

## PROPOSED ACADEMY FOR THE WHOLE CHILD CHARTER SCHOOL EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*This was prepared by the Academy for the Whole Child Charter School applicant group.*

The Academy for the Whole Child Charter School (A4WCCS) will provide a stimulating, nurturing, and inclusive school community that is safe and joyful; encourages academic excellence and innovation; respects the developmental and individual learning styles of children; and recognizes families as a full partner in each child's success. A4WCCS will ensure that each child will attain his/her full potential and is prepared to succeed in a global economy that demands 21<sup>st</sup> century skills by combining academic rigor, utilizing research-based curricula resources and teacher created materials; development of artistic creativity through arts integration and community partnerships; encouraging personal and social responsibility; and by emphasizing the intellectual, emotional, and social needs of each child.

The purpose of A4WCCS is to provide an exemplary education for children in Fitchburg starting in Kindergarten through grade 4 with a maximum enrollment of 278. We will rely on and utilize the most current research and best practices available in the field. A4WCCS will be an equitable place of learning where "all" children have the same opportunities for a robust and well-rounded education, regardless of socio-economic status, including a longer school day and before and after school programs. At A4WCCS teachers, parents, community members, and students will work collaboratively to ensure that all the needs of the whole child are addressed.

The need for this type of educational option is urgent based on Fitchburg's current demographics, the needs of families and the school district's performance and accountability rating by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The City of Fitchburg population is 40,319. It is a diverse community with a high needs population: 15.5% of families live on incomes below the national poverty level as compared to 9.9% statewide and 12.5% nationwide. Most striking is the percentage of children living in poverty at 21.6% compared to the state at 12.8%.<sup>1</sup> The Fitchburg Public Schools is a Title I district serving 4915 children. 77% of children served in the district are considered low income; 32% of children are from families whose first language is not English and 13.2% of children are limited English proficient as compared to the state at 7.7%. Special needs population is 21.1 % as compared to the state at 17%.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, the Fitchburg Public Schools performance and accountability rating by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) is level 3 on a five level scale (Level 1 highest).<sup>3</sup> Another compelling indicator is the district's lack of progress to narrow the CPI (Composite Performance Index) achievement gap in English Language Arts and Math. In ELA, the achievement gap has widened since 2008 from -9.2 to -11.2 in 2012. In math, the achievement gap has widened from -10.2 in 2008

<sup>1</sup> 2010 Massachusetts census report – City of Fitchburg

<sup>2</sup> 2013 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Fitchburg School District enrollment data

<sup>3</sup> Schools are classified into Level 3 if they are among the lowest 20 percent relative to other schools in their grade span statewide.

to -14.0 in 2012.<sup>4</sup> These indicators, along with others, have placed the Fitchburg Public Schools in the lowest 10% of all districts in the state.

Community support for this school has been very positive as evidenced by the number of 1720 visitors to the project's blog, attendance at two parent informational sessions, including A4WCCS committee members at 64; and response to a public survey in English and Spanish distributed to more than 400 people in which 88% said they would support an elementary charter school in Fitchburg.

The intent of the Academy for the Whole Child will be to show that the philosophy of "all children will learn, no exceptions, no excuses" works! Being cognizant of the low socio-economic population of students that A4WCCS anticipates serving, and knowing how poverty negatively affects student learning, we will be proactive in identifying and addressing the needs of this population as well as students with special and/or creative talents so all children will have equal opportunities to succeed. Children who attend A4WCCS will represent the *Fitchburg community coming* from varied ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds; and varied learning abilities including regular education, special education and English language learners. We believe that a small school is better equipped to meet the individual needs of students and their families by maintaining small class sizes where each child is recognized as an individual and as a learner. Essential to our philosophy is creating a strong partnership between school and family recognizing that the parent/caregiver is the child's first teacher. All efforts will be made to support the whole child during the school day and to encourage them to pursue their interests beyond the school day.

While adhering to the Massachusetts Frameworks and the Common Core Standards the instructional methodology at the A4WCCS will focus on educating the whole child in an integrated, individualized fashion. A4WCCS believes in teacher empowerment since the point of contact between student and teacher is the most powerful. "What teachers do in classrooms have twice the impact on student achievement as do school policies regarding curriculum, assessment, staff collegiality, and community involvement."<sup>5</sup> Curriculum, instruction, and assessment will be teacher created, developed and driven based on analysis of student progress results. A variety of researched-based instructional materials will be incorporated. Program offerings will be ELA (creative writing, composition, reading, spelling, vocabulary, phonics), STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math), World Language, Health and Wellness, and History/Social Sciences. Arts integration will strengthen content learning. "Arts integration is the investigation of curricular content through artistic explorations. In this process, the arts provide an avenue for rigorous investigation, representation, expression, and reflection of both curricula content and the art form itself."<sup>6</sup>

Along with a comprehensive academic program, children will be engaged in Reggio Emilia inspired approach to education.<sup>7</sup> This approach centers around the child based on the principals of respect, responsibility and community through the exploration and

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<sup>4</sup> 2012 MADESE CPI Achievement Gap – ELA and Math: Fitchburg School District

<sup>5</sup> Marzano, R.J. 2003. What works in Schools. Alexandria, VA : ASCD

<sup>6</sup> Donovan, L., Pascale, L. 2012. Integrating the Arts Across the Content Areas. Leslie University: Shell Education, Huntington Beach, CA. p. 14

<sup>7</sup> Mulqueen, Meghan. *Louise Boyd Cadwell and the Reggio-Inspired Approach to Education*.  
<http://www.misshope.org/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/reggio-approach.pdf>

discovery within an enriching environment. Small group instruction combined with “mindfulness” strategies<sup>8</sup> infused throughout the school day will ensure students’ emotional well-being. In addition to academic preparedness, graduates of A4WCCS will have acquired the critical thinking skills that they will need to succeed in the complex world they will inherit. A4WCCS children will be equipped with the emotional and cognitive tools that will enable them to manage emotions and behaviors, reduce stress, and sharpen concentration with increased empathy and optimism. We are positive that our children will be confident, self-assured and successful life-long learners.

We, members of the Founding Group, are confident that our knowledge, education and experiences with a demonstrated track record and our familiarity and continued engagement with the proposed population will further guarantee overall success. These include student achievement, curriculum and instruction, creative design, law, finance, governance, non-profit management, engineering, data analysis, marketing, computer science, nutrition and wellness, and facilities management.

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<sup>8</sup> MindUP Curriculum. 2011. Goldie Hawn Foundation: Scholastic Inc. Publishers.