

#### MEMORANDUM

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Russell Johnston, Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **Date:** | March 22, 2024 |
| **Subject:** | Virtual Schools – Recommendation for New Commonwealth of  Massachusetts Virtual School |

Section 94 of G.L. c. 71 established Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools (CMVS), enabling the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) to award certiﬁcates to establish CMVS. By statute, the Board “shall issue a request for proposals to establish 1 or more commonwealth virtual schools” and “the board shall make the ﬁnal

determination on selecting proposals; provided, however, that the board shall only grant a certiﬁcate to a qualiﬁed applicant as determined by the board.” [G.L. c. 71, § 94](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter71/Section94)(b) and (c).

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) received prospectuses for two CMVS in July 2023. The Commissioner invited one of the applicant groups to submit a ﬁnal application. In November 2023, the Department received a ﬁnal application for the proposed Felix Commonwealth Virtual School (Felix). In January 2024, the Commissioner provided the Board with information about the CMVS applicant as well as an overview of the CMVS application review process.[1](#_bookmark0)

While the application submitted by Felix addresses the elements speciﬁed in the virtual school statute, the application has some areas that need further development. As explained below, I recommend that the Board grant a certiﬁcate to the board of trustees of Felix and impose conditions on the certiﬁcate necessary to address those areas of the application that need further development and improvement. In addition to these conditions, I recommend the Board approve terms of the certiﬁcate that vary in some respects from those in the application submitted to the Department.

1 January 18, 2024 Board Memorandum and attachment: [Information on Commonwealth Virtual School Applicant](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2024/2024-01/item8.docx) and [Process for Commonwealth Virtual Schools](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2024/2024-01/item8.2-review-process.docx)



Felix proposed to operate a statewide CMVS for grades 7-12 with a maximum enrollment of 4,000 students, with 2025-26 as the proposed opening year. The executive summary is enclosed.

The full application is available upon request; please email [virtualschools@mass.gov.](mailto:virtualschools@mass.gov)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Proposed CMVS Name** | **Proposed Enrollment Region** | **Proposed Grades** | **Proposed Maximum Enrollment** | **Proposed Opening Year** |
| Felix Commonwealth Virtual School | Statewide | 7-12 | 4,000 | 2025-26[2](#_bookmark1) |

#### Application Review Process

The Department's Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign conducted a multi-step review of the final application. The goal in this process is to assess the degree to which applicant groups substantially address the majority of the application criteria and the degree to which the applicant group demonstrates the potential to create a public school of high quality.

Brieﬂy, the application review process for the pending application included the components that follow.

* *Review panel.* A review panel, which included both internal and external reviewers, discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the ﬁnal application and identiﬁed areas where clariﬁcation from the applicant was needed. This process helped to generate questions for the interview.
* *Review of Learning Management System (LMS)*.[3](#_bookmark2) The Department examined features of the applicant's LMS and whether it will enhance learning, communication, and efficiency. The Department also examined its overall functionality, site security measures, data-privacy, and how the LMS would

2 The regulations specify as follows.

A certificate granted by the Board shall be effective for three to five years, beginning July 1st of the first fiscal year in which the virtual school enrolls students, unless revoked pursuant to M.G.L. c. 71 § 94 and 603 CMR 52.12. If no students are attending a Commonwealth of Massachusetts virtual school within 19 months from the date the certificate was granted, the certificate will be null and void, unless an extension is granted by the Commissioner.

603 CMR 52.04(4)(a).

3 A LMS is a software application or web-based technology used to administer, automate, and deliver educational courses and materials.

##### operationalize and enhance the proposed school’s mission, guiding principles, and core values.

* *Public comment.* The Department held a hybrid public hearing in Boston on

December 6, 2023. Comment was received in-person and virtually. Board Vice Chair Matt Hills and member Ela Gardiner attended the hearing. Written comments were accepted from members of the public through December 22, 2023.

* *Interview.* In January 2024, the Department held a ﬁnal interview with the applicant group.

#### Summary of Recommendation

I recommend that the Board award a conditional certificate to the board of trustees of the proposed Felix Commonwealth Virtual School. To address those areas of Felix’s application that need further development and improvement, I recommend that the Board impose several conditions on the school’s certificate. The Department will determine whether the school has met these conditions prior to opening. Specifically, I recommend the Board impose the conditions that follow.

1. By May 1, 2024, the board of trustees must submit to the Department an action plan that outlines the steps it will take to open the school. The applicant group’s action plan should cover the period from April 1, 2024, to the ﬁrst day of school and must outline the strategies, steps, and designated point person(s) and provide a clear timeline for opening the school. The action plan must be speciﬁc and consistent with the school’s mission, vision, and objectives.
2. By May 10, 2024, the board of trustees must submit to the Department a draft contract with Arizona State University Prep Digital (ASUPD) for review and approval. The contract must include, but is not limited to, an outline of the services and a clear justiﬁcation for the compensation and contract payments. It also must include accountability measures and goals sufficient to measure the performance of ASUPD and to permit the board of trustees to terminate the contract if the goals are not met.
3. By June 1, 2024, the board of trustees must submit to the Department an updated budget proposal approved by the school’s board of trustees for the pre-operation year and the ﬁrst three years of operation. The budget proposal must include a detailed budget narrative, staffing plan, and cash ﬂow projections based on the school’s anticipated enrollment. The budget proposal and associated documents must demonstrate capacity to ensure the ﬁscal health and solvency of the school.
4. By June 1, 2024, the board of trustees must develop and submit to the Department a comprehensive plan that ensures all students enrolled in the virtual school will have reasonable access to an “in-person hub site,” a main component of the applicant’s

proposal. Reasonable access must consider both distance from and travel time to the hub sites for all students. This plan must include the school’s plan to provide for transportation of all students, including students with disabilities, to and from the hub sites. If the school is unable to provide reasonable access and transportation to and from hub sites for all students statewide, the school must seek an amendment to the enrollment region speciﬁed in its certiﬁcate.

1. By June 1, 2024, the board of trustees must submit to the Department an updated and comprehensive staffing plan, aligned with projected ﬁnances, that includes clear expectations for instructional quality and strategies for effective and differentiated online instruction for all students.
2. By June 1, 2024, the board of trustees must submit to the Department documentation and information sufficient to justify the proposed per pupil tuition rate in its certiﬁcate granted by the Board. If the Department determines that the documentation and information submitted are not sufficient to justify the per pupil tuition rate in its certiﬁcate, the Department will amend the school’s certiﬁcate to specify a tuition rate consistent with the per pupil tuition rates of other CMVS.
3. By November 1, 2024, the board of trustees must complete alignment of the virtual school's curriculum to the [Massachusetts curriculum frameworks](https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/) and submit documentation to the Department sufficient to assess and conﬁrm such alignment.
4. By February 1, 2025, the board of trustees must submit to the Department a special education program plan and policies and procedures for education of English language learners that are sufficient to meet all applicable federal and state requirements.
5. By May 1, 2025, the school must submit to the Department pre-enrollment data sufficient to meet the enrollment levels outlined in its ﬁnal application for its ﬁrst year of operation.
6. Before opening, Felix Commonwealth Virtual School must comply with the Department's opening procedures for virtual schools. Successful completion of the opening procedures process is required to open and to operate a CMVS.[4](#_bookmark3)

4 The regulations, at 603 CMR 52.04(5), state as follows.

Certificates shall be awarded subject to the conditions listed in 603 CMR 52.04, and any additional conditions that the Board or Department may specify. Upon receiving a certificate, the virtual school must successfully complete the opening procedures process specified by the Department. Opening procedures requirements include, but are not limited to, the following: (a) the terms of the proposed contract, in such cases where the virtual school's board of trustees intends to procure substantially all educational services from another person or organization, the board of trustees shall submit for the Commissioner's approval the terms of the contract; (b) approved bylaws; (c) attendance policy, including but not limited to a daily visual check-in for students; (d) criteria and procedures for suspension and expulsion of students; (e) written documentation that criminal background checks have been performed as required by state law for all employees and volunteers; and (f) written documentation of the virtual school's compliance with state and

In addition to these conditions, I recommend terms of the certificate that vary in some respects from those in the application submitted to the Department.[5](#_bookmark4) These variations are summarized below and all terms of the certificate are attached.

