

FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW 2015-2016

Proposed School Name (Commonwealth):	International Academy of Montachusett Charter School
Grades Served At Full Capacity:	K-12
Number of Students At Full Capacity:	1,168
Proposed School Location:	Fitchburg
Proposed Charter Region:	Clinton, Fitchburg ¹ , Leominster, North Middlesex Regional, Wachusett Regional
Proposed Opening Year:	2016-2017

Mission Statement:

The mission of the International Academy of Montachusett Charter School is to provide students with the knowledge, skills, thinking ability, and leadership qualities they will need to achieve college acceptance and succeed in life. We will accomplish this mission by providing any child who enrolls in our school—regardless of his or her background, socioeconomic status, prior academic experience, or other factors—with an international and proven, college-preparatory public education in a student-centered setting that emphasizes community, civic responsibility, and personal development as well as academic rigor.

Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:

School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment
First Year	K-3	322
Second Year	K-4	418
Third Year	K-5	514
Fourth Year	K-6	610
Fifth Year	K-7	706

The Department has compiled a summary of the evidence identified through the review of the charter application, the responses provided by the applicant group during the subsequent interview, and the testimony and comment provided at the public hearing and during the public comment period. The below summary describes the evidence identified that addresses the application criteria and identifies the areas of the application criteria where limited evidence was provided during the application process.

¹ Due to the limited availability of seats under the 9 percent net school spending (NSS) cap in Fitchburg, the proposed school must enroll students from other areas of the charter region in order to reach the proposed maximum enrollment of 1,168, and avoid exceeding Fitchburg's NSS cap.

Public Comment:

The application received testimony and written comment **in support** during the public hearing and public comment process. At the public hearing, 16 speakers spoke in support of the school, including parents, students, community members, a teacher, a school administrator, and 2 members of the applicant group. Written comment includes a petition supporting the school with 1,227 signatures, submitted by the applicant group, and letters in support from four community members.

The application received testimony and written comment **in opposition** during the public hearing and public comment process. At the public hearing, 25 speakers spoke in opposition to the school, including: State Senator Jennifer Flanagan, State Representative Stephen DiNatale, Fitchburg Mayor Lisa Wong (School Committee Chair Sally Cragin spoke on her behalf.), Fitchburg City Councilors Stephen Hay and Michael Kushmerek, Superintendent of Fitchburg Public Schools Andre Ravenelle, Diocese of Worcester Superintendent of Schools Delma Josephson, members of the school committee of Fitchburg Public Schools, school administrators, union representatives of North Middlesex Regional Public Schools and Fitchburg Public Schools, teachers, parents, and students. Written comment in opposition includes 45 letters from district and school administrators, teachers, parents, and community members from the proposed charter region.

Mission (I.A.) and Key Design Elements (I.B.)

Identified Evidence

- The mission, with its emphasis on preparing students for college, is consistent with high academic standards and student success. (I.A.)
- The application describes the 11 key design elements of the school: world class, international curriculum; focus on math and English; diagnostic assessment; direct instruction; pacing charts; weekly testing; student uniforms; strict code of conduct; safe and clean school facility; SABIS Student Life Organization; and Spanish instruction. (I.B.)
- The mission and key design elements are generally reflected throughout all sections of the application. (I.A. and I.B.)

Limited Evidence

- The mission does not indicate the key design elements proposed to achieve outcomes and lacks clarity with regard to what is innovative about the proposed program. The significance of “international” is not explained in the application. (I.A.)
- The key design elements of the proposed school are standard elements of the SABIS model. While the application describes program elements proposed by the founding group, including an arts integration component and a social emotional learning component, neither of these elements is meaningfully reflected throughout all sections of the application. At the interview, members of the founding group and SABIS representatives indicated that program elements that are not a part of the SABIS model would be developed later, after the school is in operation. (I.B.)
- The extent to which the application reflects the educational philosophy of the founding group is unclear, given the significant differences between the SABIS model and the model proposed by the founding group in previous years. (I.B.)
- Non-academic goals, related to character development, are extremely broad, and measures are not clearly defined. (I.B. and II.C.)

Description of the Community to Be Served and Enrollment and Recruitment (I.C. and I.D.)

Identified Evidence

- The application includes demographic and academic achievement data for students in the proposed sending districts. (I.C.)
- The application describes the founding group's efforts to publicize the proposed school. Outreach efforts have included providing information and gathering signatures at multiple open house events, community events, daycare centers, community centers, and businesses. The founding group has also engaged in social media outreach. (I.C.)
- The applicant group proposes to open with grades K-3, and to add a grade each year until reaching maximum enrollment in the tenth year of implementation. Based on the growth plan, the proposed school will have five years of academic performance data from the statewide assessment system at the time of its first renewal decision. (I.D.)

