***Proposed* Phoenix Academy Public Charter High
School, Lawrence
Summary of Interview**

*Questions derived from review panel and documentation review*

***Note: The interview summary is not a transcript of the interview audio. Responses have been summarized by Department staff. The order of questions and responses within the summary may not reflect the chronology during the interview.***

**In attendance:**

**John Connors**, board chair of Phoenix Academy Public Charter High Schools (PAPCHS)

**Colette Stanzler**,board vice chair of PAPCHS

**Patrick Monkiewicz**,board treasurer of PAPCHS

**Beth Anderson**,board member and chief executive officer of PAPCHS

**Liz Murray**,chief academic officer of PAPCHS

**Ann Whitney**,managing director of curriculum and instruction of PAPCHS

**Lisa Gifford**,director of English language development and special education of PAPCHS

**Bob Zager**,managing director of finance, operations, and human resources of PAPCHS

**Valerie Taubes**,managing director of operations and strategic initiatives of PAPCHS

**Tamara Soraluz**,head of school of Phoenix Academy Lawrence and proposed head of school

**Rachel Aierstuck**,director of curriculum and instruction of Phoenix Academy Lawrence and proposed director of curriculum and instruction

1. **[Network staff] The application notes that the network is engaged in what you refer to as the Phoenix Forward design process. How would you characterize the overall scope of the changes to the program? In some places, the application reads as though you are tinkering around the edges; in other places it seems to imply you are making fundamental changes to the model.**
* Beth: I would say a fundamental change in Phoenix Forward seems more accurate to me. Much of it so far is Chelsea-focused. Our Chelsea school is a member of the Barr Foundation’s Engage New England cohort this year. We have some pretty fundamental and significant network-wide change happening this year, mostly anchored in the development of competencies as our foundational framework for our academic program. This is going to drive to change across all of our systems. It is going to allow students to have a much better sense of how we define success in terms of readiness for 21st-century college and careers. It is going to allow our students to progress much more rapidly through our academic program, and it is going to allow us to tailor our academic program to be much more personalized, based on individual student goals and career aspirations.
1. **[Board] Describe the board’s involvement in the Phoenix Forward design process.**
* John: The board’s role is to provide oversight. We look at dashboards on a quarterly basis and to make sure that the kids are constantly doing well. A lot of kids in the state and a lot of kids in Lawrence, Haverhill, and Methuen are dropping out of high school. We need to make sure that there’s a model that will help kids get through high school and achieve independence.
* Beth: Board members have also acted as thought partners, helping us think about the things that we need to do to set students up to get through college. This board team has been very involved in helping me and my senior team to develop this design work.
1. **[Network staff] You submitted the application two months ago, just when the network was entering the “design” phase of the process. Please update us on developments in your thinking about changes to the program.**
* Liz: We have worked with an organization called reDesign to survey students and staff members in our three schools regarding what they think are the most important skills and competencies for Phoenix graduates. Their input will drive the competency development process. We are expecting the first draft of competencies to be developed and shared with the community for comment in mid-February.
1. **[Network staff] Describe the current status of the collaborations described in the application that are supporting the Phoenix Forward process. These include partnerships with reDesign, Springpoint, the Bridgespan Group, and the Barr Foundation.**
* Liz: They have done a wonderful job of sharing different school models with student-centered education. This has helped us as a network to think about what resonates for us, and then each school principal can think about their students, the strengths of their current staff, and what is appropriate for their school. The partnerships have provided professional development and thought partnering, and the school visits that they encouraged us to do in New York and in the Boston area have been very helpful parts of the Phoenix Forward process.
* Beth: Another partner that we have been excited about is Bunker Hill Community College. They are now entering the design process with us. In Lawrence, we are cultivating a partnership with Northern Essex Community College.
1. **[School-based staff] What do you understand to be the main changes that will be made at the proposed school next year that are related to the Phoenix Forward design process?**
* Tamara: My understanding is that the focus is in Chelsea this year and that the next school will be Lawrence, meaning that we will have support in doing all of the steps and the phases that Chelsea went through this year. This includes being able to understand who our students are, their needs, and what they need to be successful post graduation. We would be doing that work in collaboration with our students and with our teachers. There would be a process of building competencies that makes sense to our cohort, our population, and a graduation plan that makes sense and that is building the skills that students need post high school. We will continue collaborating with Northern Essex to ensure students have a local option for post- secondary. Many of them do not have access to resources outside of Lawrence. In the process we will also need to understand our Haverhill and Methuen students and expand our vision for our Lawrence students.
1. **My understanding reading the application was that the Phoenix Forward design process was taking place during the current year, and that the changes would be rolled out at the Phoenix Lawrence campus in the fall. Is that correct?**
* Tamara: Phoenix Lawrence started the process. We went on the school visits in New York last fall, and we have started doing some work with our students and staff. I expect the process next year will be much faster, since it will build on the work that has already been happening this school year.
1. **Will you have competencies in place in Lawrence for the beginning of next academic year?**
* Liz: Yes. Our partner will bring us a draft in February, and we will have multiple feedback rounds before we finalize competencies.
1. **Please update us on your efforts to develop connections in the Haverhill and Methuen communities, whether with the districts, with community organizations, or families of prospective students.**
* Tamara: Beth and I and another couple of staff attended a meeting with major community leaders in Haverhill a couple of months ago to introduce our school. Community organizations like the Boys and Girls Club and the YMCA of Haverhill were at the meeting. The Northern Essex representative was also there. We are starting to get the word out and the response has been positive. We are now connecting individually with those organizations to be able to hold information sessions at the YMCA or at the Boys and Girls Club.
