***Proposed* Worcester Cultural Academy Charter Public School**
**Summary of Interview**

*Questions derived from review panel; public hearing and comment; and documentation review*

***Note: The interview summary is not a transcript of the interview audio. Responses have been summarized by Department staff.***

## In Attendance

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| Pamela BoisvertKeith Blanchette | *proposed board chair, current OSACPS board secretary**proposed board treasurer, current OSACPS board treasurer* |
| Angele GossAmy Herman | *proposed board member**proposed board member* |
| Stacey Luster | *proposed board member* |
| Alicia O’Connell Rogers | *proposed board member* |
| Jane Roseberry | *proposed board member* |
| Jennifer M. Safford | *proposed board member* |
| Jim Donahue | *OSV president and CEO; executive director of OSACPS; proposed executive director of WCACPS* |
| Lisa DeToraMelissa Hogan | *Current principal at OSACPS, proposed principal WCACPS**Current director of special education and student support services at OSACPS, proposed director of special education WCACPS* |
| Tina Krasnecky | *OSV vice president of finance and human resources* |
| Jasmin RivasJamie Greenthal | *OSV director of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access* *OSV director of charter school strategy and planning* |
| Jodi Rabat | *School Designer and professional development specialist, EL Education* |

## Not in Attendance

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| Emily Dunnack  | *OSV director of education*  |
| Alexandra McConnon  | *OSV executive assistant to CEO and board support* |

1. **Why are you seeking to establish the Worcester Cultural Academy Charter Public School in Worcester?**
* Worcester is obviously a large urban school district. In fact, it fluctuates between being the second and third largest in New England after Boston. It brings all of the attendant issues with it and has to deal with it. Worcester has a unique position in terms of the number of families coming into the city who are coming from other countries. Immigrant families. We have a huge number of English language learners given the size of the district, we have very large, even larger number of students coming from families, I think it's 58%, coming from families where English is not the primary language. We have a very diverse student population. I frankly look at being bilingual as a superpower. I think we have a lot of superheroes in our Worcester school system, and what we would like to do is give them the very best opportunity to realize their educational potential in a setting that is very much attuned to their needs, their individual needs, their community needs, their family needs, and it will address all of their learning issues. We think that Worcester Cultural Academy will play that role. I see two major resources that Worcester has going for it. One is this population of students, very large public school population, who will be the leaders of tomorrow. Both culturally and community-wise. But I also see another resource that Worcester has, and I think we all agree with that, another resource that Worcester has is the cultural institutions. I'm from Worcester. I was born in Worcester, raised in Worcester, went to school in Worcester, my whole professional career has been at Worcester, and one of the aspects of Worcester that I have always been very proud about is the number of cultural institutions that we have, for a city our size, a midsize city we have a tremendous number of cultural institutions in the city, both immediately and outside [Worcester], dealing with performing arts, creative arts, music, nature, science, conservation, history, education, these cultural institutions have really brought a tremendous quality of life, I think, to Worcester, having been here forever. I see the role that that plays and what we're trying to do is to marry those resources from those cultural institutions with this Worcester public school population. Those students who would best benefit by this type of education. All of this would be overseen under our umbrella. Let's say of EL Education, which has a track record in terms of working very successfully with marginalized population, students who might learn a little differently. Students might need a little different support in various areas. And we think that's the population that we will be serving through Worcester Cultural Academy. It is a win-win in terms of what Worcester already has with these amazing nationally and internationally known cultural institutions and the population that we now see coming. It's not new. We've always had this population coming into the Worcester public schools, because Worcester has always been a magnet for immigrant families who've been a very welcoming city, and we see this as a tremendous opportunity to bring those two resources together and create something really really special.
1. **How has your knowledge of Worcester shaped the school’s design and programming?**
* One thing that we are planning to do is hire three English language learner expert teachers. We've also talked about having some training for our support staff. All of our teachers will be SEI (Sheltered English Immersion) certified and also this whole board either has children or grandchildren, or people who have been in the Worcester Public Schools. Personally, I worked with Worcester Headstart for over 5 years. I saw an amazing system with Headstart that took in these kids and did amazing work. But also, having worked as a teacher, teaching the EL (Education) curriculum, and being able to apply that to this population, I think, is just going to be an amazing opportunity both for the teachers who come into this different kind of a teaching model but also the kids and the families, lots of engaging opportunities for the families. That is different from what I experienced as a teacher in different public schools.
* I am currently a grandparent of students in the Worcester public schools, grade 7 and grade 12, and they previously were in a private school, Worcester Academy, and during the pandemic I had an opportunity to witness firsthand the difference in the rigor, in the instruction and it was disturbing. I also previously was the human resource manager for the Worcester Public Schools and helped to negotiate the turnaround plans for the first schools that required that, and I could see now in hindsight that the reason why the approach was not sustainable was it didn't shift the culture or the perception on the students. The whole idea about marginalized students, the way it's worded almost suggests that they are self-marginalized. The district, the institutions have marginalized these students, and at one point in my time here, being 3rd generation, it was significantly detrimental to the district to have these underachieving students because they didn't make up the majority like they do now. It would be we're doing a great job but those students with their second languages and their poverty and their parents that don’t engage, they're the problem versus the institution taking responsibility. What is really critical about this proposal is that it shifts the responsibility and shares the responsibility with the parents and with the students. In the mission I just love how it refers to finding the inner genius. There's a presumption of genius, and the students will believe it, if we believe it because the turnaround schools, those faculty, they worked so hard. It was successful for a period, but you can’t sustain that. It's too much to bear all that burden. They didn't shift culture. What this model [will do], rather than try to shift culture, it begins with the culture of shared responsibility for learning. It is essential for our community. I wish that once this is approved, that we can replicate this because, there's too many students that are just not receiving what they need.
* I wanted to build on that, and we've seen it in practice. At Old Sturbridge Academy, we've seen students who have struggled, students coming from my community in Southbridge, who are flourishing and thriving and really believing that their teachers believe in them. They've found their voice. They are empowered to ask questions. We've seen it in our amazing book project where students - that was a result of our students questioning what was going on in the (Old Sturbridge) Village. We don't see ourselves in these stories, and our students lead that effort. I've worked in the public schools in Southbridge, and I was a parent of students in Worcester. Students don't feel that their voices are heard. They're not going to be questioning the policies and practices or questioning why something is. Our students are encouraged to do that on a daily basis with this model, and we want to bring that to [Worcester]. The more students that are empowered in this way, the more leaders we create for the future.
1. **In what ways will WCA resemble the OSACPS model? In what ways will it be different?**
* I think one of the ways that it will be very much similar is the fact that they will partner with EL Education. One of the things that EL Education, and Old Sturbridge Academy has done very well is created an amazingly supportive school community where all students belong and have a voice from day one. In terms of what specifically will be beneficial for this upcoming Worcester community is that we often see transformational growth in language in terms of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, specifically from English language learners, or those [students] that learn differently, [such as] Special Ed[ucation] students or underrepresented groups. We work really hard on making sure that students develop academic mindsets. And just to be very specific those are (1) I belong, (2) my success can improve with my effort, (3) I can succeed at this, and (4) this work has value for me. Another really strong aspect of this particular model, which I think we see flourish at Old Sturbridge Academy and we also will see in Worcester Cultural Academy, is that our students are actively involved in not only their projects, but their community, and like Stacey said, we know that they already have what it takes to do amazing things and we just foster that and they do it in a really authentic way, which makes them so proud and have so much ownership of the work that they're doing, and we know that that's what makes achievement flourish.
1. **Are there ways that it will be different?**
* We have been so fortunate to have worked on Old Sturbridge Academy Charter Public School’s opening, a lot of people on this Zoom call today started Old Sturbridge Academy. There were many lessons learned in doing that, many takeaways that we're going to bring to Worcester Cultural Academy, for example, our robust English language learner program and special education program. That's important to families. We want to make sure that we have outstanding standalone programs that can meet the needs of those students. What's also the same is the partnership that we're going to have with Old Sturbridge Village in terms of the closeness of the staff working together to make the students feel like the museum is part of their classroom so we're extending the four walls of the classroom and what's different is, we just have more cultural institutions to partner with. And we learned very, very quickly, at Old Sturbridge Academy students needed to be able to walk to the village. They can get there in three minutes so what this team did, we added some important positions and resources so that we can get the students from point A to point B. A great example is the Expedition Coordinator. You're going to notice that on our staffing chart. It's a job that I would like to have, and I already told people I’d be the principal. It's a great, a great position that we're going to shift a little bit in this Expedition Coordinator becomes the liaison between the teachers, the students, and the cultural institutions because we have more of them. Another example is we’re going to have a bus driver and a bus so we can get students from point A to point B. Again, a major difference is the urban environment. I'm really excited about an urban environment. This would be my third school that I'd be starting; the second one in an urban environment. [Lisa DeTora previously worked in Fitchburg Public Schools.] And again, we need that accessibility to get the kids from point A to point B, so a bus and a bus driver on staff, as a founding principal that's key to me to move students from point A to point B. Other similarities, we're going to use the lessons learned with the curriculum products that we've been choosing. We're going to use the same English language arts program, we’ve adopted a new math curriculum that is really working at Old Sturbridge Academy, a science curriculum. We're working really closely with Old Sturbridge Village for social studies and make sure that that is robust and meaningful to Village for social studies and make sure that that is robust and meaningful. We want to take the best parts of Old Sturbridge Academy and really, look at the needs of our anticipated student population and bring them to these cultural institutions on a really consistent basis. Again, the students are feeling like this is an extension of my classroom. I can go here on the weekends with my family and show them the painting that we were looking at or an exhibit that we designed. I think Worcester is the differentiator, and it's a really exciting one.