Limited Evidence

- The demographic and achievement data for students in the proposed sending districts includes a fair amount of variation, and the application acknowledges that it is unclear which students will enroll at the school. At the time of the interview, the applicant group's documented evidence of demand from families with eligible potential students included 20 intent to enroll forms. (I.C.)
- Within the application and during the interview, the applicant group provided little information regarding evidence of demand to support the proposed initial enrollment of 322 students in grades K-3 or evidence to establish the interest of targeted families who would seek out the proposed school for their children. The applicant group indicated that recruitment would be underway in late January and February, and individual members expressed confidence that families would seek out the school based on anecdotal conversations with parents within their personal and professional networks. (I.D.)
- The applicant group anticipates recruiting a lower percentage of English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities than found in most of the proposed sending districts. During the interview, the applicant group indicated that these enrollment assumptions were based upon the anticipated proportion of enrollment across their proposed charter region. (I.C.)
- At the interview, the applicant group said that initially, they anticipate most students will come from Fitchburg, where the school is to be located. With approximately 300 seats available in Fitchburg, it is unclear whether the school will be able to recruit sufficient students from other communities in the proposed region in order to reach its planned maximum enrollment of 1,168. (I.C.)

Overview of Program Delivery and Curriculum and Instruction (II.A. and II.B.)

Identified Evidence

- The proposed school's calendar includes 180 days of instruction. The application states that the school will provide the required 900 hours of instruction each school year to students in the elementary grades, and 990 hours of instruction each school year to students in the secondary grades. (II.A.)
- The proposed school would implement the SABIS curriculum, instructional methods, and assessment system. During the interview, a SABIS representative reported that SABIS analyzes the performance of students in its schools on state exams as part of the process of refining its curriculum. (II.B. and II.C.)
- The application includes a description of plans for teacher professional development, including ten days of training prior to the start of each school year, two days of training during the school year, meetings held every other week after school, and weekly grade level meetings. Student assessment data and observations by school administrators will inform planning for all professional development held during the school year. (II.B. and II.C.)

Limited Evidence

- The application states that the school will serve the diverse needs of students using the SABIS system of weekly assessments and targeted support provided in remedial classes and peer tutoring sessions. The application does not include explicit research citations to support the efficacy of the SABIS system or to demonstrate that the proposed curriculum and instruction may result in high academic achievement for all students. Attachments to the application include a SABIS analysis of the performance of 8th grade and 10th grade students at two of the three charter schools in Massachusetts managed by SABIS. (II.A. and II.B.)
- The application describes an arts integration program, to be phased in starting in the school's second year, but it is unclear how SABIS would meaningfully incorporate a program element that is not currently part of the SABIS model. At the interview, SABIS representatives expressed a commitment to implementing the arts integration program, and stated that SABIS implemented a Puerto Rican history and culture component at another SABIS school based on input from stakeholders. (II.B.)
- While the application includes the criteria to be used to evaluate teachers and a sample teacher evaluation form, the process used to conduct the evaluations is not clearly explained. The school director and academic quality controller appear to share responsibility for evaluating teachers, but their respective roles are not clearly delineated within the application. (II.B. and III.C.)

Student Performance, Assessment, and Program Evaluation (II.C.)

Identified Evidence

- The SABIS model includes a proprietary system for regularly assessing student progress in each class and identifying when additional support is needed. (II.C.)
- The application describes the different measures to be used to assess student achievement. In addition to internal measures, the school will also use the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading and Math Batteries (STAR) to measure student learning. The application also describes how the data will be used by school staff to support the goal of improved learning and outcomes. (II.C.)
- The application indicates that the program will be evaluated using an accountability plan based on those created at Holyoke Community Charter School and Lowell Collegiate Charter School. The draft accountability plan included with the application includes a measure for each of the 10 key design elements. (II.C.)

Limited Evidence

- The application does not describe transparent policies for promoting students to the next grade or for graduation. (II.C.)
- The school's ability to use its assessment system to facilitate timely adjustments to the curriculum and instructional methods to meet the needs of the school is constrained by its use of a curriculum and teaching methodologies determined by SABIS. (II.C.)

Supports for Diverse Learners (II.D.)

Identified Evidence

- The application generally demonstrates an awareness of the school's obligations with regard to serving English language learners and students with special needs, and expresses a commitment to meeting its obligations. (II.D.)

Limited Evidence

- While the application generally demonstrates an awareness of the school's obligations with regard to serving English language learners (ELLs) and students with special needs, it fails to describe in adequate or convincing detail how the school will meet its obligations. The instructional methods described in this section of the application are not consistent with the highly scripted SABIS instructional approach described previously. The collaboration described in this section between general education teachers and SPED and ELL staff is not referenced elsewhere in the application, and the teacher schedule, described previously, appears to include little, if any, time for teacher collaboration. During the interview, a SABIS representative indicated that the schools managed by SABIS participate in the development or selection of additional curriculum as well as assessments to support the learning of English language learners and students with disabilities. (II.D.)
- Initial ELL and SPED staffing levels are modest, given the school's proposed enrollment. Although the application indicates that special education and ELL support staffing levels will increase as needed, it is not clear how the school will determine staffing needs. (II.D.)

Culture and Family Engagement (II.E.)