* Beth: I met with the mayor of Haverhill to get his support and that led to meetings with the superintendents in Haverhill and Methuen. We wanted to demystify Phoenix in the middle of a tough political climate. This opened the door for Tamara and her team to do recruitment from those places. One of the schools wrote a letter of support, which is unprecedented. In Haverhill in particular they see us as a resource that is needed. There is a senior staff member on my team who is dedicated to helping Tamara on this project.
* Valerie: Tamara is starting a founders group that is a cross-section of our school, including teachers and leaders. Tomorrow morning they will be launching some additional recruitment and relationship work in the community. Through that group we are going to build relationships in the next couple of months.
1. **[Board] How does the board invite and foster discussion with members of the communities served by each school? If I am a stakeholder in the Phoenix Lawrence community, what will be my means of access to the board?**
* Colette: Our meetings are open for anyone to attend. No one has attended them in the past, but they are certainly open, if anyone wanted to come.
* Patrick: We started rotating the locations of our board meetings at each of the schools. That makes it a bit easier for people to gain access.
* Beth: Patrick’s role in Chelsea makes him extremely accessible to anyone who might want to come before this board. Saritin, a new board member from Chelsea, is also well-known in the Chelsea community. In Lawrence, Tamara and her staff already have relationships with two legislators and some political activists who are familiar with the school. If there were to be a situation where folks needed to access the board, they could do so through those individuals if they didn’t feel comfortable going to the board directly.
1. **Can you explain your assessment of the proposed school’s ability to meet the enrollment targets in its growth plan? You have a first-year target enrollment of 175 students.**
* Tamara: We currently have 120 students enrolled in Lawrence. The only pipeline for getting students is through Lawrence High School. By opening enrollment to students in Haverhill and Methuen, we expect our enrollment to grow to 175. We are currently staffed for 175 students.
1. **Do you expect much of a shift with regard to the population of students who will enroll next year?**
* Tamara: I expect to be able to serve a population of students who have previously withdrawn. We are not able to serve those students currently due to age requirements and limits, so I expect the average age of the students to increase. Right now our average age is about 16, which is much younger than at our other two schools. I expect the average age to be between 18 and 19 next year.
1. **Will that have any implications for staffing?**
* Tamara: I think it will have implications for the competency work. If we have students who are much older, they will be much more ready to enter careers than a 15 year old. Therefore, our model will need to be reflective of the needs of older students. These are also students who are working part time or full time while going to school, or students who are also parenting. Our school will need to be more responsive to those needs.
1. **[Board and Beth] We would like to discuss the current in-district school. What is the nature of the financial arrangement between the Phoenix Foundation and Lawrence?**
* Beth: They give us a certain amount of money and we make it work. If it is not enough money, or if it is cut year to year, I work with the receiver to try and get some money back. The foundation provides more oversight of results than budget.
1. **Does the revenue cover all of the expenses related to operating the school?**
* Beth: No.
* Bob: The amount we receive as a network office to provide services to Lawrence is limited to the amount that is contracted through Lawrence Public Schools. The amount has varied over the years, but is between a $100,000 and $200,000 a year. The amount we receive as a network office to provide services in our Springfield and Chelsea schools is 10 percent of each school’s budgeted tuition each year, which is in the $200,000 to $300,000 range for each school. We receive additional funds from our Chelsea and Springfield schools to offset expenses related to the Americorps members who provide tutoring and other supports. Our Lawrence school does not make that contribution. We make up the difference through foundation support to the charter management organization, our network office. A higher percent of Phoenix foundation support goes towards Lawrence than Chelsea and Springfield because of the fact that we receive lower revenue from Lawrence Public Schools.
* Beth: Every year for the past few years there have been surprise cuts of $50,000 to $250,000. If we did not have a very benevolent board and a well-run financial machine, then we would not have been able to operate the Lawrence school over the past few years. The finances are a huge driver for us in this.
1. **Will the in-district school close at the end of this school year whether or not a charter is granted?**
* Beth: That is not the plan.
1. **If the charter is granted and the in-district school ceases to operate as an in-district school and operates as a Commonwealth charter school, will the elimination of that arrangement impact what has been called the Phoenix CMO?**
* Bob: The revenue that the network office receives from the school in Lawrence will be more on par with what we receive from the other two schools. In terms of the services that we would provide in return, those would mostly be the same. All the student programming and all the coaching and support for Tamara as principal and the school leaders that happens now will continue to happen. My staff on the finance and human resources side would have a bit of additional work, because currently Lawrence Public Schools pays the Lawrence school’s expenses and manages their human resources. We do not anticipate this will require much of an increase in staff time in our office, because there are a lot of processes that are already ongoing with our Springfield and Chelsea schools, and because we are using some technological advances to help with those processes.
1. **[Board] How will the board assess the effectiveness of the Phoenix Forward process?**
* Colette: Beth regularly reports on the process. So far it has been on what the process has been, what she and her team have been doing. As they move into piloting and testing, she will report back to us. As Beth mentioned, right now Phoenix Chelsea is part of this cohort. There are expectations as far as timeframe. We are looking much more strategically at what is working well in Chelsea. We will be looking at how we can implement those changes in Lawrence and Springfield as well. The Phoenix network is at a point now where we know a lot. We have learned a lot about what works well. We are also recognizing that there are best practices from a lot of other schools. We are quite involved in looking at what are the metrics for what she is testing and whether it is successful or not.
1. **How will the board effectively ensure the development and retention of quality school administrators?**
* Colette: We are not involved in recruiting leaders. We evaluate Beth, and Beth reports to us. Beth and her team recruit leaders. In the dashboards that we look at on a quarterly basis, one of the things we look at is staff retention. We have discussions with Beth to assess whether we have the right leaders in place or whether we are doing the things we need to do to keep the right leaders in place.