* One of the things that Lisa was saying, that at Old Sturbridge Academy kids can be in the museum in 3 minutes. I went on Google last night just to check this out because I thought I was right. But three of our major cultural institutions are within 2 miles or 2.5 miles of the location we are proposing for Worcester Cultural Academy. On a good day, they could practically walk but we will have the school bus. It will be very quick to get there.
1. **Is the bus assumed that it would be big enough to accommodate one grade? What is the thinking on the bus?**
* Yes, one grade level.

**Any final thoughts before we move on.**

* I think another difference is in the board members. The expertise and the connection to the community in Worcester is, very different, not that our OSA board is amazing, but from the beginning, the Board members here have so much experience and depth where they are going to hold us accountable. Angele [Goss] and I were talking the other day and yeah, you’re ready to hold us accountable for what we promise to do. I think that gives me so much confidence in what we will be able to do, and how we will grow and learn from these amazing people who know the community and know how to ask us questions that are going to push us in the right directions.
* One of the things that is similar between the boards is obviously me and Pam. We're both on both boards. We're both founding members of the Old Sturbridge Academy. I've been the treasurer for 5 years of that Academy to bring that expertise from those 5 years and hope to move this along a lot faster but again, as Jasmine said, some of the things that we learned, and we had and we're able to bring forward just by actually going through it. It's not our first rodeo. You've done it once. We had some hurdles, got through those, and now we think we can actually do it better on our second time around.
* The genesis of Worcester Cultural Academy came from Worcester. Old Sturbridge Academy was up and running and doing great things for a couple of years. We were midway through our 5 year term cycle, and Jim Donahue was actually approached by one of the executive directors of one of our major cultural institutions to say, I know you're doing great things, is there a possibility to do this in Worcester? The light bulb went off for us at that point with the Old Sturbridge Academy, saying, this is a really great model, and Worcester does have an amazing number of cultural institutions. Let's think about this, and it was very well received by the Sturbridge board. In fact, during a strategic planning process, it became part of the strategic plan that we should look at replicating this model, because especially, certainly in Worcester, and maybe all over Massachusetts, we have so many cultural institutions. Let's see what we can do. That was really the genesis of Worcester Cultural Academy, and with the understanding that we would be taking all the best practices from Old Sturbridge Academy to Worcester but enhancing it and making it more relevant for Worcester.
1. **[Board] What are your expectations of the types of supports and resources provided by OSV and EL Education during the pre-operational period and once the school has opened?**
* During the pre-operational period, I understand that there are very specific things that have to be accomplished in order to get to your opening day, so we would, certainly, because we will be entering into a management contract with OSV, who has experience in doing this, we would be expecting that they would be guiding the board through that whole process to a start date, the opening day of school, and then taking over the administration of the Worcester Cultural Academy with oversight from the Board.
* I just want to add to what Jodi said earlier that EL [Education] piece. We're really helping teachers to build a sense of collaboration and student-centered learning where students are leaving with the sense of this is what this means to me, this is how I can add to this education, this is how this built in my community and my family. As Pam started out, the diversity of families that are coming to the school, particularly in Worcester, and that EL [Education] really is building for teachers a special sort of professional development. It really helps teachers understand the diversity of the families, and really helps to not only be student-centered but to infuse the culture of the students into the culture of EL Learning, which we talked about, how that symmetry works so well, similar to the oversight model, and will be really important to the Worcester Cultural Academy.
* Just as Old Sturbridge Village will oversee the day to day operations of the proposed school under the management contract during the start-up period, they will be collecting applications, running the lottery, and hiring the staff.
1. **Please define a cultural leader of tomorrow – this is a student outcome that is cited in the mission.**
* When I think about that, I think about what culture organizations need in the cultural landscape. We need folks who are potential staffers in the future, people who want to work in these organizations. We need people who want to lead them as volunteers and board members or volunteers who just feel that the institutions are important and want to be there. But we also need new ones. We need to have graduate students who have vision and think that maybe they want to create an organization of their own. That is going to contribute to the cultural landscape. Whether they graduate as patrons and supporters, who feel that these organizations can enrich their lives just as visitors or members or board members or staff members or founders of institutions that's kind of what I think about, and I’ve seen it here at Old Sturbridge Academy. When you see students finding ways to bring out their own inner genius through projects in the museum that engage the public. Whether that's a future in a museum setting or it's a future in some setting where there is public engagement through what they're creating, art, music, nature. My definition is a little broad. But I just want the exposure and the comfort levels.
* I think in terms of cultural leaders, we want to graduate students who appreciate the importance of their culture, of what culture is, which is a lived experience made up of art, music, fashion, social morays. What is their experience, and how important that is to a cohesive community, to a culture? Whether they're in a leadership role of running a museum or just have that ingrained in them that this is an important aspect of life to celebrate culture and support culture. I think that's what we're trying to accomplish. To make sure that they have that understanding of the importance of this lived experience, which is different for a lot of, obviously, for probably everybody. But they have understanding of the importance of that lived experience, and they respect it, and appreciate it, and can support it.
* I am teaching kindergarten at OSA, I am a founder there [founding teacher] and yesterday we had an amazing experience that really exemplifies this including all children, children being able to see themselves. Jasmine Rivas actually paid a visit to the kindergarten class, and she was dressed as a Bomba dancer from Puerto Rico, and the children were so excited and engaged, and I had students who were looking forward to celebrating Little Christmas today [January 6], who heard a story from somebody who looks like someone in their family who is celebrating the same things. She also gave an opportunity for all children to engage and talk. When children see that type of learning, when we place importance on that type of curriculum, children see themselves and they feel important and a part of this community and that's what we want to do in Worcester as well. To make sure that all students have that feeling of I’m important. This place is important. I am valued. I see myself in books. I am represented, and these children also represent themselves with their high quality work as young as kindergarten. They are creating town meetings, they are performing in front of the whole school, and their families. And when I say performing, I don't mean just singing and dancing, I mean speaking and talking about their own work, talking about becoming experts in science, in weather, in reading what we've read in the arts. We have just finished a unit on Russian dancers and Russian composers from the past, and they'll be talking about that in a town meeting next week. The children are so engaged, and so a part of their learning in this model.
* I think the piece, too, that I hope you're hearing is that Worcester Cultural Academy students are seeking to see this culture represented, they are expecting to see this culture represented. They will be accustomed to seeing this diversity, in who is talking to them, and what they're learning in books they see, they are also looking for this in the cultural institutions that we're partnering with. This becomes an extension, not only of their families that they see within their own homes in their communities, but in the classroom and then again in the cultural institutions and so as they grow up and continue their education, they are looking for this, they're seeking it, they're asking for it. And whether they are in the majority, if you will, of cultures that are represented, or in the minority, they're looking for who's missing? What voices aren’t there? What voices can we add? I think, as we watch these students continue to see that, and expect that, and look for that in other places that continues to make cultural leaders who then graduate from eighth grade, graduate from high school, going to college, continuing to look for and expect this to happen and ask for it when it's not there.
* I think it's also important to focus on creating and building these cultural leaders - it's a process. It's growth. These students will not simply attend or participate in an art show one time or visit a performance at an institution in Worcester one time. They will develop relationships with the cultural institutions. Their projects will allow them to feel connected to the community, to the institution, and themselves and their family. I am a resident of Worcester, and I have children in the public schools, elementary and middle school, they are my stepchildren, and I can only imagine how they would feel if they were able to have such ownership over school and their interests.
* This is unique to the model.
* I felt strongly as well just when we're thinking about cultural leaders, and how they're having the ability to really effect change. And understanding that representation matters which is what everybody has already talked about. But then this idea that we can also help them to really be critical of these institutions to ensure accountability. That these institutions are not just like we're going to bring our students to you and you’re going to do what you always do, but, no, this is a true partnership where our students are going to hold you accountable as an institution, because over time, what we want to see is change, so that it doesn't look the same. So that their families don't feel the same way maybe they have always felt. Being born and raised in Worcester, I’m similar to Pam, I've experienced that, and I've been through it so we're trying to affect change. I think helping students to see themselves as cultural leaders that have the ability to do that is really important.
