so there is second resource to help them through certain situations. Something like this will be difficult going to New Bedford. However, we've talked about certain technologies that could help. We'll utilize Skype for meeting purposes. Data needs to be shared, and we need to be creative as to how that data is shared.
- As part of an organization that is scaled nationally, I think we are as a board likely to be pleasantly surprised about opportunities for additional talent. There is a lot of value added of opening another region that will strengthen both of our schools. New Bedford is more likely to strengthen the network than drain it.
- That staff is excited about the opportunity to share ideas with others.

2. Describe the experience at CoaH with staff satisfaction and retention. What lessons will you take with you to the proposed school?

- Department Day, when you have time every week to plan, it changes everything. It's about adjusting your lessons based on assessments.

- We're going to track more teachers because of the growth opportunities we'll provide. We'll have a bigger group of folks to reach out to. They're going to feel like they can grow in their profession.
- I was conducting and monitoring site visits in Lawrence that have two charter entities that are growing into place. I had the opportunity to meet a number of high quality charter school teachers that had moved to that community either because they were from that community or just excited about opportunity. I realized that this could be an attractive opportunity to bring folks to New Bedford, or back to New Bedford. It made me feel reassured in that regard.
- With regard to teachers' feelings about the school valuing teacher leadership, it was subject of fair amount of discussion. There was a down tick with regard to teacher leadership on the surveys. We talked with Erica about where this was coming from and what was behind these survey results. We asked her to reassess and re-survey and report back to us this winter.
- I fully believe that this is a definitional problem. What is teacher driven? For example, if there's \$3 million to be spent in the budget, that might not be teacher driven, it might be program driven from the teachers' standpoint, but how they are going to run their classroom is definitely teacher driven. If we give \$1 million raises to teachers, that's not teacher driven.
- It was difficult to diagnosis the issue because there may have been a terminology issue because some of the answers seemed to be contradictory.
- That dip came at the time of our expansion plans. When we say teacher leadership and expectations of staff, what does it actually mean?
- We also did the MA TELL survey and they asked about a lot of things that we consider to be teacher leadership, they didn't directly ask, but those survey results were positive. So that's one main reason why we think there is a disconnect in the terminology.
- A long time ago we learned that we have to grow our own teachers if we want to do things the City on a Hill way. We have our own licensed teacher training program. We have the authority to license teachers. We are bringing tutors and alumni into that program. These are people with deep familiarity with City on a Hill. We've also talked about compensation. Every time BPS gives their teachers a 15% raise, we fall behind the pay scale. We have to respond to that. We are at stage two of a three stage process of formalizing our teacher compensation program. We've also been formalizing a lot of processes and job descriptions so that we can take it to scale.

[Follow-up: “Do you want teacher representation on the board?”]

- With regard to teachers on the board, we’ve been there done that and it doesn’t work. Teacher representation happens on site.
- The board meetings are open to teachers, they go, they speak, and they talk to board members, so there isn’t any disconnect.
- The same thing goes for parent representation.
- Teacher representation occurs on the school site council.

Finances/Facilities

1. Tell us how the per pupil tuition for Boston was determined. (\$14935 vs. \$13013 in our guidance).

- We based it on our existing schools, which is the same student population in terms of grade level. We thought this would be more accurate.
- We have an extremely conservative budget.