**Describe the network’s current experience with staff satisfaction and retention. What lessons have you learned as the network has grown?**

Beth: We have learned a lot about staff satisfaction and retention, especially since we replicated in Springfield. We went from one school with a cult of personality in leadership to multiple schools where we had to figure out how to scale. We are coming out of the other side of that after a lot of work and painful introspection and a lot of listening across our schools. Some of the beginning lessons that we have learned are the importance of transparency in leadership, so that folks know what is going on. We want people to feel that access has increased, the amount of touches that staff have with the board. This year the board has come and had breakfast with staff and students at two of our schools. Each of the schools is doing staff surveys. Network staff and leaders are in those surveys, so that folks can comment and give feedback on how they feel. We are looking at the diversity of our staff and leadership. A human capital team is working on how we diversify and build our organization so that it is really attractive for leaders of color. Our statewide group is too homogenous right now.

Liz: I think we have learned two powerful lessons. One is around leader autonomy. We have learned that the success in Chelsea does not mean that our principals should not have autonomy to be locally responsive. Those have been wonderful conversations with our principals. When I think about the planning process for the current school year, it looked very different from what we did previously at Phoenix, in terms of sharing the professional development from Phoenix Forward with our principals, bringing them together as a network instructional leadership team, and then telling them to go back and work with their staff and propose which aspects of Phoenix Forward to pilot in the coming year that is going to be responsive to student needs and staff capacity level. They are all piloting aspects of Phoenix Forward that they felt were the right fit for their community. The second is around teacher support. We have done a lot of soul searching around the pace at which we ask our teachers to learn and travel and produce as they are working steadily to improve the quality of instruction in classrooms and to build positive relationships with students, which is a cornerstone of Phoenix schools. We have made some moves to increase teacher planning time and make their schedules more conducive to staying at Phoenix longer. We changed the dismissal time for students from 5 p.m. to 4 p.m. last year. We are also considering flexible scheduling for students and flexible scheduling that will allow teachers to grow rapidly, produce excellent work, and respond to the professional development that they are getting, to make the pace of work and the work-life balance at Phoenix something that is a little more manageable.