1. **Please name a few specific academic and non-academic goals you have for students. What will be the evidence you will use to determine whether you have achieved those goals?**
* I can speak very specifically about, as the proposed school leader, what we're going to be doing, and then someone from the board can jump in and say, how we’re going to hold the school accountable for this. What we're going to start with is the model that El Education has provided which is the strong model in the standards. We're going to take all the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and make sure that they are at the foundation of everything we do, and then we have a saying, we say in EL Education that teachers talk less, students talk more. Added to that saying, we're really going to investigate these real world problems that are embedded in the standards that the students are engaged in, can connect to, that are really specific to their cultural institutions in their city. There could be a gardening project that students do in a community in a nearby community neighborhood. They could use their English language arts, science, and social studies standards that they're working on in class and create this garden in the neighborhood. They will be assessed on their writing, their reading, their listening, their speaking, their attainment of standards. But they also going to be assessed on their final product that they produce, how they're communicating with the community members. And this is where our habits of character fold in. We have mastery of knowledge and skills. We've got habits of character, and then we have that high quality work piece where they're building a project, actually doing something to make the world a better place, to increase with the community. The teachers have the exciting job of putting all these pieces together for the students. The students actually do the work. I'll kick it over to somebody from the board to talk about what data you would want to see in terms of our students’ performance.
* I would want to see what the activities are; I would want to see what is going on. I think in many cases it's going to be difficult to evaluate what is the end result until these kids have gone through a couple of years of this type of experience but I would like to see what are the activities that are going on, how are staff addressing this goal, and how are you being open to input from the board as well as the community and the parents in terms of how effective some of this might be. I don't think it's something you can evaluate within 6 months of the activity but I think it'd be a more long term goal that we would have, and our goal is when we graduate these students from the eighth grade that they are very well prepared for high school and that they are very well socially and emotionally and academically prepared for high school and college, and that they are articulate communicators, they are critical thinkers, and they are very skilled problem solvers, but that's at the eighth grade. I think it might be a lesser evaluation as we go through those 8 years. But certainly, it's something that the board would be looking at and monitoring.
* When it comes to data, this might not necessarily answer the question you are asking but the data we're looking at the end of the day, we’re also a school, so the data we're looking for is actually academics as well. We can provide great kids. But we're also looking to provide well-educated kids that can actually meet or exceed all the standards of the state of Massachusetts offered up for these people.
* I think some of the data that we can hold the school accountable for immediately is qualitative data. I think that we will be hopefully as board members invited to attend things with the students. Performances or programs on site and at the cultural institutions, what we should be able to observe are that students are prepared for those activities. And that they are invited to challenge and propose things so that they really reflect the students who are there at that particular time. I think obviously it will take a longer time for parents to really build their voice because schools, and I mean this with no disrespect to the Worcester Public Schools that I'm a product of or to DESE [Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education] but schools have taken that power, disempowered parents, from having that type of a voice. And so that will probably take a little longer to build but students are very resilient, and I think we will be able to see as soon as something you’re invited to in November if the students are really reflecting that empowerment.
* I just want to add, too, for the English language learners really looking at how their skillset builds, how they develop more proficiency in that academic language, how they are going from maybe not knowing the English language very well, to being able to present, to being able to communicate, both in their native language as they are talking to the community members and then in the English academic language as they are presenting or building reports, or building any of these science or performance things that we have talked about to really looking at how that develops through the years and that students really build that proficiency in both that social and academic language.
* As a board member, we are going to look at concrete data, we are going to be looking at the student-led conferences and the culture of the school but as a board member, we need to look at the MCAS testing, we need to look at the benchmark testing, we need to look at the ACCESS testing, and not look at just the result but do we see growth with these students who maybe are not being served right now best, but we're hoping that we're going to be able to use the EL [Education] curriculum with their English language objectives and help these students really make that growth especially over the years as the school grows.
1. **[Board] Proposed board members have prior experience on governing boards of a variety of different organizations and institutions, including charter schools. How has your prior governing board experience prepared you to launch a new charter school in Worcester? What knowledge, skills, and qualifications will you bring to support the effectiveness of the board of trustees and ensure the school’s success?**
* Pam and I have the unique experience in the fact that we were already on a charter school board that was founded, was approved by BESE, and has been in existence for five years. We feel [the school has been] wildly successful which is the reason we want to continue this. Other boards, I am on a bank board which, as everyone knows, a very regulated industry similar to everything this school has. They have their own rules but at the same time there are a lot of laws and regulations that have to followed. That governance aspect of it is strong and built into what I do from a board member perspective. As for what else I bring to the board, my professional background as a CPA, I would anticipate, I’ve been the treasurer of the OSACPS, I would anticipate being the treasurer of the new WCA institution as well. I can hold Tina [Tina Krasnecky, OSV vice president of finance and human resources*]* and Old Sturbridge Village and all the academics and monetary aspects of the school in check based on my experience that I've developed over the years.
* We have 110% confidence in Keith. We're thrilled that what he's done with OSA and that he will also be bringing that to WCA. It is a great opportunity for us to help him currently in both. My experience with OSA as a founding board member, I joined because I was enthralled with this idea of not just a charter school but a charter school collaborating or cooperating with a museum. I thought it was an absolute, win-win model. I actually seen it in New York State with the Rochester Museum of Science. I thought this was amazing. I see no downside to that, so I was thrilled to be on the OSA board and now go into WCA mode so to speak. But my major role, I’ve been on the finance committee with OSA since the beginning and that’s why I can speak so positively about Keith, he’s been absolutely wonderful, but I’ve also chaired the governance committee. I think the governance committee for any organization, really plays a major role and that's experience from OSA that I can bring to WCA in terms of processes, procedures, filling board positions, and policies to make sure that everything is working smoothly. I think that's an easy transition to bring that experience to WCA.
* I would just say that probably most relevant government experience for this particular question would be my experience as a member of the Worcester City Council and chair of the education committee of the Worcester City Council. I think that experience will allow me to add value as it relates to public participation and accountability to the public. And one of the biggest accomplishments but most challenging activities that I led was the merger of the Worcester Vocational High School, which was city run into the Worcester Public Schools, which resulted in Worcester Technical High School, which is one of the districts most successful school. I can add value as it relates to public participation.
* I previously led the board of Girls, Inc. of Worcester for 2 years, where the service population there is the exact mirror of what we hope to see at WCA. I also sat on the board of Abby Kelley Foster Charter Public School [in Worcester] for four years, specifically also on the education committee, and I joined that board more than 10 years after its approval and startup and to be able to see its success over the years was exciting. I understand the model of subcommittees reporting to the board and working with the staff, for this instance it would also be the management contract as well, and also providing reports to DESE. In terms of my education and training – I was also a lawyer for ten years, but no longer practicing after I decided to work in public service. I worked at the Worcester Housing Authority for two years directing the admissions process for families on Worcester, our most vulnerable communities. That inspired me to do something a little bit different but related to the mission of the school, I am now in library science school at Simmons University, studying youth services public librarianship so I hope to continue to serve the public professionally as well as individually on this board.
* I can also share, similar to Alicia, I have some non-profit board experience, currently on the YWCA of Central Massachusetts board and also was on the board for Learning First Charter Public School, formerly Seven Hills Charter Public School [in Worcester], for many, many years while my three children were attending school there. I also joined that board after it was already in existence for a number of years, so I was able to be a part of the executive committee and vice chair [of the board], and the academic excellence committee to really look into curricula and things of that nature. It is exciting here to be at the ground level for this charter school. I bring that experience with me as well.
* I have over 20 years of experience in charter schools albeit in Rhode Island. And I've been the teacher, now an administrator, I’ve been on the board of the charter school. I'm really familiar with the accountability to the Department of Education as a charter school and how important that is. My experience will add value to this board.
1. **[Board] We understand that Lisa and Melissa have been selected as proposed administrators of WCA by the proposed board of trustees. Please describe the process for selecting the proposed principal and director of special education. What was the proposed board's involvement? What was OSV's involvement?**
* Keith and I have had the benefit of working with these folks in terms of what they were doing for OSA. When they were proposed by OSV, which would be our educational management organization, when they were proposed as taking these leadership roles, there was no question, because we knew how successful they had been at OSA and to bring that level of experience, expertise, dedication, and commitment to a new charter school made all the sense in the world. They would not be starting from scratch. We knew their professionalism. We knew their level of success. We knew everything that they had achieved being on the OSA board. It wasn't even a question in terms of should we look for somebody else. We were thrilled that they were willing to do this.
* If you were trying to define any specific people to fill those roles, and you were coming with a category list of ideal traits, you’d take Lisa and Melissa, they have already done it, they have successfully started a school and ran it for five years. I think we have the perfect people, and we couldn’t have asked for better people. Once they expressed interest, it was kind of a done deal. These are the people.