* + I recommend that the Board grant the certificate for 3 years, from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2028. The applicant requested a 5-year certificate. The initial certificates granted by the Board to existing CMVS were also three years in length. This shorter time span allowed the Department to formally assess the degree to which the new schools were meeting mission driven, academic, or operational goals. The school's board of trustees will need to apply to renew the school's certificate prior to the end of this 3-year period.
  + I recommend that the Board set the school's maximum enrollment at 700 students in grades 9-12. The applicant requested a maximum student enrollment of 4,000 for grades 7-12. The application indicated the school would enroll 700 students and serve grades 8- 12 by its third year of operation. Granting grades 9-12 for the school’s initial certificate will allow the applicant group to address those areas of Felix’s application that need improvement and to deliver a high school program aligned with its goals. The school may request amendments to the terms of its certificate, such as grade span, in its third year of operation, when it seeks renewal of its certificate.
  + The applicant requested a variable per pupil tuition rate of approximately $16,000. As indicated in the attached terms, I recommend that the Board grant a per pupil tuition rate of $14,523, provided that the school meets Condition 6 imposed on its certificate. This recommendation is the maximum amount permissible for this school under the statute. [6](#_bookmark5) It is based upon the state average per pupil foundation budget for students of the same classification and grade level and is consistent with the methodology employed in [November](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/FY2018/2017-11/item7.docx) 2017 when the two existing CMVS sought and received a tuition increase.[7](#_bookmark6) The recommended rate for Felix is derived from the projected FY25 state average per pupil foundation budget for grades 9-12, after subtracting vocational, in- and out-of- district special education costs, and a $75 per pupil retained by the Department for administration of the CMVS program as provided for in statute.[8](#_bookmark7) The additional cost of

federal laws, including, but not limited to, all fire, health, and safety laws and accessibility requirements for facilities owned or leased by or for the virtual school.

5 The regulations state as follows. “Granting of Certificates. The Board shall grant certificates to boards of trustees under M.G.L. c. 71 § 94, with such conditions as the Board specifies.” 603 CMR 52.04(4).

6 The virtual school statute at [G.L. c. 71, § 94](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter71/Section94)(k), specifies as follows regarding tuition.

The amount of tuition per pupil a school district shall pay for a student residing in the district who is enrolled in a commonwealth virtual school shall be the school choice tuition amount, which shall be paid through the school choice mechanism; provided, that the department may, in consultation with the operational services division, approve alternative tuition amounts proposed by applicants that shall not exceed the state average per pupil foundation budget for students of the same classification and grade level; provided, further, that the department may authorize additional tuition assessments for services required by an individualized education program established pursuant to chapter 71B.

7 The two other CMVS currently receive a per pupil tuition rate of $9,597.

8 The difference between the tuition rate that the two CMVS currently receive and the proposed rate for this applicant is based on two factors. First, the tuition rate for the two existing CMVS is based on FY17 education

special education services is calculated in accordance with 603 CMR 10.07(3) and added to the per pupil tuition amount, unless such services are provided in kind by the sending district.

* + A motion for your consideration is attached to this memorandum. The motion provides for granting a certificate to the Felix Commonwealth Virtual School provided it complies with the terms and conditions of its certificate.

Regina Robinson, Deputy Commissioner; Alison Bagg, Director of the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign; and Ruth Hersh, School Redesign and Education Collaborative Manager, will be present at the Board meeting on March 26 to answer any questions you may have.

#### Enclosures:

##### Terms of the Certiﬁcate Summary of Application Review Executive Summary

List of Application Reviewers Applicant Interview Summary Public Comment Summary Motion

funding. Since the passage of the Student Opportunity Act in 2019, foundation budget rates in the Chapter 70 formula have steadily increased the amount of state aid provided to Massachusetts public school districts. Second, the proposed tuition rate for Felix includes an operations and maintenance component, which is included due to the applicant’s proposed “in-person hub site” programming; this component was not included in the rate calculation for the two existing CMVS.

### Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual School Terms of Certificate

#### Name:

Felix Commonwealth Virtual School (Felix)

#### Board of trustees:

Thabiti Brown Gaskin Lamour Yully Cha

Brandon Cardet-Hernandez Mike Larsson

The board of trustees must include a minimum of five members. Members of the boards of trustees of Commonwealth of Massachusetts virtual schools may not be paid for attendance at board meetings but may receive reimbursement of reasonable expenses.

#### Term of certificate:

July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2028

On March 26, 2024, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education awarded a certificate to the board of trustees of Felix Commonwealth Virtual School.

#### Annual per pupil tuition rate:

In fiscal year 2026, tuition will be $14,598 (minus $75 admin fee). The cost of special education services shall be calculated in accordance with 603 CMR 10.07(3) and shall be added to the per pupil tuition amount unless such services are provided in kind by the sending district.

Felix may provide individual courses to public school districts for a fee, pursuant to G.L. c. 71, § 94(2)(b) and (k), and 603 CMR 52.05(12).

#### Maximum enrollment and grade levels:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **School Year** | **Grade Levels** | **Total Student Enrollment** |
| 2025-2026 | 9-10 | 200 |
| 2026-2027 | 9-11 | 400 |
| 2027-2028 | 9-12 | 700 |

1. **Enrollment region:**

Students who reside in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, subject to the condition pertaining to accessibility of “in-person hub sites” imposed upon the certificate as granted by the Board on March 26, 2024.

#### Mission, purpose, and specialized focus:

The mission of the Felix Commonwealth Virtual School is to provide a competency-based education, with flexible learning, within connected communities, as reflected by high levels of student academic performance.

#### Educational program, instructional methodology, and services for students:

The Felix educational program and instructional methodology is as follows.

**Fully virtual academic program***.* All student learning will take place online, with a mix of synchronous and asynchronous options to create a flexible schedule. Students will engage in at least 6 hours and 15 minutes of synchronous learning a week, which includes a 1-hour tutorial session for each of the four core learning subjects a week, two, 1-hour seminar sessions a week, and a weekly 15-minute check-in with a Core Learning Guide/advisor. Students may take advantage of optional synchronous time (study halls or teacher office hours). Students will also engage in synchronous learning which will consist of performance-based tasks, assessments, or completion of assignments in the following areas: English language arts, mathematics, science, social science, college and career, arts, and foreign language.

**Flexible Learning Locations**. Students engage with Core Learning Guides (Massachusetts licensed teachers) through a digital campus (Canvas and InSpace) for all of their academic classes. Students have the option to learn from home or attend an in-person “hub site” to participate in their virtual classes. At no cost to families, students have full membership access to the “hub site” community facilities and may engage in their classes at the “hub site” during the traditional school day. While primary learning is 100% virtual, students are able to utilize their flexible block times to seek support and engagement opportunities at a local “hub site” or online. The “hub sites” will also provide enrichment activities, nutrition, in-person support,

**Adaptive, Personalized Learning Path.** Upon enrollment, Felix will assess each student’s knowledge and skills through diagnostic testing. School personnel analyze the results and

recommend a course progression to meet Massachusetts high school diploma requirements. Students use this recommended progression as the foundation for developing a personalized learning plan (PLP), which includes secondary and post-secondary academic courses, co- curricular activities, and internship planning. The PLP will contain students’ individual goals, including a student’s IEP or multilingual learner plan where appropriate. The PLP provides each student with a tailored weekly schedule, and individualized pace plans for each course to help students stay on track.

**Competency-Based Learning** Felix will use an all-digital, competency-based curriculum developed by Khan World School. As a competency-based school, students earn promotion to the next sequential course when they demonstrate proficiency in their current course work by earning 80% or greater in their competency assessments. All students are encouraged to continue learning until they reach 90% or higher with the coursework complete. All asynchronous coursework is evaluated with assignments and competency-based assessments.