1. **[Board] The application expresses the board’s “deep commitment to ensuring that the board is diverse in racial background, geographical location, and skill-set over the next year.” What are some specific examples of recent recruitment efforts that reflect that commitment, and what are your specific goals with regard to diversity on the board?**
* Patrick: We do this primarily through networking. In Chelsea this is through the chamber of commerce, the Rotary Club, and Kiwanis. We have done a lot of networking in the business community and with folks in the city who have done a lot of work with other non-profits. This provides a point of access for us to identify potential candidates. This past year we have interviewed a community leader of color. Saritin Rizzuto just recently joined. She is Latino.
* John: We are also building deep relationships with communities in Springfield and Lawrence.
* Colette: We have conversation at each board meeting about the pipeline. It has been a focus to increase diversity. All the board members are asked to think about contacts they have that would allow us to go deeper into those communities.
* Patrick: One of the challenges is distance. It was difficult for a former board member from Springfield to attend. Rotating the location of board meetings and using remote participation may make it a bit easier. Understanding those challenges and how we can make it easier for people to attend will enable us to attract new members.
* Beth: Two of our board members are Latino, and three of the people that we are vetting for the board and foundation board are people of color.
1. **[Tamara] Describe the onboarding of new students, such as the four-week Scholar Institute. What are the goals of the school’s onboarding process? What differences, if any, occur in the onboarding experience of students who do not enter at the beginning of the academic year? Will the process of acclimating students to the school change under Phoenix Forward?**
* Tamara: Currently, prospective students are able to come and shadow a Phoenix student for two days before making the decision whether or not to enroll. That gives the student an opportunity to make an informed decision about whether the school is right for them. We have worked really hard to involve families. Families come for a meeting at the school. They do a tour. They go through our handbook to learn what our policies are before a student can start. We enroll students during the first two weeks of each quarter to give them the highest chance of earning credit for that quarter. Scholar Institute is a systemized way to ensure that our students have a grace period of four weeks at the beginning of the school year to review basic skills. We know that students lose math and reading skills over the summer. What we are hoping to do next year is a more structured first two weeks of school for all students who are new, to assess where they are academically. Students would take STAR assessments for math and reading, so that we know their math and reading level, so that we have a schedule that responds to their skills, and where they are doing a lot of career building and easing into the school year.
1. **Since you admit students throughout the year, are you also planning to conduct orientation throughout the year?**
* Tamara: That is our hope. Right now it is only at the beginning of the year. Our hope is that it happens every time a new student enrolls.
1. **[Lisa] How have the English language development and special education programs been designed to respond to different student needs in Chelsea, Springfield, and Lawrence?**
* Lisa: The first thing is always ensuring the civil rights of our students, that they are getting whatever services they need, and ensuring that we have the proper staff to cover that. We shift our services and our staff and our classes based on our students’ needs. I meet monthly with the leadership in each of the schools to go over all of the demographics, the classes, and any ongoing issues with coordinated program reviews or mid-cycle reviews or any other things that we need to do for the students. The entire administrative team for each school is well-informed of our numbers and who our students are. I do random checks of special education and English learners’ files to ensure that students’ needs are being met and make adjustments as we need to.
1. **How was the *Supports for Diverse Learners* section of the application developed? Were network staff with expertise in special education and English as a Second Language programming responsible for its development or review?**
* Valerie: I wrote the section and discussed it with Lisa. Both she and Ann reviewed the section. It is based on the model we are using in Chelsea and Springfield.
1. **[Lisa] Let’s talk about supports for students who are English learners. We have some questions that will allow you to elaborate on what was included in the application. What changes, if any, are you anticipating in the level of need and number of English learners in the coming year?**
* Lisa: I anticipate that the number of special education students and English learners will increase.
* Tamara: I would agree that both of those populations will increase. There is a significant need for students who are immigrating to the United States past age 18, who have limited public school options in-district. That is a need that the school will be able to fulfill. The district is also having a hard time addressing the needs of students with IEPs who are struggling behaviorally or academically.
1. **Your staffing plan includes one English language development teacher in Years 1-3. Please explain the thinking and the process that led to that decision.**
* Tamara: That is based on the number of English learners. This year, we only needed to have two classes, an intermediate and an advanced course, in which there were six or fewer students. Many students now are much younger. Should the need arise, we will have additional classes. That teacher has the capacity to add another two classes. Should there be a need beyond that, we would consider additional staffing.
* Lisa: Every month I meet with the administrative team, and I also coach the English language development and special education teachers on a weekly basis. Our mission is to make sure that we are serving our students. I work with people who want to make sure that is happening, and we make those arrangements to the best of our ability. We have added staff before.
* Valerie: We are currently staffed for 175 students, the number we expect to serve in Year 1.
* Beth: We are an all hands on deck organization. In addition to all of these structural pieces and our ability to hire more staff, our academic team across the network is committed to making sure that we meet the needs of each student.