* I have worked on the front lines with both of these people, meeting with them daily for the last 5 years. Well, Melissa, since she joined, and the kind of integrity that these people bring to their position – this whole view of shared leadership enabling their teachers and the educators that they're working with to really participate in making a successful school and taking ownership of the school is something that I've never seen before anywhere. I’ve had a lot of principals and I've worked with a lot of special needs educators, and I’ve never experienced such a, not only the wealth of knowledge, but an ability to make decisions and ability to listen. Also, both of these professional people will ask. They really want to know what we think. Or what teachers think. I am retired but I still am so excited to be able to stay involved, and contribute, and work with these individuals. I've seen so much success with these people and the support that they offer their staff is like nothing I've ever seen anywhere.
* I want to add that while I concur that this was the right move to propose Lisa and Melisa for these leadership roles, I do intend to hold OSV and WCA accountable for diversity in the subsequent hires at the leadership and the educational level, both diversity of race, culture, and language but also demographics of location. We do understand what is necessary and that representation matters at all levels, but it would be foolish for us to start from scratch when we have such talented, capable, willing leaders to get us off the ground running.
* Following off what Stacey is saying, a better question to us would have been if you couldn’t have them, what would we have done?
* Their attention to the value of diversity, as Stacey just said, really looking at these ELL families as they are coming in, what they have done at OSA already. How they want to structure that. Building on staffing that supports the increased diversity of students – all of those things are really important. We will definitely be holding them accountable to providing that type of support, both structurally with staff and the academic data that Keith mentioned earlier as we watch the students’ progress.
* We’ve been very lucky to build a relatively stable leadership team. One way that we have done that is really to embrace this growth mindset concept that we have at the school which is that we want to keep giving our staff new challenges and new opportunities to lead. When I think about Melissa and Lisa, they have learned a lot through the start-up of Old Sturbridge Academy. This presents an opportunity for us to give Lisa and Melissa a new challenge and also to create leadership opportunities at Old Sturbridge Academy for new leaders. It's a way for us to think through, how do we keep everybody challenged? How do we keep everybody engaged? And how do we keep everybody growing? And so, Lisa and I, we started talking about this a while ago. Lisa has learned so much from her experience at OSA that the opportunity to do that again with that knowledge is going to be great. For me, it is also about building leadership capacity within the larger organization. I couldn’t agree more with what Stacey said, in fact, with Stacey’s help, I talked to somebody yesterday who could be a great potential leader at the WCA.
1. **[Current OSA board, employees, and James Donahue of OSV] What succession planning is in place at OSACPS related to school leadership?**
* Actually, way back when OSA was starting we had a great founding board member who had extensive work with EL Education in Springfield, and he had to leave our board at OSA but has always stayed in touch. And we were all very impressed with him, and he has expressed interest in coming back to OSA as principal. We don't feel that if Lisa goes to WCA, OSA is not left in the lurch at all. This is a very impressive guy – a lot of experience, a lot of interest and commitment, and he has expressed an interest in coming in and playing that leadership rule OSA. We feel that we would not be missing a beat if that were to happen.
* If we could go further on that, over the years Lisa has added deans, added supports, STEM directors, so she has created a pipeline at OSA so that if something along these lines were to happen, this could be a natural progression for folks moving forward in that school. As for Melissa leaving, we’ve supported her over the years. We’ve added four fulltime positions - a fulltime special education coordinator, and three fulltime special education teachers. We have been backfilling that knowing that there is a possibility for someone to move on at any point in time. Through the five years, we have been building underneath them so that if anything ever happened and they moved on, we would be able to keep the school going. Pam and I would be on both boards, but we have a fiduciary obligation to both of these schools to make sure that they are in a good position to help the kids be successful.
1. **[Current OSA board members] In the establishment of WCACPS, there will be two OSA board officers who will transition over to the WCACPS board of trustees. Is the presumption that you will be solely on the WCACPS board, or would you be on both boards? What succession planning is in place at OCACPS related to board leadership?**
* While no decisions are final since we do not know if we have the WCA school yet though we are hoping for a positive result. If you were to ask me now and I had to make a decision, I would say I would finish off my term at OSA and then I would be fulltime at WCA, focusing as much time as I can to help the school be as successful as possible.
* My response would be the same thing I would finish off my term at OSA and then become the chair of the board of WCA. That's not to say I couldn’t be a community member of a committee at OSA, because I obviously have very strong feelings about that institution as well. But my main focus would be WCA.
* Before I left OSA, I would want to make sure I was involved in the process of finding someone to replace me on the board. I would need to make sure that someone had those skills that I have, and I guess if it came to the point where I couldn’t find a replacement then I think I would have to stay on until that person was found because I wouldn’t want there to be a vacuum for the financial aspect of it.
1. **[Lisa DeTora] Please describe your experience as an instructional leader at OSACPS and your readiness to perform the principal’s responsibilities as described in the WCA application, including curriculum development and supervisory duties.**
* My time at OSA has been transformational in my career and that is the beauty of the charter school which gives the school its own autonomy to develop the mission and vision. What we were able to do was partner with EL Education and Old Sturbridge Village to create this hand on, project-based curriculum. I plan on doing the same exact thing in Worcester with the implementation of curriculum that works. We already know that EL Education’s English language arts curriculum is an outstanding curriculum. We’re going to roll that out in Worcester. We’ve learned our lessons in science and math. Putting our eggs in those baskets earlier with high quality curriculum materials and staff that supports that is something that I’m going to replicate in Worcester as well. We have a model here with a STEM department chair and you’ll see with the staffing model that we have a math coach; we're starting right away with that. Because I need people on my team who really own the curriculum, that data, and support the growth and development of it. In terms of being a curriculum leader, I have the K-8 scope and sequence down that we need for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. I have presented at the national level with EL Education, which was a huge whole school project that I led the teachers and students and coordinated with Old Sturbridge Village. And then also really thinking about what the teachers need. Keith said it and I’ll say it again. This is not my first rodeo as a school leader, and it's not my first rodeo as a teacher in starting a school. I know exactly what the teachers need in that pre-operational period. In that year one, they need a lot of hand-holding, what they’ll need professional development-wise to really keep pace and also to replicate and disseminate our best practices with our colleagues in Worcester Public Schools. And what I am most excited about, Amy was talking about this before, it is the shared leadership, bringing this model and building this capacity in my colleagues which is just going to be in a little bit of a different environment, it is in an urban environment which I am ready for because there are more opportunities in Worcester to flex these curriculum muscles. My creativity in the curriculum planning and connecting with the cultural institutions has been keeping me up at night because I have been thinking of all these ideas that we are going to be able to do with our students based in Worcester. I intend to take the lessons learned and to really amplify this, based on the students, and their needs and their voices as well as our community partners.
1. **[Lisa DeTora] What are the areas in which you will need to be supported by OSV and EL Education?**
* Through the management contract, all of the office, the backend office, finance, HR, accounting that has freed me up, while I have learned tremendously from my colleagues, but that's freed me up to focus on curriculum and instruction and students. They are going to continue to provide that support through the management contract and we have a great system going to provide us with the resources that we need. Then through EL Education, it is continuing those best practices. There have been some research studies that have come out. EL Education is constantly improving their practice and we want to make sure that we fully implement the model with the most up-to-date research and collaborate at the national level with our colleagues. EL Education is a national organization, so we want to make sure that we're connecting and presenting nationally. We would really take advantage of all the professional development, all the regional and national institutions that they have to offer to really connect with that network of like-minded people. Even though we're starting from scratch, we really have these two proven supporters who are going to help us raise this really quickly off the ground.