The following will shape Felix’s services for students:

**Low Adult to Student Ratio.** Students are supported virtually and/or in-person with a low adult to student ratio. The instructional and support adult to student ratio for key roles: core learning guide (virtual core content teachers), success coaches (available virtually and at hub sites for general/literacy support as well as special education and English language learner support), and director of culture and community (available virtually and at hub sites).

**Advisory and Support Structures.** In addition to teaching core subjects, Core Learning Guides also serve as “Advisor” to a “house” of 17 students. Each house meets weekly as a whole group (virtually) for their topical seminar class, led by the Advisor. Each Advisor also has a weekly 1-1 check-in with every student in their roster about progress on the student’s Pace Plan, the short- term detailed version of their Personalized Learning Plan. Success coaches provide 1-1 support to students (general academic, literacy, special education supports, or English language development) either virtually or at a hub site.

**Whole Family Support**. Directors of Culture and Community will address holistic family needs, such as housing, employment, utilities, food, and medical needs. These Directors meet with families virtually or in person to connect families with local partners and resources. The Directors of Culture and Community will rely on Core Learning Guides and Success Coaches to help identify students and families that may need outreach.

#### Governance and bylaws:

The Felix board of trustees will submit updated proposed bylaws for the Department’s review and approval in accordance with the time-bound condition imposed on the school’s certificate related to opening procedures.

#### Schedule/Proposed school year:

As per the regulations outlined in 603 CMR 27.00, the school year shall consist of 180 days of instruction with a minimum of 990 hours for grades 9-12.

#### Enrollment policy and preferences:

Felix will provide enrollment preferences to:

* 1. Students who seek academic work not available in their school, and
  2. Siblings of enrolled students.

The Felix board of trustees will submit an updated enrollment policy and application for the Department’s review and approval in accordance with the time-bound condition imposed on the school’s certificate related to opening procedures. The school must receive the Department’s approval of its enrollment policy and application prior to accepting any applications and admitting any students.

#### Attendance Policy:

The Felix board of trustees will submit a draft attendance policy for the Department’s review and approval in accordance with the time-bound condition imposed on the school’s certificate related to opening procedures.

#### Expulsion Policy:

The Felix board of trustees will submit a draft expulsion policy for the Department’s review and approval in accordance with the time-bound condition imposed on the school’s certificate related to opening procedures.

#### The identity of third-party software or curriculum vendor partnerships:

Curriculum will be provided by Arizona State University Prep Digital (ASUPD) derived from its own, Edmentum’s, and Khan World School’s curriculum materials. All curricula must be aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Other software providers include: InSpace, IXL, Duolingo, Zoom, and Google.

#### Proposed contract with organization providing substantially all educational services including payments:

ASUPD will provide Felix with substantially all educational services. ASUPD will provide learning management system LMS (Canvas) access and administrative management; joint hiring of teachers; initial and ongoing professional development, and evaluation of Core Learning Guides (teachers) and ongoing evaluation and development of the curriculum as the school expands. As noted above, ASUPD will provide curricular materials, diagnostic and assessment tools with associated virtual platforms and will pay Felix teachers. The CMVS must only employ educators licensed in Massachusetts.

The Felix board of trustees will submit for the Department’s approval a proposed contract with ASUPD in accordance with the condition imposed on the school’s certificate. The contract must specify the basis for all payments to ASUPD and the amount of such payments.

#### Demonstration of capacity to support and store all critical data in compliance with state and federal law:

Felix will utilize PowerSchool as its student information system (SIS) for services to support and to store all critical data in compliance with state and federal law.

#### Adherence to assurances in the Final Application:

##### Felix will adhere to all assurances agreed to in Attachment G on pages 95-98 of the Final Application. This includes, but is not limited to, compliance with all statutes and regulations governing Commonwealth of Massachusetts virtual schools.

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **School Year** | **Grade Levels** | **Total Student Enrollment** |
| Y1 2025-2026 | 9-10 | 200 |
| Y2 2026-2027 | 9-11 | 400 |
| Y3 2027-2028 | 8-12 | 700 |
| Y4 2028-2029 | 8-12 | 1,000 |
| Y5 2029-2030 | 7-12 | 1,200 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW** | |
| **Proposed School Name:** | Felix Commonwealth Virtual School |
|  | |
| **Grades Served at Full Capacity:** | 7-12 |
| **Number of Students at Full Capacity:** | 4,000 |
| **Proposed School Location:** | Statewide |
| **Proposed Opening Year:** | 2025-2026 |
| **Proposed Partner Organization:** | Arizona State University Preparatory Digital (ASUPD) |
| **Curriculum:** | ASUPD and Khan Academy |
| **Learning Management System:** | Canvas |
| **Per Pupil Proposal:** | Variable tuition rate of approximately ($16,000) |
| **Proposed Board of Trustees:** | Thabiti Brown; Yeshi Gaskin Lamour; Yully Cha; Brandon Cardet-Hernandez; Mike Larsson |
| **Mission Statement:**  “to provide a competency-based education, with flexible learning, within connected communities, as reflected by high levels of student academic performance”  **Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:**  The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) has compiled a summary of the evidence identified through the review of the CMVS application, the responses provided by the applicant group during the subsequent interview, as well as the statements and comments provided at the public hearing and during the public comment period. The summary below describes evidence and identifies areas for which the applicant group provides evidence in response to application criteria and also identifies the areas of the application criteria where limited evidence | |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual** **Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| was provided during the application process.  **Public Comment:**  The application received comment **in support** during the public hearing and public comment process. At the public hearing, 11 individuals spoke in support of the proposed school, including parents, students, and community members. The Department received written comment in support from 42 individuals by the public comment deadline. The Department also received 2 letters of support that also expressed concerns and feedback from Dr. Mary Skipper, Superintendent, Boston Public Schools, and from Sarah Jordan, Director of Accountability, Greater Commonwealth Virtual School.  The application did not receive comments **in opposition** during the public hearing and public comment process. | |
| ***I. How will the school demonstrate academic success?*** | |
| 1. Mission, purpose, and specialized focus [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(1)]: | |
| **Identified Evidence**   * The mission is succinct and defines the purpose and specialized focus of the proposed school as well as the potential value. The application describes the school’s focus on “competency- based[1](#_bookmark8)” virtual curriculum, with “blended learning” components focusing on flexibility, personalization, multiple pathways, “learning from everywhere” and connected communities. It also describes the school’s plan to offer optional in-person support at local hub sites in Massachusetts. | **Limited Evidence**   * All aspects of the mission are not consistently reflected throughout the application. There is little attention given to high levels of academic performance in the application. |
| 2. Student population and special programs [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(37)]: | |
| * The application identifies the student population the school intends to serve; it will give preference to "students who seek academic work not available at their school." The application also describes the school’s focus on serving students “who seek | * The application offers a limited amount of information about the school's ability to educate all students who may enroll, as well as the precise strategies and resources used to satisfy the needs of a diverse student population. While the application refers to other student groups |

1 The applicant group describes competency-based learning in the application as “learning through personalized, rigorous, and self-paced learning, where students become empowered agents who can transfer and apply concepts to create meaning in the real world.” It goes on to say, “[i]n other words, students move on when they are ready versus when they finish any given grade level. The school’s aim is “to equip students for success in higher level learning, and then remove barriers to entry into college coursework.”