* Liz: We have made adjustments at our other schools when populations have shifted. In Chelsea we increased staffing to meet the needs of English learners. In a short period of time we went from two to four English language development teachers to ensure that they were receiving appropriate services. We brought in the Middlebury English language development curriculum, which is a blended learning platform, and the iLit blended learning platform, so that teachers have rich curriculum resources. We are not trying to figure it all out from scratch all the time. We created an English learner portfolio process, so that they can advance rapidly through the different levels of English language acquisition as quickly as their mastery would allow. We also partnered with Confianza, which has been a partner for our English learners’ teachers and our teacher leader who provides coaching to those teachers. We are able to be nimble and flexible, and we would do the same thing in Lawrence.
1. **What are the qualifications of someone hired as an English language development teacher?**
* Lisa: Each school is required to have an ESL-licensed teacher. Our teacher in Lawrence is a licensed ESL teacher. We recruit a lot from Teach for America. Over the last couple of years Teach for America has done SEI endorsement courses, so some of our staff coming in from that source have their SEI endorsement already. I have taken the SEI administrators course, and am a licensed special education administrator. Our special education teachers are licensed special education teachers.
1. **You talked about the various curriculum resources. The Middlebury program is described on the Middlebury website as a supplemental curriculum. The application leads one to believe this is used as the primary curriculum. There was some concern among reviewers about whether the school has an English language development curriculum, and one that is WIDA-aligned.**
* Lisa: We do. In preparing for this school year, we developed curriculum maps. We went through a process of looking at the WIDA can-dos, articulating our priorities for each quarter, and how we tackle language acquisition in a way that allows students to accelerate. We designed our program with the Middlebury and iLit blended learning platforms, the model curriculum units designed by DESE, and teacher-created resources that all align to WIDA.
1. **[Lisa] Please describe your capacity as the network director of English language development and special education to meaningfully supervise the special education teachers and English language development teachers at all three schools.**
* Lisa: I am in each of the three schools at least once a week for a full day. Weekly I meet with the special education teachers and coach them individually. I get into classes and look at instructional practices. I do the same for the English language development teacher. Monthly I meet with the leadership team, which includes Tamara and Rachel and Ann and Liz, and we talk about special education students and English learners and where we are with our work. Quarterly I lead a professional development session for all special education teachers in the network. Our English language development teachers meet with our lead English language development teacher for the network. I am also available to my teams for meetings as needed.
* Valerie: Each teacher also has a school-based supervisor, the head of school or the director of curriculum and instruction.
1. **[Network staff] How has the network evolved in its thinking about measuring the success of the program and how has that translated into changes in the assessment system?**
* Ann: We are designing our academic program to be rigorous and aligned to college readiness, and so for us success is not just students graduating, but students persisting in college and career. Quality performance assessments are our dominant mode of assessment of student learning. The performance tasks are aligned to college and career skills and allow students to demonstrate their critical thinking in ways that are authentic to the kinds of tasks that they will need to do in college and career. To supplement the quality performance assessments, we have a variety of other assessments to track student progress. Those include STAR assessments for reading and math at the beginning and end of each year, to see where students are on key math and literacy skills, to be able to personalize pathways for them and create more instructional resources to support them where they have skill gaps, or accelerate them where they are demonstrating they have skills and assets that they are bringing to our community. Additionally, we use an interim assessment system in ELA and math classes to assess progress towards meeting ELA and math standards. Those ensure preparedness for MCAS.
1. **This sounds like what you are currently doing. How will things change with the shift to a competency-based system?**
* Liz: I think it will shift somewhat. The quality performance assessments are how we will see that students are demonstrating the competencies. We will think about designing our graduation milestones and our quality performance tasks to be aligned to the competencies that are being developed as part of the Phoenix Forward process. We have not yet determined whether we will continue to conduct interim assessments, given that we are moving toward the competency-based model. We plan to continue to use the STAR assessment as a cross check to the quality performance assessments, which are mostly teacher-created.
1. **How do you as network staff support school-based staff with assessment.**
* Liz: When Tamara and her team drafted their strategic plan for the 2017-2018 school year and identified six priorities that they wanted to tackle in order to achieve their MCAS, enrollment, and attendance goals, that was anchored in data from the previous year. Every academic term I meet with Tamara and her leadership team to do what we call a quarterly academic benchmark meeting, to review the progress of the academic term around grades, interim assessments, and STAR, and to assess where students are making progress towards meeting her goals and benchmarks for them, and where the team might need to adjust their plans.
* Ann: At least two days each quarter are dedicated data days. They tend to be the first Friday in a quarter and then a mid Friday in the quarter. On those days I work with the school-level teams and the director of curriculum and instruction to identify the most important data to be looking at. We look at data from our quality performance assessments, data from our STAR assessments, data from our MCAS results, and passing rates for our courses. These are examples of different types of data that might be analyzed. We use protocols to guide staff through analyzing the data and generating action plans for the quarter.