1. **[Melissa Hogan] You are identified as a part-time director of special education at WCA. How will this impact your employment at OSA?**
* I will be the part-time director at OSA and part-time director at WCA hence the development of staff – the coordinator would act as a team chairperson under me. I'll oversee the regulatory stuff. My experience coming to OSA, I was 20 years at Southern Worcester County Collaborative as a special education director. From there I was overseeing lots of different programming, [such as] therapeutic day programs, substantially separate medically fragile programming, special education program development, but I also worked consulting for all of the schools in southern Worcester County. I did program evaluations. I developed a contract service proving agency entity through the collaborative. I was working with every district in southern Worcester County to staff their service delivery needs for OT/PT [occupational therapy/physical therapy]; speech/vision therapy; orientation/mobility therapy; deaf and blind services; assistive technology; BCBA [Board certified behavior analyst]. OSA reached out to the collaborative in their first year looking for help in the first year to meet the needs of their students that were coming in the door with disabilities. I started consulting that first year to help do some training and professional development in the areas of behavior management and physical management – that is what I helped them with in their first year. Because I was a professional development coordinator at the collaborative as well as I started to help train the staff, I realized that they probably need a little bit more work in their regulatory compliance. I started consulting. I went from one day, to two days, to three days, really working on the meetings and the paperwork. All of that stuff, and then by year two, we were like, okay, Jim reached out and said, how about full time? And when I started, there was one special education teacher and one school adjustment counselor. Over the last three years we did significant amount of program development and needs assessment in regard to the population. When I started, there was about 10% special education population, we're now at about 22%, which is almost equivalent to Worcester Public Schools in regard to special education. We grew from that one special education teacher [in year one], we have six special education teachers. We now have OT [occupational therapy] and speech full time on site. We have contract PT [physical therapy]; we're contracting a BCBA. We now have a full time school psychologist. We now have two school adjustment counselors. We went in that first year from three paraprofessionals, we now have 14 paraprofessionals. What I found at this school is the management has been so supportive in helping with resources to meet the needs of the students and letting me and our staff pivot as needed and be really fluid and flexible in meeting the needs of our students, because as we pull a name out of a hat, we’re not sure what their needs are going to be as the students walk in the door. But we have been able to really really meet the needs of our students with a primarily full inclusion model, with all of the supports in place and the accommodations and the modifications in place to meet their needs. My first full-time year here [at OSA] was our first tiered focus monitoring evaluation of our special education department. We did it. I did it. With the help of my staff and we had no findings in our first audit and assessment. We are entering now three years later our next step in that. We are in the middle of the self-assessment process now. I got a lot of experience in that program development, in figuring out ways to meet the needs of the students, and in educating and providing professional development to staff in regard to student specific needs and making sure that all students have access, and they are engaged. I also found and fell in love with the model connected to the [Old Sturbridge] Village and the project-based learning. I became so passionate about the school because of that - this is a model where the students with disabilities can thrive with that project-based learning, the hands-on learning, with connecting it to real world connections in the Village, in their communities, with experts coming in, with real people, real time, real problems, real world connections are huge for students with disabilities and a lot of flexible approaches to learning with the EL Education connection. The focus on the habits of character and being the leaders of their own learning is what we say. We're really helping our students with special needs understand their own needs because they are accountable for their learning. You’ll often hear the words around the school is, wow, what was hard for you in that? What habit of character did you use to be successful in that task that you were assigned? We see that so much. As these years have gone on, I have seen students come off their IEPs because they are learning about their needs and they are learning about what they need in accommodations and modifications and once they figured it all out, all they need is those accommodations and modifications, and they no longer require that specialized instruction. I am seeing so much growth in our students with disabilities and I would love to see that in the city and helping those kids in Worcester.
1. **[OSV] What capacity does OSV have to support educational programming at two schools with different needs?**

* I can start and then certainly turn it over to my colleagues at the museum. We've been thinking about this for a while in terms of capacity. As you see Jamie Greenthal is here on this call, we're very lucky to be able to add Jamie to our team last summer. He brings a lot of experience in charter school growth with his time in New York City. I envisioned that Jamie will be playing a role in supporting the addition of Worcester [Cultural Academy], but also supporting Old Sturbridge Academy in its strategic plan., a little more quickly than we were expecting. I see Jamie playing a role with both schools. We also added, we took a position that was one person, when we first opened OSA in 2017, and split it into two. Now we have now one full-time coordinator of board support who works and supports all of the boards of the organizations that we manage. That was an important hire because, as you know, there's a lot that goes into managing these boards and supporting them in terms of working with committee chairs to develop agendas, getting minutes done, scheduling meetings. We now have a full-time person who's just dedicated to that work, and then we also added a director of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. I believe that was in August of 2021. We did that because at the time both organizations, OSA and OSV, and its museum in Rhode Island, felt that we needed to move further and faster on that front. And so, the boards were all in agreement that we needed to add resources there. Jasmine joined our team and will be supporting WCA as well. We’ve added a position in Tina’s division, in finance and HR. I feel pretty confident that we have the capacity to support the functions we’ve outlined in the management contract. For me personally, as the proposed executive director, I'm super excited about the Worcester school. The Village has a long history with the city of Worcester. I love being a part of start-ups, I plan on having an office [onsite], there is plenty of space in the building. If this is the building, that we finalize. I plan to have an office there and to be there as often as I can be to work with Lisa, to work with Melissa and the faculty, much like I did in the first year of Old Sturbridge Academy to make sure we get it right. Though I have every confidence that it will go right. Jasmine, do you want to talk a little bit about your capacity.
* We have been thinking about this for a while and thinking about, especially in DEIA, one person can’t be all things to all people. We’ve recently reviewed our five year DEIA plan for the Village specifically and really creating capacity at all levels. Starting with HR, I work with HR very closely. We meet biweekly and we’ve created an onboarding process and an onboarding training for new staff. Those are things that we can replicate for our schools. In looking at models where HR staff gets DEI certified so that they have that lense as they approach their work when we’re reviewing job descriptions, when there is hiring and interviewing. I can’t be at every interview but really making sure that our staff in HR has that perspective and building their capacity to be able to run their own trainings and co-facilitate trainings with me and with the leadership at each school and that they are able to share in training new staff as they come in. We saw that at OSA this past year, it was the first time that we were able to meet new staff and have them connect to DEIA, knowing that I am there to support them as well. It was the first year that we had DEIA in the PD structure. Really building capacity in those ways for both OSA and Worcester Cultural Academy. And in another sense creating a structure where there is defined board development around cultural competency. In our five year plan, looking to have board members commit to at least two DEIA trainings a year where the board would increase and measure their own capacity around DEIA. We have a robust internship program here at OSV and adding shared internships, where DEIA interns are embedded into marketing and operations and all of the different departments so that lense is part of planning for events, that lense is part of any collaboration that we're doing with the schools. Really increasing capacity in that way so it doesn’t just live with one person.
* I'm happy to speak to the capacity in terms of overall finance and human resources. I oversee finance and human resources for both OSV, OSA, and Coggeshall Farm Museum [in Rhode Island]. As a few people have said, this is not my first rodeo. I was a founding member of OSA. And so, I have been doing this now for 6 years in terms of charter school finance and human resources support. I oversee a team of nine, six of which who have been with me the entire time so at this point in time the staff I have, have become well versed and very knowledgeable in not only museum finance and HR, but in charter school finance and HR. The financial aspect, I think, is easily demonstrated with the data. I think our financial management of OSA have been very very good. I think Keith would attest to that. I think my team has consistently prepared budgets and forecasts and is certainly compliant with any of the demands that are required of a charter school. We've done that very well by leveraging the resources I have here which was the whole idea of the management contract was to be able to take individuals and leverage them across our organization to provide our support. I think in terms of our ability to add WCA to the finance staff, I think it's very easy. I think we'll continue to assess our capabilities. But we have certainly advanced our technology in the financial world. We've moved OSA to an accounting platform that matches OSV’s [platform], and we would do that with WCA, so it allows for better redundancy and very, very good efficiencies. It is a very good system. Our relationships with the teaching staff at OSA, in terms of budget, we’ll be able to carry that over to WCA. I really think that, speaking from a financial perspective, we are well poised to take on another organization. In terms of HR, that's an area where we've actually invested more over the past couple of years, because all organizations have been growing at a good rate and I do find that human resources issues are different across the organizations. We do have to continue to add to our level of expertise in terms of serving different staff types. I think, as Jasmine indicated, having Jasmine join OSV has provided a tremendous amount of support to the HR organization here and it is really helping us deepen our understanding on a number of fronts and it is a great collaboration. We will be actually looking to hire an additional HR leader in the near future, because once again we think that across all the organizations we support, it's an area that is going to require more focus as we go forward. Once again, the other aspect of supporting WCA, we have proven through COVID, how well remote works, however, I believe that in human resources as well as in finance, nothing beats in-person discussions. My staff, despite the fact that we could continue to be remote in today’s day and age, my staff is almost always on campus here at OSV and accessible to OSV staff and OSA staff. I would carry that model to WCA. Worcester is not very far from here [Sturbridge]. The building we are looking at in Worcester has plenty of office space. I fully expect to have finance and human resources staff presence at WCA on a regular basis. My belief in the management style, as well as supporting the school properly, I think we want to be there working with the staff going forward.
1. **How have you engaged families and the Worcester community in your vision for the proposed school?**
* Absolutely. Let me start and then Alicia [proposed board member] can back me up on this. Since I joined at the beginning of September, we have really been leaning in pretty heavily to engage in the community in Worcester around this school. We started our community outreach just about three months ago where we started doing tables and information sessions at a number of community-based organizations. We’re about three months into that effort. Those organizations include the Worcester Public Library, the EcoTarium, the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club just to name a few. We’ve been tabling at preschools. We’ve started up a nice partnership with the Guild of Saint Agnes who have been warmly welcoming us into their facilities. We’ve also tabled at events, we had folks at a Worcester Railers hockey game not too long ago, sharing information about the school. One of the key ways that we, going forward, will be engaging communities will be through our applicant base. Through the dozens of applications that we have received, we are going to be working with those folks to engender trust with them and have them reach out to their networks and help us raise awareness for the school. We are very much looking forward to creating our community 7 or 8 months before the school even opens. We've been making the community aware of the school through a number of channels, I used to call them ad channels, through direct mail, through print advertising, through ads throughout the month of January, social media advertising. We’re doing organic social media, earned media, you may have seen some press articles about us recently that we participated in and pitched to media. You’ll see all of our materials that we control or that we produce are bilingual, in Spanish. We’ve also produced our flyers in four languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. We’ve been posting flyers in businesses in the neighborhood around the school. Several weeks ago, we dropped, I think the final total is 1,100 flyers, in doors and residences around the community. Jasmin and I did that work together over the course of three days all day. And had a chance to talk to community members both in Spanish and in English in the areas around the school. We've also engaged individual community members strategically who are point people, people who are champions of their community. For example, in the building where the school would be located there is a Portuguese school that operates on the weekends. The director of that school is someone I have been working with to share information to the Brazilian community, the Portuguese speaking community in Worcester to get the word out. Lastly, I would say one of the key ways that we will reach the community is through the existing charters. They have hundreds of applicants on their waitlists and so they have graciously been reaching out to those waitlist families to make them aware that there's hopefully a new charter school coming in if they're interested in applying and learning more and sharing information with them.