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| a flexible learning approach in content and/or location.”   * The application outlines programming to support the chosen population of students. The school intends to offer “flexible learning locations”, and in-person support at “hub sites” located around the Commonwealth (2 sites in the first year, with 1 in Boston and the other either in Lawrence or Holyoke, growing to 4 by the fifth year). The application also provides a few examples of how this school might meet the needs of the intended student population by offering accelerated learning via a competency-based curriculum, a flexible/personalized learning model (asynchronous and synchronous learning modes), academic and social supports (learning guides and success coaches), and “location flexibility” through which students may engage in virtual learning from their home or a “hub site”. * The application also proposes an adaptive learning model; it states that “in order to meet the unique needs of all students, universal diagnostic literacy and math assessment are embedded in the orientation week for all first-time students to ensure personalized learning plans are appropriate and tailored.” The group intends to use ongoing and embedded student learning technology assessment tools (Exact Path and Edmentum). | (caregivers, disengaged students, those who are currently homeschooled) in addition to the chosen population (those seeking academic work not available in their school); it does not provide details about specializing or operationalizing the proposed programming (strategies and/or resources) to serve and support these additional populations. |
| 3. **Access and Equity** | |
| * The application indicates that information about the school, programs, and enrollment will be made publicly available on the school’s website in multiple languages. It goes on to state that the school will provide technology (laptop and headphones) and resources for online learning. The application aims to provide access and equity for enrolled students through its support structures, including a "House" (advisory) model and "Whole-Family Support" model. The final application also mentions the recruitment process, enrollment practices, and the role of Directors of Culture and Community in assisting | * The application provides limited information about the plan to address access and equity issues for the full program outlined in the application. Due to the fact that the application group proposes a statewide CMVS, concerns were raised about inequitable access to programs offered at the hub sites for families and students who do not live near the hub sites. Additionally, the application does not provide clear plans to fully include multilingual learners (ML) and students with Individualized Learning Plans (IEPs), to ensure they can access the whole curriculum, make substantial progress in acquiring the knowledge and skills presented by the curriculum, and |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| families. | fully participate in all aspects of the virtual school experience.   * The application describes the role of the Director of Culture and Community “to address holistic family needs, such as housing, employment, utilities, food, and medical needs.” The application, however, does not demonstrate how this will be implemented in practice. * Finally, the application states that "through community and corporate partnerships, the school will provide support to families who need access to technology." This statement raises concerns about the school’s capacity to provide technology access and equity if private funds are not secured. It is also unclear how the applicant group determined that only 25 percent of students would require the school to provide a portable WiFi hotspot with a data plan. |
| 4. **Community Demand** | |
| * The application provides information from a parent poll conducted by MassINC in fall 2023: out of 504 polled parents of K-12 students in Massachusetts, 56 percent of families would be interested in learning more about the school if this school became a reality and 51 percent of families would consider choosing a school with Felix’s model. | * The application provided little valid evidence of demand for this proposed statewide 4,000 student virtual school. The application estimates a possible market size of 227,000-241,000 interested students, based on a survey of 504 parents of K-12 students. However, the sample size is small and the degree to which this group is a representative sample is unclear. The application cites outdated (fall 2021) waitlist data from the two existing CMVS. * During the interview, the applicant group provided some evidence that the school could meet its enrollment projections for the first year of operation and reported that approximately 50 students have indicated an intent to enroll by submitting forms via the applicant group’s website. Additionally, during the interview, the applicant group reiterated that that approximately 100 students who participated in MassINC focus groups indicated interest in attending. |
| 1. **Curriculum**: 2. **Course design:** 3. **Print versus electronic resources:** 4. **Accessibility** [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(30)]: | |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 9. **Learning management system (LMS):** | |
| * The application describes a competency-based curriculum, and the applicant group reports that the proposed partner, ASUPD, has the ability to align the curriculum both vertically and horizontally, and if the certificate is granted, they will ensure alignment with the Massachusetts curricular frameworks. The application indicates that the CMVS will “institute regular curriculum review processes under the direction of our board to ensure high-quality, standards- aligned curriculum based on student competency, including a dedicated curriculum review committee as our school expands.” * The Learning Management System (LMS) demonstration indicated a strong likelihood that the chosen LMS, Canvas, will be easily navigable by all stakeholders. * The school articulates a plan to provide students a school week consisting of 60 percent asynchronous and 40 percent synchronous learning modes. However, this ratio is not supported by other sections of the application. The proposal includes accelerated pathways for middle school students and multiple advanced paths for high school students. * The application promises that ASUPD materials meet accessibility standards. * The school will use Canvas as the LMS, PowerSchool as the proposed School Information System (SIS), and InSpace, a video conferencing platform, as a way to “create a fully collaborative, human-centered learning environment.” | * The curriculum is not aligned with Massachusetts curricular frameworks, and if the certificate is granted, the applicant group plans to work with a potential vendor (ASUPD) to ensure alignment. Further, there was limited evidence presented that the curriculum provided by ASUPD and Khan Academy will help support opportunities for all students to master academic skills and concepts. * There seems to be very limited information about how the course design and course offerings will provide students with learning experiences outlined in the applicant’s vision as "engaging, relevant, interactive, leading to deeper learning and critical thinking." |
| 10. Research based [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(2)]: | |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * The application does include research about the importance of “learner-to-learner interaction” and building “online communities.” The application provides academic citations for studies which indicate that employing these kinds of strategies “can lead to increased student achievement and learner satisfaction.” | * The application lacks clear connections between “research” cited and most aspects of the proposed school model. Claims made in the application about the quality and effectiveness of ASUPD and Khan World School, the proposed curricula, are not supported by evidence or research. “Research” cited lacks valid evidentiary results. As an example, the application includes a link to the “The Key Pillars for Quality Online K-12 Education” document which outlines seven key pillars for designing a successful online education system, focusing on contextual factors and instructional components. Rather than research, this is a review of literature regarding K–12 online teaching and learning. During the interview, the applicant group reiterated some of the application’s data for both Khan World School and ASUPD, however the “research” provided is based on one year’s worth of data. More information is needed to confirm the validity and reliably of the claims. |
| 1. **Instructional quality:** 2. **Personalized learning [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(39)]:** 3. **Tiered support model:** 4. **Learning mode:** 5. **Early reading instruction:** | |
| * The application states on page 21, that “ASUPD will partner with the school personnel and board to deliver high quality experience to each student.” ASUPD will also “lead in training the school’s Core Learning Guides.” In collaboration with school personnel ASUPD will identify high quality educators to lead learning at the Felix School, who “will complete all levels of ASUPD’s virtual and blended learning professional development program.” “ASUPD will partner with the Felix School to ensure high quality instruction is delivered to all students through a system of continuous observation and feedback, and improvement.” Students and families will be surveyed | * The application provided limited information about instructional quality; it does not articulate clear expectations for high-quality teaching practices. Applicant responses during the interview provided little additional detail: the applicants stated that teachers will be guided by best practices from traditional schools, and school leaders will conduct observations and provide feedback and coaching. They went on to say that the competency-based curriculum drives rigor, requiring educators to ensure that students are progressing. * While the model is designed for a high degree of personalization, it   is unclear how the school will establish and maintain high expectations and standards across all of the offerings, and how the |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| regarding instructional quality and care. However, it is not clear what high-quality instruction looks like at the proposed school, for online Core Learning Guides, and/or in- person/virtual Success Coaches. There is insufficient detail in the application about expected instructional practices. “Teacher supervisors meet one-on-one with instructors bi- weekly to discuss progress towards goals, student achievement metrics, individual student situations, and other success Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**.”