1. **[Board] What data do you review for individual Phoenix schools? A year from now, if the charter is granted, what are the key pieces of data you will be looking at in order to assess whether the Lawrence school is achieving its mission?**
* John: MCAS scores in comparison to the district, the graduation rate in comparison to the district, the college readiness pieces, attendance, and enrollment.
* Colette: We look at the percentage of students enrolled in college and who are persisting through college. We are also looking at the capacity of teachers.
* Beth: I send a data dashboard to the board, and then during meetings of the executive committee I make suggestions based on concerns I have identified. They usually add a piece or two based on their read of the data. Then we go to the board and Valerie and I do a deeper dive.
* Patrick: It is helpful looking at historical data and data from the schools across the network. What is happening in one school can almost set the bar for the other schools.
1. **[School-based staff] Will you be grouping students differently next fall?**
* Tamara: Currently students are assigned to Categories One through Three based on credits. Students are not progressing through the categories in the way that we thought they would. As part of Phoenix Forward we are thinking about what promotion to graduation should look like. Kids don’t move in a linear way, and so we are thinking about how to create a system that is responsive to that. We may no longer have a need for the three categories. We look very traditional right now, in part because we are an in-district school, and that has held us back in terms of being flexible to meet our students’ needs. We don’t serve traditional students, and so our model shouldn’t look traditional. Part of the drive to become a charter is in order to have that flexibility.
1. **[School-based staff] Describe the process for getting the school community ready for the changes that will be implemented in the fall.**
* Tamara: We are going to build a student focus group who will meet with the leadership team on a monthly basis to discuss proposed changes. There will also be a staff focus group. There was also one last year, and we would replicate the process. Last year we had a group of staff who looked at scheduling options and competency options during the last two months of the year. I am hoping to start the process much earlier this year, so that we have the last four months of the year for planning, before teachers leave for the summer. Our hope is to have both focus groups running by the end of February.
* Liz: In anticipation of the Phoenix Forward work, for the last few years there are some specific things that have been happening across the network and specifically in Lawrence. One is the development of quality performance assessments. We have been training and supporting teachers to make the shift from test-focused assessment to performance assessment that reflects the experiences students will have in college and careers. That is firmly in place, and that will be a wonderful companion to the competency work in Lawrence. We have also made some concrete policy changes, and I applaud our principals for bravely charging forward with the shift to positive youth development, which is in the process of being implemented. One aspect of this is that we removed the attendance requirement that was linked to whether students could earn credit. They can now earn credit for courses either by passing three out of four quarters of the year, or they can advance by doing a mastery portfolio any time, in any course, at any level. Along with that, one of the things the team is piloting this year is an individualized learning block, so that there is a true student-centered structure in the schedule.
1. **[Network and school staff] Please summarize shifts in the approach to discipline. What will be different at the school in Lawrence next fall, and how are you preparing staff members and students for those changes?**
* Tamara: The work actually started last year. The positive youth development model from Springpoint has been a huge anchor for us in talking about what restorative practices look like. This year we made a decision to remove punitive consequences such as detention. We no longer have detention in Lawrence. We asked what it means for a consequence to be restorative and how to provide training to teachers to understand what that means. We provided significant professional development on what restorative practices are and how we use them. We have learned lessons since the beginning of the year and have been making changes. Teachers will have two blocks a week devoted to restorations with students. We have also rolled out things like support plans for students who need small wins. This has decreased our suspensions for the first four months of school. Teachers are really excited to learn more about how to hold restorative circles in classes, conference with students, and conference with parents. Those are all things that will be included in professional development in the coming months.
* Rachel: A huge part of my work is supporting teachers in professional development. When we talk about behavior management and when we talk about curriculum and instruction, we are not talking about two separate things but the same thing in a lot of cases. It has been really exciting this year to work with our director of school culture to provide professional development that is about instruction and behavior management. We are doing this together, making sure that teachers and members of the student support team are in those sessions together, communicating regularly, and they are not seeing these as two separate things.
1. **[Network staff] Explain the network’s plan to hire one full time nurse to serve all three schools across the network. How will this approach support the health needs of the targeted student population?**
* Beth: I am envisioning us having some local support at each campus, and then having a full time nurse who would serve in an administrative and support function across the network.
1. **[Network staff] We would like some clarity on the relationship between network staff and staff at an individual school. How did the board and CEO determine the current network staffing structure?**