* I would just reiterate as a community member who is involved in other organizations and has Worcester public school parent friends that there is a need for something different in Worcester, something unique and new. Parents want a smaller school. They want the environment of a charter school that is supportive and nurturing, which I know from my experience exists from my time on the board at Abby Kelley Foster (Charter Public School in Worcester) and my experience getting to know Old Sturbridge Academy. Personally, I attended a tabling session at the Worcester Public Library and spoke to parents who were excited about this option for their children. I was excited to table at a Bravehearts baseball game this summer but wasn’t able to attend. I was able to talk to community organization leaders whose service populations would be potential students who either shared flyers or social media posts through their channels or asked to speak to Jamie and Jasmine to get more information as to why would they tell their constituents that this is an option for them. There's been a lot of talk about it in the city and I think we’re reaching as many bases as we can.
* In going out into the community, in talking to people, business owners, families every chance we get. We did it. I did an interview with a Latin business organization where they have a show every Friday on YouTube. We were able to answer some questions about this school and invite families to come to our informational sessions. All of those different ways to reach families and engage families to come in and ask us their questions.
* I can't walk around the city without people coming up to me and asking me about the Worcester Cultural Academy. What has impressed me the most is the fact that a lot of educators in the Worcester Public Schools who are parents are interested in sending their children to the Worcester Cultural Academy. And so, I take that as an endorsement. But it's a silent endorsement, because they're waiting for the approval before they actually put their applications in.
* As a board member, it's just really important to hear that staff are going out into the communities where families live, engaging with them in their own language, going to the places that are familiar to them. That this kind of communication is really important. That it is not asking families to come to where we are but we’re really going out and building those relationships with trusted services and organizations that these communities already have and borrowing that trust that they have and endorsing, as Stacey was just saying, for the school. And that’s really important as a board member to see that the staff is really engaged in the community and not just asking the families and students to come to them to get information and to learn and then to only have it in English. Really being able to communicate both ways where they are is really important to me as a board member and in holding the staff accountable in that level of communication.
1. **What evidence do you have to support the enrollment of 200 students in grades K-4 for the proposed opening in the fall of 2023?**
* We have 73 applications in, the highest number of applicants are kindergarten. There are 30 applicants for kindergarten. There are 11 applications in for first grade, for second grade there are 7 applications in, third grade has 15 applications in, and fourth grade has 10. Old Sturbridge Village staff has held 5 information sessions with a sixth one planned for next week. They are virtual or in person, and there have been 24 attendees to these sessions so far.
1. **Can you talk a bit about your assessment of the likelihood of reaching enrollment targets for the higher elementary grades (grades 2-4)?**
* We definitely think the strategy for filling the intermediate grades, grades 3 and 4, is a little different than necessarily the kindergarten strategy, which has always been easier for us, even at OSA. But I think what's Stacey referenced is important. We do think that there are a number of families who are waiting for the school to be approved before they put their application in. But we have to continue to be on the ground. We’re looking at a grassroots strategy of really getting out into the community and doing what we did for Sturbridge, which is the door knocking, the flyering, the talking to other parents who already submitted their applications to see if they introduce us and connect us to families who they know. Hopefully, teachers who will identify students in their classrooms who they think would benefit from being at the Worcester Cultural Academy. We're particularly, I think, interested in students who are not experiencing success right now at second or third grade which is why we want to have fourth grade. We want to have the opportunity to create an access point to the school when families might be feeling like school is not working for my child right now. Sometimes they don’t know that when a child is almost 4. We just have to make sure that we are reaching those families and then Jamie and I have also talked about expanding our grassroots approach, so connecting with more community and business leaders in Worcester making sure that the word is out communicating and making the application and information gathering for families is as easy as possible. I have confidence that we’re going to fill it. It's just it's going to take on the groundwork, And I think once the school is real, or at least it's looks like it's getting closer to being opening, I think we'll have a surge in applications. We had more applicants than seats for OSA. My goal is to have more applicants than seats for WCA when the lottery happens.
* I think once we have approval, we will also have the benefit of our cultural partners promoting this school. I think that will make a huge difference in terms of them reaching their populations, their membership, and so on in terms of spreading the word that this opportunity is now available in terms of the missions and so on. I think that we’ll see a huge escalation in terms of the applications once that is public.
* I also think that connecting with agencies, like Seven Hills Family Resource Center, where they can help identify families that might have needs at those higher grades and spread information. Again, when the school is approved that facilitates those connections, and making sure that families get information about opportunities.
1. **Please provide an update on the status of the proposed relationships with the Worcester Expedition Institutions named in the charter application, specifically the *Worcester Art Museum, EcoTarium, and Hanover Theater & Conservatory for the Performing Arts.* No letters of support or commitment have been received from these organizations.**
* The relationships are still strong. Because of the opposition that has been expressed against the charter application, the cultural partners are threading a needle around when they can pledge their commitment to delivering the program. What I’ve heard from the Worcester Art Museum and from the EcoTarium is that they cannot provide a letter of support because they don't want to be seen as impacting the decision one way or another on whether the school is approved. Both organizations have committed to providing the programming that we’ve been discussing with them in the form of a memorandum of understanding that we would establish once the school is approved. In the case of one of those institutions for well over a year, probably well over 2 years now. We have not heard of any change of course from the Hanover Theatre. In fact, their CEO met with our board before Christmas – in early December, before the public hearing I think it happened. It's a challenge but I think that they are committed to it. I have strong relationships with each of the organizations. I'm actually encouraged that because of all the outreach and earned media that's been happening, we actually have been approached by other organizations that weren’t listed in the charter application originally who have an interest in partnering with us around the learning expeditions which is exciting. I get that charters are politically challenging for communities. I understand where the cultural institutions are today, but I fully expect that if the school is approved that we will probably have MOUs to present to the board within a few weeks of approval.
* In case you didn't know, Worcester is a very political city, and that's the reason why it's been such a long time since there has been a charter approved here or even attempted. These institutions, these cultural institutions, I’m a former trustee of the Worcester Art Museum, I’m the past president of Mechanics Hall, these institutions need the Worcester Cultural Academy as much, if not more, as we need them. Their membership is aging, extremely aging and not reflective of the demographics of the city of Worcester. And so, they have been trying and continue to try to do things, to expand their membership base. This is a strategy that is the most meaningful strategy that they have ever had the opportunity to engage in, so I have no doubt that it's similar to the teachers, they are waiting for the approval because they are not going to take the political hits unnecessarily. But once it is approved, they will be on board, and so won’t the rest of the cultural institutions in our city.
* I just want to echo what Stacey just said. It was so right on, Stacey. Absolutely, they are on board, they cannot give us a lot of support at the moment. But we have heard absolutely nothing negative, all positive about this model of a charter school working with those institutions across the board. I think it's just a matter of politics. They are concerned about going public before it is approved. But I have no doubt whatsoever. They will all be on board. As Jim said, we’ve got – it is almost like having a waiting list of institutions who want to be part of this.
1. **At this point, it seems like you are asking us to take your word for it. From what I understand, from what Jim just described, as soon as the charter is granted, they are ready and willing and have an MOU immediately, but they can’t say that either? Right now, we don’t have any documented evidence of support in terms of partnerships that are crucial to the design. The context you provided is helpful. What else can you provide us to give the Board [of Elementary and Secondary Education], the Commissioner, the Department confidence that this model can be implemented in the timeframe that you have indicated and with the partners that you have indicated?**
* I have forwarded an email to the Department an email I received from the CEO of the EcoTarium. I can certainly ask the other CEOs to send a similar communication which basically says that we can’t do anything in the application phase to be seen as impacting the success or failure of this application but once it is done we are committed to providing the programming and if that is something that will be helpful to the Commissioner's staff as you review this, I’d be happy to make that request of them to submit it.