**   * The final application outlines the use of evidence-based frameworks and guides for instruction, such as the National Standards for Quality Online Learning and principles of universal design of learning (UDL). The final application emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive and bias- free instruction and the involvement of specialists in reviewing course content to ensure it is free from bias. * The proposed instructional model appears to be highly personalized, multifaceted, and multidimensional including personalized learning plans and pace plans, work-based learning, hands-on/project-based learning, discovery learning, internships, inquiry-based learning, immersive virtual reality, AP courses, early college programming, and competency-based curriculum. Upon enrollment, students will undergo diagnostic assessments to create personalized learning plans (PLP), this assessment will provide baseline data for the school’s competency-based program. During the interview, the applicant group stated they will use PLP to determine social-emotional support levels and reiterated that they would use a CASEL-aligned curriculum like RULER. * The application outlines a multi-tiered system of support and lists staffing, tools, supports, and interventions to address academic needs. | proposed multidimensional offerings will be implemented and accessible to all student groups.   * There are inconsistencies in the application about the claimed ratio of 60 percent asynchronous to 40 percent synchronous learning time. In other areas of the application, it is clear that students will only be required to attend 6 hours and 15 minutes of synchronous learning time a week, whereas students are estimated to spend 20 hours a week completing asynchronous course work. During the interview, the applicant group confirmed that the optional synchronous time was included in the 40 percent computation. The actual ratio is closer to 24 percent synchronous and 76 percent asynchronous learning time per week. |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * The early reading section clearly explains how the school will “focus on foundational skills of language and building the reading brain.” They have also outlined the various ways that ASUPD educators will identify students’ literacy needs. |  |
| 1. **Student engagement** [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(26)]: 2. **Teacher-student interaction** [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(33)]: 3. **Parent/guardian engagement** [G.L.ch.71 §94(b)(34)]: | |
| * The application outlines a variety of learning design elements designed to engage students which serve as the foundation of the program: required synchronous seminar classes, required small group tutorials, self-paced asynchronous personalized learning, peer tutoring through schoolhouse.world, intentional partnerships, and Personalized Leaning Plans within Canvas (the learning management system (LMS)). The application states both the LMS and the InSpace platform will help to track when students are “engaged” and student engagement can be monitored by teachers/core learning guides. * The application outlines expectations and goals for teacher student interaction. Learning Guides teach core content classes, lead weekly seminars with a cohort of students, as well as weekly live content tutorials. It goes on to say that “it is the responsibility of the Learning guides to conduct regular outreach to students behind pace.” Further, the application does explain that the teacher – student interaction will be “documented through student attendance records and communication logs in the schools SIS and LMS.” * The application describes the use of Family Town Halls and Compacts “for families to work alongside school leaders to surface ideas, priorities, and concerns.” Town hall meetings will be conducted virtually and will provide multiple opportunities for working parents to participate, and live closed caption transcription will be available for those | * The application provides limited information about how the school will use systems to ensure and track student engagement or how it will encourage and monitor student involvement beyond core courses. During the interview, the applicant group spoke about their experiences ensuring good attendance while working at brick-and- mortar schools. The applicant group noted that their model will ensure student agency and connect students to school. * It is not clear how the hub site Director of Culture and Community who is “the keeper of student wellbeing” and social emotional learning, will implement the role, particularly for students who do not attend hub site(s). * There is limited to no information regarding how the school will track student engagement or even participation in additional educational offerings that students access via auxiliary links which take them out of the LMS and beyond the primary curricula. |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| wishing to engage in a language other than English. Further each family will enter into a two-way compact with the school to help facilitate accountability and set expectations and for regular communication. The school will implement restorative justice practices as needed and intends to include family as appropriate. Finally, families will have access to the SIS and LMS as well as personalized learning plans and monthly progress updates. |  |
| **19.Academic integrity:**  **20.Formative and summative assessments [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(22)]: 21.Qualitative and quantitative data:**  **22.State test administration [G.L.ch.71 §94(b)(7)]:** | |
| * The school intends to use Exact Path for standardized benchmark assessments. Exact Path is presented as providing adaptive diagnostic assessments and personalized learning pathways. They report that “the tool helps educators personalized instruction and provide targeted intervention programs in the areas of math, ELA, reading.” The school intends to use rubrics to assess mastery of learning in content areas. The application states “[w]e will utilize disaggregated qualitative and quantitative data from various assessment sources to adapt and enhance the program, aiming to improve both academic and non-academic outcomes for every student.” | * The application lacks clarity on academic integrity measures including proctoring, discouraging plagiarism, or a cheating policy. * The application also lacks clarity about how it will use data from multiple assessment sources to modify the program or to improve non-academic student outcomes. * While the application states that the school will “leverage data to drive decision-making and use technology to achieve adaptive learning,” it is unclear how the proposed school will systemically use data collectively and individually to inform instructional techniques. The application states that the school’s goal is to “develop intrinsic motivation for learning rather than simply ‘playing the game of school’” although it is unclear how this will be accomplished. * There is very limited information on administering required state assessments. The application does not reflect an understanding of the CMVS’ obligation to administer the MCAS to all students who may reside in any municipality across the Commonwealth or its obligation to arrange transportation to testing sites. |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **23. Attendance [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(32)]:** | |
| * The application states that attendance is mandatory, and students must attend required synchronous sessions, tutorials, seminars, weekly check-ins with Success Coach, and individual learning conferences (a total of 6 hour and 15 minutes a week). The application outlines a system for attendance with data points drawn from the LMS Canvas, a daily visual check-in via required synchronous sessions, a parent notification system if a student misses a required synchronous class, and an early warning dashboard to monitor and analyze student enrollment and attendance data. | * It remains unclear how student learning time will be tracked or verified in a virtual environment, how asynchronous work outside of the LMS will be monitored, and how truancy will be addressed. |
| 1. **Supporting all students** [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(21)]: 2. **Successful participation in online learning** [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(31) 3. **Services for English learners** [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(32)]: 4. **Services for students with disabilities** [G.L. ch.71B]: | |
| * The application aims to support all students by providing “the latest learning technologies,” their version of a competency-based curriculum, as well as Personalized learning Plans (PLP) which “link to students’ individual goals, including a student’s IEP or ML plan where appropriate.” * The application indicates a low teacher to student ratio of 1:8. The application provides the qualifications of individuals who will provide support to students. Those individuals include core learning guides (academic teachers), success coaches (for general education/literacy and special education/multilingual learner (MLL)), the director of special education/MLL, and the director of culture and community. * The proposed school provides, and students must successfully complete, a one-week student orientation, which | * While the application mentions “personalized instruction,” “coaching,” “personalized learning plans,” and “supports for student who are enrolled in college courses,” the application needs greater clarification regarding the implementation of programming and supports for all students, including a description of the settings in which these support services will be provided, and how they will be adapted to a virtual environment. * While reporting a goal to offer students a high level of flexibility, there is limited detail how the school will support students’ success while navigating a great deal of autonomy. * The plan to have one person serving as both the Director of Special Education and Multilingual learners seems inconsistent with the mission and vision of the application as well as the number of anticipated students who require these services (40 percent in year 1). * It is unclear if the school will maintain “a low ratio wraparound |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| includes some of the practices for successfully online learning. | model of 1:8” when serving the intended maximum enrollment of 4,000 students.   * The application states that students “will not receive access to their academic courses” until successful completion of the one-week orientation. The application is not clear about how students’ ability to learn online will be assessed, and what it means to “successfully complete” this one week-orientation. * Although the application outlines basic services that the school will provide for English language learners (ELs) and students with disabilities (SWD), it is unclear whether the applicant group has determined how brick-and-mortar practices need to be adjusted for a virtual environment. The application does not reflect a clear understanding of the legal requirements for EL services. Further, the application states that EL “[s]tudents will have access to blended learning opportunities for additional review,” but it is unclear what this means. |