* Beth: It was iterative. When we opened our Lawrence school six years ago, there were three of us between Chelsea and Lawrence. That was nuts. Sara [the current network chief operating officer] and I sat down and created a model. We anticipated that we would have a large population of young teachers and a lot of new operations folks. We predicted we needed to have some basic functions around operations, human resources, academics, and back office. We wanted to hire some senior folks who were not new to management, leadership, or development. I also knew pretty quickly that we needed to have someone with experience with education reform. One of the first hires of that time was Liz, a person who had done K-12 work around training and development after leading a school, Prospect Hill Academy. That hire as well as Sara’s hire were the stanchions for Phoenix in the next phase of growth. We had operations covered and academics covered, so we were in a place where we could take some risks so that we as an organization could continue to serve kids that nobody has figured out. Sara’s role and Liz’s role have given birth to the main functions of our network. In more recent years we added a strategy option because we would like to grow this in some ways that make sense for Massachusetts. Everybody in the network office has projects that they are working on to support the individual schools. My role has shifted towards more oversight of data and what is transpiring in schools, hiring, and working for the board around the senior organization, buildings, and expansion. This organizational structure helped us get here, but I don’t know that this is the way we should be organized now. With college completion and economic viability being real drivers of our change process, I cannot only imagine more positions but I can imagine being organized differently. We are a statewide network, and we have to think about that. We are thinking strategically about what our organization should look like at the network level.
* Patrick: There are a lot of unknowns when you are building the network. You don’t want to burden the schools too much in helping to support the network. It needs to be the right size to be sustainable. We make sure on the finance side that what we are doing is sustainable.
1. **Are all network staff public employees? No one is employed by the foundation?**
* Beth: All network staff are public employees.
1. **How do network staff responsible for supporting school-level staff differentiate their support across the three schools? How do network staff determine the level of support for school-level teams at each site?**
* Beth: There are three senior leaders who work with me. We are developing an additional level of managing directors. All of us work in different ways, but the primary relationship is Liz’s relationship as the oversight person for the heads of school. What we are trying to do as an organization is evolve oversight from a really hands on approach at the beginning to more of a coaching role. We want to get to a place where heads of school have so much longevity and experience at Phoenix that they would also be sitting at the senior-level leadership table. That would be an awesome goal for us. One of the things that makes me excited about Tamara as a leader is that she has been at Phoenix for five years and has risen through many different roles in the organization. Her relationship with Liz next year will be different in a lot of ways than it is this year, and it is different because she has had five years at Phoenix Lawrence, which looks different than someone who, like Jackie, started brand new a year ago at Phoenix Springfield. Liz will pull in other network staff as needed, and I have my own formal and informal ways of working with heads of school.
1. **[Tamara] Please describe the support provided to you by the chief academic officer. In what ways is the support targeted to your specific needs as a school leader?**
* Tamara: Liz and I meet weekly for supervision. That time is used for looking at school data and my progress towards meeting professional goals. We talk about what it means to lead a group of leaders with different experiences and different backgrounds towards our school goals. We talk about progress toward meeting benchmarks we identified before the start of the school year. Lately we have been talking about what leadership growth looks like, and thinking about what professional development might benefit me and the other members of the leadership team. Liz and I are in constant communication. I also feel like I have easy access to Ann when things come up with the academic program, and to Jen Clammer [network chief of student supports and strategic partnerships] for assistance with restorative practices and positive youth development. I utilize the network leaders as resources. I would say that Ann is my primary supervisor this year.
1. **[Liz] What are your priorities for supporting the head of school over the coming year? What are the goals of that support?**
* Liz: We start with self-assessment and goal setting. When we started Tamara’s onboarding process in the spring, we used the state administrator’s evaluation rubric and leadership competencies for student-centered and personalized learning recently released by iNACOL. Given that we are preparing for the work of Phoenix Forward, we took a look at those and identified areas of strength and areas for potential growth, and we narrowed it down to a couple of narrow practice goals. One is instructional leadership. Tamara’s background is as a social worker and as a director of school culture. The other piece that we named was leadership of system-wide change to positive youth development. Given Tamara’s previous experience was as a social worker and director of school culture, her skills are formidable working one on one with students and with the student support team. Now as principal Tamara is charged implementing that vision with the student support team, classroom teachers, and students.
1. **[Tamara] Please clarify who will supervise teachers.**
* Tamara: Rachel supervises the majority of our teachers. I supervise the five members of the leadership team and two teachers.
1. **[Rachel ] Please describe the support provided to you by the network staff.**
* Rachel: My go-to person is Ann. We meet weekly. We focus a lot on data and different leadership challenges. She helps me develop and refine professional development sessions and opportunities, and helps me with my leadership goals. I also feel comfortable going to anyone on the network leadership team. There are also network leadership retreats. The deans of curriculum and instruction from all three schools get together and discuss progress and share challenges. We have also talked about Phoenix Forward and preparing for the shift to competencies.
1. **[Ann] What are your priorities for supporting the Rachel over the coming year?**
* Ann: I do not supervise Rachel. Tamara is her supervisor. My role with Rachel is to be her partner in learning, support, and oversight of the academic program. We work on her leadership goals. We talk about her leadership practices. We co-observe classrooms. We look at evidence of student learning. We talk about how to give feedback to teachers in the most effective ways. We talk about scenarios that are challenging. I give feedback on or co-develop professional development plans for teachers based on the needs that we are identifying.