1. **The language in the email [from CEO of EcoTarium] does not speak directly to the school model but speaks to providing similar programming as it does to any other public school institution. It does not reflect the type of relationship that this school is proposing. One of the fundamental design elements that you put forth is a deep and robust partnership for expeditions that go beyond the field trip which many of the current Worcester Public Schools participate in to OSV and other local cultural institutions. To provide a model that you describe, similar to the model at OSACPS, requires a level of in-depth partnership that is not reflected in that email.**
* I think when Noreen authored that email she was focused on, just because I had a conversation with her on the telephone before I got it, she was focused on trying to communicate to the opposition that we have relationships with a bunch of different schools here. It's not unusual for us to partner with other organizations, and I think that her use of the phrase MOU [memorandum of understanding] was in her mind we would tailor an MOU, but I understand completely. I have no problem reaching out to the CEOs of each of these organizations today and saying, can you amend your email to say specifically, related to the deeper projects, the weekly experiences that we discussed in our meetings throughout this application process. If that's language that would be acceptable, I can certainly make that request and I feel fairly confident that they would amend the email. I don't know if that would be enough.
* If I could just add, I can't really speak to that - what's enough to the Department. However, to me it is illogical to me that these cultural institutions would not welcome the opportunity to have increased relationships with us. To have people and students and families coming to their institutions that haven’t otherwise had access. We committed to a school bus, bus drivers, why would they ever turn that down? I think the only thing that you don't have evidence of, I think possibly, is capacity in terms of the Worcester Art Museum does have a director of education, that would be the liaison to us and I'm not sure what the EcoTarium has or the Hanover has, but those details, I think, would have to be developed and shared, but it would be illogical for them not to want to partner.
* We anticipated this, especially in developing these new partnerships, and that is why the school is taking on the bulk of the expedition planning. You will notice in the schedule that fieldwork happens weekly regardless of whether we are going to a museum or not. Teachers, me as the instructional leader, we’re taking the ball on this and infusing the cultural partners. We anticipated this in year one. We anticipate that these relationships will grow but we are going to take the ball and run with it as the school. Because we know what we need to do now, because of our relationship with Old Sturbridge Village as a school, to partner with multiple institutions. The school is going to take the bulk of this on to start.
* After I got the email from Noreen, I emailed her back, I understand but we’ve done so much work, we have to get the OSA kids to the EcoTarium to do these programs for the next school year because we can’t let the work that we’ve done just go south. If the Worcester application doesn’t get approved then I want to figure out next year how I get the Sturbridge kids engaged in that same programming because, it's just, it's great stuff. I don't want any kids to lose out on it. I don't if I can avoid it. I can certainly talk to them to see if they can be more specific.
1. **What does the relationship look like with these different partners based on the discussions that you’ve had?**
* We've already met with Worcester Art Museum and the EcoTarium. We’re talking about what this partnership would look like and we’re already developed basically a scope and sequence of touch points of what the students would do. The model is that you pick the standard, you pick the theme, pick the guiding question, and then develop a series of touch points over the trimester. The students are either going to the museum or the cultural institution or the cultural institution is coming to them. That's the model that we're looking at. It's really inspired by the objects, the resources, the primary sources, that the institutions have as the hook for students or a mystery that they are going to solve. We're doing all of that in collaboration already. As you can see from our scope and sequence, we have a preliminary understanding of what the institutions have to offer but in our subsequent communications, especially I’ll say with the EcoTarium, they say, oh, you could do this for the pond unit. We've already started to have those conversations and we’ve actually invited them to Old Sturbridge Village to see our students in action during out LTE, our Learning Through Experience programs, so they can visualize what this is going to look like for their capacity. What do they need to do on their end to meet our needs? We’re going to lead the way in terms of here’s how this is going to look, we're going to work on, it is going to be different because the teachers are going to be there and taking a leadership role in this. We’re bringing the cultural institutions along. Our vision is that students are going to have these touch points with the cultural institutions along the way and we’ve already started to develop these curriculum experiences with the cultural institutions. Shout out to EcoTarium who has really been really excited about showing us their resources and collaborating with us on this curriculum development.
1. **Tell us about the potential role of the external staff at these Expedition Institutions, particularly in developing curriculum and student instruction. What does the school see as the role of these experts who are at these institutions?**
* I am so glad you used the word expert because that is EL Education language. We go to seek out – they are the curators, the keepers of this knowledge and the teachers and I we are going to design these experiences for students where they are going to uncover these. We’re really going to – I am thinking about our colleague who is the director of education at the EcoTarium, we’re going to tap into her knowledge of what do you have. What are some untapped resources? Where are some underrepresented voices in the science community? We're going to be collaborating and planning with them. We take it back and do most of the work, they'll support us with the logistics of scheduling, cost, and here’s what we can offer in terms of facilities, here are some other experts you can talk to, such as scientists at the EcoTarium or other expert that we want to or researcher that we want to connect with. They are going to come in and out. We’re really driving the bus on the curriculum, and they are going to come in as the experts, as the curators of these objects. And then really tell us what their needs are. What stories haven’t been told or what departments haven’t been dusted off in a while and our students are going to jump in there and uncover some things that are going to produce some really beautiful work.
* For example, with the Worcester Art Museum, one of the discussions I had with their CEO, along with their museum education director, was replicating. We opened a community gallery here in Old Sturbridge Village largely driven by the school. There's a gallery space on the museum grounds that our students have actually mounted an exhibition and we hope to open that gallery to other members of the community as well. I'd like to replicate that at WCA. At the art museum, I talked about maybe the art museum is the keeper of that gallery space with our students. Let's say, when it opens the fourth graders are actually going to curate the exhibition that's going to be in the gallery for three months so they may go out to the Worcester Art Museum. They may work with a curator or curators there to identify pieces that the art museum, and this is their CEO’s idea I don’t know if the curators would get behind it, but the art museum would loan to Worcester Cultural Academy and it would be on display and then our students would be writing the labels and telling the stories and opening it up for community events. Or the curators and educators from the art museum would be showing the students some aspect of their collection and then the scholars would be developing the pieces that would be on display in the community gallery. We see that as one part of the partnership with the art museum that goes beyond the learning expeditions but is a way for them to be embedded in the school and for students to be working with them on a regular basis. Because that a gallery would have 2 or 3 exhibits a year that would be done in partnership with the art museum.
* We're already thinking of that dissemination piece. We're already thinking about city-wide STEM fairs hosted at the EcoTarium. We’re thinking about professional development opportunities that teachers across the city can participate in. We are really excited to ignite the spark, reignite the spark in these organizations to get more people to come to them and we take on this charge. We take the dissemination piece very seriously and have already started those discussions with the cultural institutions.
* I'm really excited for our students to have the opportunity to, and their families, to learn that some of these world-renowned pieces, at the Worcester Art Museum in particular, that’s where I have the most experience, the artists are from their own backgrounds. That there are African American artists and Latin American artists and Asian American artists who have produced world renowned pieces. There is a perception that the students that we serve, and that we seek to serve, that their backgrounds are underprivileged, and that they're only contributions are their needs. That's what they contribute. They contribute needs. I can imagine some kind of scavenger hunt if you will, in different galleries, and having them trying to determine if they can identify which of the art, which of the pieces were produced by a person of color for example, because, obviously, you can't tell, and I would also welcome them to challenge the museum to decide whether or not, they should make that more apparent to people, because the patrons go in, I’m a patron as well, you go in, and you don't know that this piece was developed by a person of color, and so I'd love to hear what the students and their families think because it's definitely a source of pride that they haven’t had the opportunity to experience.
* Agreed.
* Through these partnerships, the institutions are learning from our students. I’m just going to use an example from OSA, because I took part in it yesterday. The museum was doing a focus group with the students to get their feedback on the expeditions that they are taking part in and the projects that they are doing together. Students were able to identify what can I influence in this expedition, what are things that are out of my control, and students were able to give feedback so that their expeditions can be better. That they can be more engaging and really showing the partners that there is much more that they can learn from our students and their families, and their experiences, and their perspective, not only they're giving back to students but that they are getting something out of it.
1. **Can you describe the approach to integrated arts in year one?**
* Yes, absolutely, so this is going to be really infused in the arts integration model. This again, becomes the job of that expedition coordinator so we're going to be working with that person to create not only that through line that they are going to have through expeditions, but their standalone classes are actually going to be infused into their expedition. What they are studying in science, for example, they're going to read about it, they're going to write about it, they’re going to sing about it, they’re going to draw about it. We want a fully arts integrated approach. In year one, we're going to have this expedition coordinator who is teaching as well. We’re going to have a science focused special. And again, I don’t want these to be construed as standalone classes. They are going to be infused into the topic or project that the students are focused on. Then we will be exploring what they will be doing through the visual arts with our expedition with our cultural institutions, so the expedition coordinator and the lead teacher are going to take the lead on that for year one. We're going to have wellness, which is physical education and health, for all students so we're making sure that they get those needs met. And music is going to be along the similar lines, though more potential partners are coming out of the woodwork in terms of music, which is good, but we would take that arts integrated approach led by the expedition coordinator. I would support with the standards to make sure students are getting a robust arts-based experience that is integrated and relevant to what they are studying. We don’t want little silos. We want a project that tells the whole story. At these performances there's going to be a variety of student expression through different medium.