| 1. **Preparation for college and career [G.L.ch.71 §94(b)(23)]:** 2. **Digital citizenship [G.L.ch.71 §94(b)(13)]:** 3. **Social and emotional growth [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(24)]:** 4. **Tailoring supports around needs of families/guardians:** 5. **School culture:** 6. **School community [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(25) and (27)]k** | |
| * In terms of preparation for college and career, the application discusses that “during the planning year, the school will explore partnerships to support guidance of students in their career exploration, such as a partnership with Beabel, which is built on the World of Work curriculum.” It goes on to explain that “[t]he focus of the ASUPD model is to bring down walls between grade levels and blur the lines between high school and college.” The school plans to offer | * The application states that “there are two main options for student to leverage more rigorous coursework once they attain a certain level of competency in their core content area: 1) honors/AP 2) early college.” It is, however, unclear how these students will be supported to achieve in these rigorous classes. * The application provides limited information about how the proposed school will implement the early college and dual enrollment opportunities. Furthermore, it is unclear upon what basis |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| honors/AP or early college courses to students (earning up to 60 credits by graduation).   * The application outlines an emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and using culturally sensitive and bias free curriculum. The school plans to use the RULER curriculum as the foundation for social-emotional learning. All success coaches will be trained in trauma-informed practices for teaching, as well as “leveraging tools in collaborative and proactive solutions and cognitive behavioral therapy for educators.” Other sections of the application outline the use of restorative practices and the “house” model for advisory support. The application provides initial plans, but not concrete strategies for how it will support student social emotional knowledge, skills, and competencies. * The application outlines a vision for school culture guided by the group’s central values: joy, thriving, directing our time, and being known that will aim to provide students with safety, academic and social support, cultural responsiveness, and inclusivity. The application lists aspects of the school’s proposed model or expected partnerships that may support the development of the envisioned school culture. * The application states the school will “proactively engage in restorative practices as a mechanism to build a strong community grounded in relationships, empathy, community building, repairing relations, and accountability.” During the interview, the applicant group claimed the personalized learning plans will foster a sense of belonging. Additionally, every student is going to have at least one adult who tracks their personal journey. They went on to state that there are going to be opportunities when students learn together and socialize through the InSpace platform. | the applicant group believes that students can “earn credit for work experience” beyond mentioning that it is modeled after Year-Up.   * The application provided limited information about how the school will promote good digital citizenship, cyber safety, and prevent cyber bullying. * Although the application provides an overview of the school culture and a list of elements that may help achieve it, greater clarity is needed. While the application describes that "a robust culture has strong routines, expectations, and traditions" the application provides few concrete examples of how the school will develop and inculcate students with these routines and expectations to build its culture. Furthermore, during the interview, the applicant group acknowledged the challenge of creating a community of students made up of those who will and those who will not access in person hub sites. |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * While the application provided limited information in this section about tailoring support for families, the application does outline family engagement strategies. During the interview, the applicant group reiterated virtual town hall meetings for families and emphasized the role of the Director of Community and Culture, who would create experiences for students and families. |  |
| **34. Program evaluation:** | |
| * The applicant group focuses on student growth and plans to use quantitative and qualitative data to monitor program efficacy. Felix School staff, hub site staff, and ASUPD experts (and potentially others) will collect and analyze data throughout the year using PowerSchool's analytics for customized reports. The application states that school leadership will annually review the curriculum, course offerings, LMS, and instructional practices. | * The application provides limited information about systems and structures the school will develop to set goals for programmatic student outcomes, to analyze data in relation to these goals, and/or to regularly and evaluatively review the curriculum, course offerings, LMS, and instruction, ensuring successful implementation throughout the CMVS. |
| **35. NCAA eligibility: ( ) Present( ) Absent( ) Incomplete** | |
|  | * It appears as if the proposed school has no plans to obtain its own NCAA number, but rather use ASUPD’s NCAA approval. |
| ***How will the school demonstrate its capacity to deliver proposed programs and services?*** | |
| 1. **Governance structure** [G.L.ch.71 §94(b)(5)]: 2. **CMVS board oversight:** 3. **Decision-making:** 4. **Policy input:** 5. **Proposed board member/and school leader profiles:** 6. **Self-evaluation:** 7. **Communication and public accountability** 8. **Inquiries and complaints:** | |
| * The proposed school’s board of trustees includes highly experienced educators, with a breadth and depth of | * The proposed board lacks experience in virtual teaching and learning for middle and high school students. There appears to be a |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| experience in leadership, implementing innovative models, school administration, youth leadership, creating caring communities, and education technology.   * The application outlines the process that the board will use to make decisions including board meetings, developing agendas, meeting at least quarterly, key oversite decisions, access to reports, data analysis, recommendations from committees, or administrators, and input from stakeholders. The application also provides an overview of how the board intends to seek feedback when setting policy, from students, families, and staff. * During the interview, the application group demonstrated experience with governance systems, structures, and accountability systems. | lack of in-depth knowledge regarding the virtual school setting, expectations for virtual schools in Massachusetts, and virtual school operations, as evidenced by the application. There is a limited description of the annual process the board will use to evaluate its own performance. There is limited information about how the board will evaluate the performance of partner providers.   * There is limited information provided about the board oversight processes, beyond the fact that “school's leadership will present to the board clear and transparent reports on the overall health of the school" in the following areas: academic, social and emotional, fiscal, school leadership, board health, strategic vision, and partner provider and [t]he board is responsible for asking questions and the school leadership is responsible for providing answers in a timely manner. Furthermore, there were errors and inconsistencies in the application’s budget narrative and budget spreadsheet making it difficult to determine the members’ capacity in this area. |
| 1. **Partner organizations** (if applicable) [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(10)]: 2. **Partner organization expertise** (if applicable): 3. **Vetting of partners** (if applicable): | |
| * The application clearly outlines the nature and purpose of the partnership with ASU Preparatory Digital (ASUPD) and offers a very general outline of the nature and purpose of the partnership with the potential hub sites. In terms of ASUPD, the application generally speaks to how the partnership will enhance the flexible, competency-based, early college aspects of the proposed school. * The application indicates the establishment of a strong relationship with the West End House Boys & Girls Club, located in Allston. The applicant group is in the process of exploring additional locations in the Commonwealth to establish hub sites. The application includes letters of support from the West End House, the Boys & Girls Club of Lawrence, and the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Holyoke. | * The application lacks detailed information on the applicant group's vetting process for the proposed partnership with ASUPD. The application provides limited evidence of strong outcomes of ASUPD/Khan World School programming. The application provides one year of data about Khan World School’s effectiveness, which is insufficient. Other statements provided in the application about the quality of Khan World School and ASUPD do not appear to be grounded in rigorous evaluation or research. |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools**

**Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * During the interview, the applicant group provided additional information about the vetting process for the proposed ASUPD partnership. The applicant group described a conference they attended in Arizona and a visit to Boston to look at potential hub sites. The group explained that they wanted to partner with entities with experience in virtual education and supporting students. |  |
| 1. **School leader job scope description:** 2. **Transparent and data-based management:** 3. **Ex officio board members (if necessary):** 4. **Succession planning:** 5. **Committees, advisory boards, and task forces** | |
| * The application notes that the board may direct the school leader to participate in professional development offered by ASUPD about virtual school leadership, focused on virtual administration and teacher supervision. * The application outlines succession planning, indicating where possible, the board members will be onboarded in a staggered term; there will also be an orientation process for new board members. | * The application did not mention any requirement that the school leader have a background and experience with virtual schools or virtual teaching and learning. The application states the school leader may be trained by the vendor, ASUPD. It may be difficult for board members with little expertise in virtual schooling to hold their virtual partner accountable in this scenario. The description of the roles of board committees, advisory groups, and task forces is limited. * There is limited information about how the leadership team will transparently manage the school based on data. There is a brief description about how the management will take concrete steps to close identified achievement, access, and opportunity gaps. |
| 1. **Staff member qualifications [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(17)]:** 2. **Professional learning and ongoing support [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(18)]:** 3. **Collaboration:** 4. **Educator evaluation:** 5. **Online observations and course feedback:** | |
| * The application includes a table that outlines staffing qualifications for core learning guides, success coaches, Director of Special Education/Multilingual learner, Director | * The application’s staffing plan lacks clarity. The plan to hire one person as the Director of Special Education/ML/ESL does not align with the educational needs of the school’s expected student |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| of Culture and Community, head of school, assistant principal, and superintendent. The application explains that the school will adopt the MA Education Evaluation framework. It also provides information about online observations and course feedback. | population. Furthermore, it is unclear who is considered "enrichment staff" on page 56, and there appears to be little information about support staff, such as paraprofessionals, learning interventionists, and speech therapists. During the interview, the applicant group confirmed that they plan to hire one paraprofessional to provide services for the first 3 years. Beyond the fact that the school intends to pay for 12 Core Learning Guides in the first year of operation, greater clarification is needed about staffing, and related budgetary issues.   * The application lacks details on professional development provided to all staff, beyond the training proposed by ASUPD for Core Learning guides. * Other than stating that the second week of October will be used for professional development and collaboration opportunities, as well as the provision of a daily hour of prep time for “digital teachers” there is little information regarding how the school will provide teachers with collaborative time and structures. There is little information about how the school will address the social and emotional needs of staff or how the school will work to develop a cohesive team of educators. * On page 57, the application mentions that the school and ASUPD will be “jointly hiring” core learning guides. In the interview, the applicant group clarified that Felix is the only employer of core learning guides. * The application provides limited information about the school’s working conditions, hours, and compensation packages that will attract highly qualified staff. |
| 1. **Compensation:** 2. **Budget narrative [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(16)]:** 3. **Per pupil capitation [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(16)]:** 4. **Financial tracking and management [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(16)]:** | |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. **Fiscal controls and financial management policies [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(16)]:** 2. **Solvency and contingency planning [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(16)]:** 3. **Fundraising [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(16)]:** | |
| * The applicant group demonstrates its capacity for fundraising; the application states that it has already negotiated philanthropic seed grants to mitigate the planned deficits in the early years: year 0 (18 months): $1,370.896; year 1: $893,426; year 2: $172,630, and year 3: $686,257. | * The application clearly indicates how individual base salaries and increases will be determined for employees, except for Core Learning Guides who teach digitally. The application states that digital personnel salaries and increases are included in the contract provided by ASUPD. During the interview, the applicant group clarified that “Felix will be hiring teachers and evaluating teachers”. This statement conflicts with information provided in the application and indicates a lack of clarity around employment for the Core Learning Guides. * The budget narrative does not clearly explain the projected revenues and expenses, including a clear description of staffing and other operating expenses, it also does not correspond to the budget in Attachment M. As a result, it is challenging to determine a clear picture of the group’s financial planning. The organizational chart is unclear, and some of the assumptions in the budget are either inaccurate or incorrect. The applicant group budgeted for a $1 million Charter School Program (CSP) award, for which they are not eligible. The budget assumes a monthly MBTA transportation pass for each student. On page 57 the application indicates that "the budget assumes that students who live beyond a 15- mile radius from a hub site would choose a fully virtual option." This raises access and equity concerns for all students who do not live near the MBTA. During the interview, the applicant group was able to clarify some, but not all, of these budgetary inconsistencies. * The applicant group explains that their proposed school cannot run with $5,000 and should have a tuition rate tied to the current statewide average foundation amount of approximately $16,000 per pupil for grades 9-12. They argue that the tuition rate should “reflect the multidimensional model for learning and support that students and families are craving.” Further, on page 56, the application |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | outlines the cost per student breakdown which does not provide any information that tracks to staffing plan, numbers, hub site estimates, etc. On page 59 the application includes a table that outlines state average per pupil expenditures to FY22 dollars compared to the Felix proposal, but again, the details that account for the costs of Felix are unclear. During the interview, the applicant group justified the higher requested tuition rate by stating that planned instructional costs are higher with more wraparound staff support and a lower student-to-staff ratio. The proposed school plans to pay ASUPD organization at least $7,600 - $7,800 per student a year which will cover curriculum, teachers, and LMS.   * Though the application claims that the school will “breakeven” in year 4, this is not apparent. The school does not appear to be fiscally sustainable for the first five years of operation (financial projections were not provided years beyond this timeframe). The applicant group compares their proposed per pupil rate with state averages for traditional schools, arguing that CMVS lack access to local contribution amounts, student demographic needs adjustments, and spending beyond minimums. The applicant group did not reflect an understanding that CMVS receive additional funding from sending districts to provide special education services, in addition to the tuition rates. |
| ***How will the school manage operations?*** | |
| 1. **Enrollment profile [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(3)]:** 2. **Course access [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(29)]:** 3. **Proposed school year [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(6)]:** | |
| * The application generally explains how students may access the school’s courses (at home or at a hub site or from wherever the student is choosing to learn from-assuming they are over the age of 14 for supervision purposes). | * The proposal includes little information regarding how the enrollment profile relates to the wider growth plan for the proposed school, which ranges from 200 in year 1 to 4,000 students at maximum enrollment, especially given the scarcity of evidence of demand. |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | * Although the application clearly states that the proposed school year is 180 days, and 990 hours at least (in one place it says 180 or 990), it also describes plans for year-round schooling, and students “may continue to work on courses over the summer if they choose, with consultation and agreement with their advisor and head of school.” While these ideas add to the potential value of this school, there is limited to no information about how these ideas will be implemented. |
| **4. Learning time/School Schedule:** | |
| * The application provides an overview of the school schedule, provides an example of the flexible school schedules, and states that each student will have a personalized learning plan and a tailored weekly schedule. While the implementation is not fully fleshed out, in a general way the application describes how Canvas, the Learning Management System (LMS), will track student learning time and be integrated with the SIS to provide data for teachers to monitor for both synchronous and asynchronous course work. | * As previously indicated, the schedule including the expectations for synchronous and asynchronous student learning time needs greater clarification. Furthermore, the features that set this school apart – peer tutoring, seminar house meet-ups, office hours, clubs, and in- person success coach help – are all optional offerings. It is unclear what the school’s expectations are for student learning mode (synchronous/asynchronous), as well as student time on learning; as a result, it is unclear how the school’s expectations for time on learning will be communicated and implemented and tracked. The application states that “during the planning year the school will develop a mechanism within the LMS to capture students’ schedule and enroll in classes and create flex blocks for asynchronous time.” More clarity is needed about the time on learning. Clearer expectations and standards are needed in terms of optional offerings. |
| 1. **Recruitment and Retention [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(20)]:** 2. **Admission [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(4)]:** 3. **Lotteries and enrollment preferences [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(9)]:** | |
| * The draft recruitment and retention plan includes a range of marketing and outreach strategies. * The admission and lotteries sections provide a general overview of key enrollment processes. | * The application states the school will partner with the hub sites to “recruit their members.” This core strategy calls into question the applicant’s goal to serve as a statewide virtual school. The draft recruitment and retention plan contains limited information about |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | | retention strategies. |
| **8. Age-appropriate supervision of students under 14 [G.L.ch.71 §94(b)(28)]:** | | |
| * The application outlines a plan for age-appropriate supervision of students under 14. | | * The application states that students under 14 must attend a hub site 5 days a week or have parent supervision in their home learning environment. Only students that live within 15 miles of a hub site will receive transportation assistance (a monthly MBTA transportation pass); the application does not contemplate communities that do not have public transportation capable of transporting a student up to 15 miles. |
| 1. **Technology and materials access [G.L.ch.71 §94(b)(30)]:** 2. **Technical support:** 3. **Facilities:** 4. **Student records [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(12)]:** 5. **District communications [G.L. ch.71 §94(b)(14)]:** | | |
| * The application states the school will provide students with a laptop, headphones with a microphone, and a portable WiFi hotspot with a data plan. * The application describes the potential hub site in Allston, the West End House Boys and Girls Club. * The application generally describes the school’s capacity to support and store all critical student, program, and staff data for retrieval and analysis. The school will utilize PowerSchool as the Student Information System. PowerSchool is compliant with the school interoperability framework (SIF) and is an approved vendor by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. | | * It is unclear how the applicant group assessed student need for wireless support; the application states that only 25 percent of students will need WiFi hotspots. * In general, the application seems to provide limited information about technical support, and limited information about qualifications of and job responsibilities of the Administrative and Digital Logistics Manager. * The application provides limited information on how the school will evaluate programming across hub sites. |
| ***How will the school demonstrate faithfulness to its mission and terms of its certificate?*** | | |
| 1. **Access and Equity for Students:** 2. **Access and Equity for Parents/Guardians:** 3. **Accountability plan development:** | | |
|  | * The applicant aims to address access and equity issues by providing communication in families' native languages as | * As previously stated, the proposed school’s “blended learning” or in-person components raise serious concerns about access and |