Identified Evidence

- The application describes the culture of the school as one that is hospitable to learning, and in which all individuals are valued, cared for, and respected. It goes on to describe the role of school uniforms (a key design element) in building and maintaining the school culture. (II.E.)
- The application describes the intent to provide services and/or programs to address students' physical, social emotional, and health needs, including a nutrition program and a nurse. According to the applicant group, the SABIS Student Life Organization, for students in grades 5-12, plays an important role in students' social emotional learning. (II.E.)
- The application describes the school's philosophy and plans regarding student behavior and discipline for the general student population. The attached draft student handbook includes proposed policies regarding student discipline, including suspension and expulsion, as well as procedures for the exclusion of students with disabilities. (II.E.)
- The application describes how the school plans to involve parents/guardians as partners. In addition to providing information about the school in newsletters and on social media, plans include holding monthly parent meetings, and sponsoring multiple family events and showcases throughout the year. (II.E.)

Limited Evidence

- The application devotes minimal attention to describing how the culture of the school is developed and maintained for students in grades K-4, before the SABIS Student Life Organization begins in grade 5. During the interview, a SABIS representative reiterated that the prefect system is an important part of building culture in the younger grades. (II.E.)
- While the application includes a list of 16 potential local partners (community agencies and organizations), only two submitted letters of support. It is also unclear how local partnerships would be meaningfully developed. (II.E.)

Capacity and Governance (III.A. and III.B.)

Identified Evidence

- The proposed board members have a range of experiences and qualifications in K-12 education teaching and administration, higher education, real estate and facilities management, technology, communications media and arts, and governance of non-profit organizations and local governmental bodies. (III.A.)

Limited Evidence

- While the members of the design and development team identify themselves as the primary authors of the final application, the application consists mainly of SABIS-prepared material. Proposed program elements that are not part of the SABIS model, such as the arts integration program and the social emotional learning component, are not well integrated across sections of the application. (III.A.)
- The application includes limited information to establish understanding regarding the role of the board in overseeing the proposed school and the education management organization (EMO). For example, the application indicates that a protocol for evaluating the performance of the EMO will be developed jointly by the board and the EMO. Both the board and the EMO will evaluate the director. During the interview, members of the proposed board indicated the board's relationship with the EMO was still being negotiated, and that a process for evaluating the EMO is still being developed. (III.B.)
- In the application and during the interview, the applicant group provided a limited rationale for their choice of SABIS as an EMO. While the application includes a table summarizing what the applicant group says are similarities between the applicant group's prior submissions, the proposed Academy for the Whole Child Charter School (A4WC), and the SABIS Educational System, reviewers noted fundamental differences in the philosophical approaches underlying A4WC and SABIS. During the interview, the applicant group cited evidence of the academic success of students in SABIS schools as a reason they chose SABIS; however, their characterization of SABIS did not accurately reflect the areas of weakness noted in the Department's publicly available assessment of the performance of the three Commonwealth charter schools managed by SABIS. (III.B.)

Management (III.C.)

Identified Evidence

- The application includes a school organizational chart that includes all employees of the proposed school, the board of trustees, and the EMO. (III.C)
- The application describes the roles and primary responsibilities of the school's leader and other administrative staff, for the most part articulating key role distinctions with regard to instructional leadership, personnel decisions, financial management, and operations. (III.C)

Limited Evidence

- The application contains a draft management contract that was described as a “placeholder” during the Department’s interview with the applicant group in January. The applicant group indicated that a committee of the proposed board of trustees has been organized to support contract negotiations, and that the draft contract was reviewed prior to submission. (III.C.)
- The school director’s dual reporting relationship, to the board and to the EMO, is unclear, as is the process for identifying a school leader. During the interview, members of the board and SABIS representatives described a process in which SABIS will recruit candidates, with the board making the final decision; however, the details of the process are not yet formalized. (III.C.)
- The application includes limited information regarding the desired skills, experiences, and qualifications of key administrators and teachers. (III.C.)

Facilities, Student Transportation and Finances (III.D. and III.E.)

Identified Evidence

- The applicant group has a tentative agreement to occupy a site in Fitchburg sufficient to house the school for its first two years of operation. (III.D.)
- The Fitchburg Public Schools would provide transportation to residents of Fitchburg based on the proposed daily school schedule in accordance with district policies. The application indicated that the board is exploring various transportation options for families outside Fitchburg, including regional pick-up and drop-off points, contracted bus/van service, carpools, a reimbursement program for parents who provide transportation, and/or coordinating transportation with other charter schools. (III.E.)

Limited Evidence

- The applicant group does not have a plan for addressing the potential issues associated with locating in Fitchburg, with its limited number of available seats (approximately 300 of the planned maximum enrollment of 1,168). (III.D.)
- While the application describes the omission of certain revenue from its budget, including federal entitlement grants, as an effort to develop a conservative budget that demonstrates contingency planning, the resulting budget does not reflect a comprehensive understanding of the anticipated revenues and expenditures for the proposed school within the proposed communities. The budget instead establishes a reliance on a substantial line of credit (\$800K) that may not be necessary if a more accurate budget was provided. (III.E.)