1. **[Lisa DeTora and James Donahue] Can you please describe how your responsibilities will differ from one another in the establishment and operation of this school? You can factor into your response the differentiation between the experience at OSA and the anticipated experience at WCA.**
* I think that the way that Lisa and I work together is I see my job as helping to generate resources for her and for her school. Whether that is advocating through the budgeting process with the board, policies that need to be adopted. I spend most of my time supporting the board and its committees and making sure that there's a line of communication between Lisa and the board and that the school is getting what it needs from them. The other piece is that I hold Lisa accountable so there’s a lot of conversations that we have about results at the school against different indicators. We'll work together, a good example is that during COVID-19 pandemic we worked together to come up with a solution that allowed us to bring all students back full and in person in the fall of 2020. That involved Lisa surveying her families and then bringing that data back to me and then we analyzed it and thought about what is it that we need. We made the decision to bring everybody back. Some faculty members were in a tough situation because the schools that their children attended were remaining remote. Lisa came in and said Jim we’re going to have an issue because we have four or five teachers that have childcare problems and I’m not sure that they will be able to keep their job and we’re going to have to replace them. We sat down and we developed the one room schoolhouse model. We had a building here at OSV that was not being used. We had staff that were not necessarily as busy as they usually are, and we created a program where OSA faculty could drop their kids off at the one room schoolhouse when they came to work. They could go up to the school and I had staff who could support the remote learning for all the children of the employees who were in that building. That’s an example of how we would work together. But I delegate. Lisa is the school leader. She’s responsible for the day-to-day operations of the school and my job is to make sure that she has those resources and that I’m supporting her in reaching the goals that the board has set.
* My job is going to differ in terms of being focused on one cultural institution, I’m going to have to expand my view and really create those partnerships with many community organizations and cultural institutions so we can maximize these opportunities for our students. Jim actually said to me, Lisa-ify this application. Think about what we’re doing at Old Sturbridge Academy and then really expand it into the arts. I said, okay, Jim it is going to be Lisa-ified. I am going to be spending more of my time connecting with those organizations, but I’ll have staff that is going to support that. The second piece for me is that I’m going to be building that capacity way way sooner. I accept Stacey’s challenge really recruiting people who are up and coming, who want to take on this entrepreneurial work, giving them the tools that they need, like what Jim is doing with me. But working on that with the staff so they are taking ownership and they are ready to be the next leaders of where we go in another five years. I think the main difference is going to be the speed with which I do it. Because I have had this experience, because I have had Jim’s mentoring, and I think the location is going to allow me to realize this vision faster. It will be a lot of work, but I am honored and really willing to do it.
1. **[Lisa DeTora] Can you describe the plans for the development of an ESL curriculum by the school?**
* Absolutely. We actually did a lot of this work because we thought at Old Sturbridge Academy that we would have more English language learners. That is still one of our goals here to recruit more English language learners, but we are walking into a community that has a robust population of English language learners. We’re going to hit the ground running with a department that is led by me. I’m SEI endorsed, I’ve been trained internationally, I’m certified to teach English language learners. We’re going to be starting with a full department versus just one person to really assess the students that we get through the home language survey and develop our program from there. We’re going to be following all the regulations that we’ve written about in our final application but really personalizing it because we really want to dive into that identity piece. We really want to involve the families. We’re going to have a more robust approach from beginning to end as we see this program. Yes, we will be in compliance. Yes, we will be writing curriculum that is based on the EL education and WIDA frameworks, but we also are going to extend that into the communities, extend that into the families, because we have to create this culture from the ground up. I'm really actually looking forward to this with this English language learner department. And again, we start with three that work with me, one becomes the teacher/coordinator who works with all the compliance and the paperwork, and then we grow up to five English language learner staff. We're going to be really collaborating, working together, and doing a lot of professional development so our teams can co-create these experiences for our entire student population.
1. **Let's talk about facilities. Can we have an update on your facilities planning? I'm specifically looking for what the scope of renovations will need to be prior to occupancy and the financial assumptions regarding those renovations.**
* If 81 Plantation Street winds up being selected by the board as the final site, I’ve already done a code review with a licensed architect that does a lot of work in Worcester. He's preparing a written report, but I can share with you the verbal findings of that, which is that the building is actually in pretty good shape. It has a working suitable elevator, it has adequate fire suppression, there might have to be the addition of some strobe lighting. There is one door that was installed near one of the stairwells by the previous tenant that will have to be removed, because it's not creating enough turning radius. The biggest expense I think we will have is converting the bathrooms, so the bathrooms need to be both updated and then renovated to be appropriate for the students who will be using them. That's probably the most significant renovation. But he believes that from a code perspective that it has use as a school already, so we’re not looking at a change in use, and we’re not looking at making an investment in the school that would trigger us not being able to be grandfathered in on some of the things that are in that space because the amount of dollars being spent would not be high enough. For financing, we have had a number of conversations with a foundation in Worcester about a $1MM gift. That foundation and I talked just before Christmas when they were making their decisions. They were hoping to make them in November and kicked them to December. They would like to make a grant award once the school is approved because if they made a grant commitment now, before the approval, they wanted to disperse the funds in December so they don’t want to be making a commitment in December for funds that will be dispersed in 2023. They want to commit and disburse funds in the same year they are spent. They did not feel comfortable making a grant of that size to us, nor did I feel comfortable in receiving it, without certainty that the school would open. They said it is not a commentary on their interest in the school or their intent to do it, they just want us to come to them as soon as the school is approved.
1. **As a proposed board of trustees, what are examples of ways that you have already acted as a charter school board of trustees during the charter application process?**
* The level of involvement that we have all shown in terms of moving this process along has been exemplary. I have to keep remembering that we are proposed trustees, I feel like we are already trustees, because we are so engaged with this initiative. Many of us have very strong Worcester ties. We understand the beauty of this model, of bringing these resources, that Worcester has always had, bringing the cultural resources together with this student population, which has never been done before to the extent that we envision it being done now. I think we're all extremely committed and have been acting as a full board all along. One thing I want to mention is I am extremely proud, pleased, thrilled with the proposed board members that we have, because we cover so many different talents, skills, areas of expertise, and commitment that we are ready to hit the ground running. We are very good to go. We all have board experience; we all have Worcester experience. We are ready for this challenge.
* I think specifically regarding fiduciary duties, we’ve all shown a great duty of care in reading the application and looking into what the school has promised or what OSV has promised will actually happen to WCA and gone through anything we needed to do to provide duty of loyalty. We are set.
* We have also approved a preliminary budget. We’ve worked with Tina [OSV] to get that developed so from an audit/finance committee position, we have already gone down that road. From the weekly meetings we’ve had preparing for this, we have acted as a board for probably the past six months trying to prep for the whole process and everything that goes into even getting to this point. It is a pretty big deal for any group of people to get together. We’ve absolutely been acting as a board.
* Yes, I agree. Not only did I speak at the public hearing, but I met with our Worcester Public School superintendent and our chief financial officer for the Worcester Public Schools and the quadrant managers to explain why the Worcester Cultural Academy is necessary and important, and how it will not have an adverse impact on the district but rather will have a positive impact on Worcester students.
* You asked us a couple times about the difference between OSA and WCA. I think that is something that we have really looked at as a board, what will be the differences? How we’re bringing these cultural institutions in, how we’re looking at the ELL population different than OSA’s population has been, and really making key efforts in staffing and professional development and building these relationships. That it really is different. Not negatively impacting the Worcester school system, as Stacey just said, but really building on the specific targeted population and going out into the communities in that way. Those are other ways we really have focused on how this will be different and how it will support the student learning and their families.
1. **Tells us about the discussion the proposed board has had about the management contract structure and fee and why you landed on what you landed on, given that the relationship between WCA and OSV will be different than the relationship between OSA and OSV, for example not sited on the OSV property.**
* You are correct, very different relationships. One school is housed on the facility, one is twenty miles away. Totally get that. But the management contract is more about the administrative components of it, the accounting, the finance, the HR, things like that. In that aspect, they are not all that dissimilar. To be able to model our management contract versus the one they have at OSA made sense. The thought process even behind the management contract in the beginning was we can get better services cheaper if they were pooled rather than hiring the individual people themselves. What worked for OSA, I think will work for WCA.
* We’ve had such a positive experience through OSA with OSV. As the management team, it made sense to us to continue with that relationship for WCA.
1. **Was there any discussion about whether or not some of these services [provided under the proposed management contract] are actually proportionately growing in cost since the fee is structured as a percent of the per pupil tuition?**
* We actually talked about this at the other board. As we grew in grades, we are obviously growing in fees – it is a percentage of revenue. The reality is that some fees do not increase incrementally per student, but others do, you actually need to hire another person. There are different stages – there are things that go up with each person and other things that go up in cliffs. It would have been hard for us to say we are not going to increase the fee on this, but we need to hire another person, so we’ll get a 50K increase. The idea was that they would blend together and work themselves out. The parts that don’t increase are offset by the costs that do increase by students. That is how we came to the idea of it. It would be based on a revenue model.