**[Network and school staff] What will the hiring process look like for the proposed school? Are you guaranteeing all current staff members positions at the proposed school? Advertising all positions? Do you see this as an opportunity to make some staffing changes? Are there current positions or staffing levels that will be changed?**

Beth: We have promised positions to everyone who returned this year and wants to stay in the network, provided there is nothing new that comes up that causes us to change our minds.

Valerie: We will follow the same recommitment process that we use at all of our schools, based on positive performance. The conversation will look and feel the same.

Beth: These are teachers involved in the union. We met with teachers and staff last year when we were making this decision. We wouldn’t have done it if we didn’t have teacher and staff support.

Tamara: A lot of things will depend on the budget. We are interested in retaining the entire leadership team, in order to continue the Phoenix Forward process. We are in the process of getting a sense from our staff of where they are. If they are looking for other options, we will start posting those positions in the next three weeks, so that we have the most viable candidates. We will start the hiring process soon, so that we are fully staffed for next year. If there are teachers who are not returning next year, it will be an opportunity for us to diversify our teaching staff. The school in Lawrence is significantly diverse in terms of the student support team and leadership team, but not in our teaching staff. That is something that Rachel and I talk and think about often.

1. **[Bob] The application states that transportation will be provided using a combination of existing bus services and contracted services. The budget includes $60,000 for transportation in Year 1. What are your assumptions around transportation and how those funds will be used?**
* Bob: We have to make assumptions about the mode of transportation students will use. Based on our experience with our other schools, which draw from multiple districts, and the public transportation options available, most of them will have public transportation options. We may need to provide transportation for a limited number of students.
* Valerie: Both the commuter rail and a major bus station are within walking distance of the school. Merrimack Valley Transit has a line that goes directly through Methuen, Haverhill, and Lawrence. We anticipate the majority of students will be able to use public transportation.
* Beth: We are in communications with the community college in Haverhill about potentially using their vans. We are also thinking ahead about future transportation needs related to our plans to have students enroll in college.