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24 Cycle**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| well as emphasizing the inclusion of extracurricular activities, restorative practices, anti-bullying measures, mental health support, and support for the LGBTQ community. The applicants promise to address inequities by ensuring parents have access to materials in multiple languages. They also propose to prioritize wellness, mental health, and building trust in school culture.   * The application makes a commitment to creating an accountability plan. The sample indicators provided to evaluate the proposed school’s implementation of its program are aligned with its mission. |  | equity for students and families who may not be able to travel to the hubs.   * The application provided very limited information about how the proposed school will create an effective accountability plan, as well as how they will collect and analyze the data. |
|  |  |  |

Felix Commonwealth Virtual School Executive Summary

The executive summary was provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts virtual school applicant group.

The Felix Commonwealth Virtual School (Felix School, or Felix) is a virtual school that combines a competency-based digital learning platform with the option for students to learn in-person at community-based sites. We are driven by an unwavering belief that a competency-based foundation, flexible learning, and connected communities best serve students preparing for a changing world and unknown future. In collaboration with students and families, our mission is to unleash time, empowering students to learn at their own pace to achieve their full potential. Our vision: Learn anything, anytime, from anywhere. It’s about time.

We will closely partner with each student at their starting point to co-design goals, create accessible and flexible learning pathways, and guide them to acquiring the academic and social- emotional skills they need for success.

The optional in-person community hubs offer students the ability to join their peers and Success Coaches face-to-face. Following a scaled rollout plan, in-person support will expand over time across the Commonwealth. Local hub sites will be embedded within trusted, local community organizations like the Boys & Girls Club or the YMCA where students can learn during the day, surrounded by caring adults, without a caregiver needing to be present.

**Competency-Based Foundation:** At the Felix School, student learning is measured by a demonstrated proficiency in a subject rather than their age or expected grade level. When a student is ready to progress, they move on confident their future learning is built upon a solid foundation. This includes beginning their postsecondary journey as early as they are ready. Rich hands-on learning, internships, externships, apprenticeships, and access to college and university courses throughout high school ensure successful matriculation to continued education, if desired. In our competency-based learning environment, students will: Demonstrate mastery of core academic knowledge and skills (to grade level or beyond); Exhibit fluency in the application of core skills and knowledge across content; Learn in, contribute to, and be responsible for their communities; Develop ownership of their learning and time.

**Flexible, Adaptive Learning:** Our digital learning platform offers robust personalized education designed to meet the needs of a fast-changing world. Each student has learning pathways adapted to their mastery of the standards laid out in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Our

digital learning experience gives students maximum direction over their time, providing flexibility and support to learn at the pace and place that best serves them. In one subject, a student might be moving ahead quicker than expected, while in another they may take more time to achieve mastery.

How does the Felix School keep track of all this personalization and pathways? We provide each student with multiple levels of instruction, support, assessment, and coaching, all aligned to the same powerful goal of helping a student achieve their goals for academics and life. Each student has a personalized learning plan that includes a unique path to graduation, tailored weekly schedule, and individualized pace plans for each course to help students stay on track. The flexible

pl age 1

learning model is goal-driven, allowing for a much more tailored and targeted approach to IEP development, progress monitoring, and support identification.

**Connected Learning Communities:** While some students require less support to succeed, others desire the structure of a place to go and people to learn with. The Felix School surrounds the flexible learning model with connected communities of peers and trained adults committed to the holistic maturity of each student. Whether it is neighborhood projects or horizon-broadening electives, these learning communities are embedded within trusted, local community organizations like the Boys & Girls Club or the YMCA. In these spaces brimming with STEAM, athletics, and social opportunities, students are able to demonstrate mastery by applying and extending their knowledge gained in core academics. This part of the model serves as an important scaffold for students needing additional academic or skill support, wellness (nutrition, mental health, physical health), coaching, and connection. Multilingual learners, neurodiverse learners, or those just needing an in-person boost receive personalized help in an environment built for them to be seen and successful.

While creating community within the Felix School is vital, so is connecting with the broader communities surrounding the school. Massachusetts is filled with world-class institutions and businesses that Felix School students will someday join. While at the Felix School, students will prepare for their futures by participating in internships and mentorships brokered at the local level, including those opportunities that are virtual opportunities. Firsthand learning experiences at businesses, nonprofits, and other institutions will prepare students to join, lead, and grow organizations in Massachusetts and beyond.

**Our Guiding Values:** To create a learning experience capable of serving in this way, the Felix School must be a place of Joy, Thriving, Being Known, and Directing our Time.

*Directing our Time* because it is the most valuable commodity each is given. To mature, one must become a master of their whole self, especially over their time.

*Joy* because it ignites our intellectual curiosities and unlocks our academic potential. People choose to invest in the places that bring them joy, and school should be one of those places in a student’s life.

*Thriving* because everyone is built to see themselves at their best, to interrupt maladaptive habits, and to simultaneously experience and celebrate their own wins, power, and potential in real-time.

*Being Known* because we achieve our greatest when we are connected, seen, and understood. When someone is not present, their absence is noticed because they are needed.

###### Incorporating Values into Our School Design:

Motivated by these guiding values, we propose a school that not only espouses these principles but also brings them to life through its design and practices. At the core of this design is a digital learning platform that enables several key features:

1. **Time***.* You are in control of your time. You choose the schedule that works best for you. The core learning journey is delivered virtually, with a mix of synchronous and asynchronous options to create a flexible schedule. Learning Guides and Success

Coaches support students in learning how to use their time and be in charge of their page 2

schedule. For many students, this will require scaffolding as students learn how to have more responsibility and agency with their time.

1. **Flexible Learning Locations**. Digital Campus and the option of in-person learning at hub sites across MA, including Boys & Girls Clubs and YMCAs. This empowers students to choose the setting, virtual or in-person or a combination, that works best for their life and learning needs.
2. **Adaptive, Competency-Based Learning**. Personalized learning plans will link to students’ individual goals, including a student’s IEP or ML plan where appropriate. When you know the content and are able to demonstrate skill, you move forward. This allows for the opportunity to do accelerated work (e.g. AP courses, college level credit, earn an associate degree at the end of high school). There are multiple ways to demonstrate your knowledge, not just tests and essays.
3. **Learning Guides + Success Coaches**. Gain support virtually and in-person from experts in their fields with a low adult to student ratio of 1:8. Teachers are your Learning Guides. Success Coaches provide holistic support on your learning journey.
4. **Joy, Thriving, and Being Known.** We foster intellectual curiosity. Learning should instill joy. If you’re not yet successful, keep working at it and you will be. We’ll support you.

**Experience and Expertise:** The Felix School design team is led by world-class educators who have extensive experience teaching and leading successful schools. They are working closely with the best in class digital content creators at ASU Prep and Khan Academy. These two groups are partnering with experienced leaders in youth development organizations with long-lasting ties to the communities we seek to serve, including in communities with high concentrations of poverty, multilingual learners, and special education students. With a deep passion for seeing every student in the Commonwealth have an opportunity to excel, this group has repeatedly demonstrated the ability to do the intentional work necessary in every home, street, and neighborhood. This initiative is closely connected with leaders who have demonstrated passion for ensuring the highest quality resources are available to all kids.

Page 3

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools Final Application Review - 2023-24**

**Cycle**

**2023-24 Review Cycle - List of Reviewers for Prospectuses and Final Application**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name of Reviewer** | **Affiliation** |
| Eileen Belastock | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Educational Technology |
| Esther Jeong | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign |
| Sarah Haavind | The Concord Consortium and the Digital Learning Advisory Council |
| Amy Michalowski | VHS Learning and former member of the Digital Learning Advisory Council |
| Daniel Downs | North Reading Public Schools and the Digital Learning Advisory Council |
| Sibel Hughes | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Language Acquisition & Academic Achievement |
| April Rist | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education Planning and Policy |
| Jackie Gantzer | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Educational Technology |
| Beth Tripathi | Massachusetts Teachers Association and the Digital Learning Advisory Council |
| Ruth Hersh | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign |
| Lisa Harney | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of College, Career, and Technical Education, Alternative Education |
| Jacqueline Monterroso | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign |
| Kristin Hunt | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Massachusetts Early College |
| Joanna Laghetto | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign |

### Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools 2023-24 Review Cycle - Applicant Interview

#### Interview Summary

**Applicant:** Felix Commonwealth Virtual School

**Date:** January 9, 2024

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

*review. The interview summary is not an exact transcript. Responses have been summarized by Department staff.*

###### Attendees (applicants):

* *Thabiti Brown*
* *Brandon Cardet-Hernandez*
* *Yully Cha*
* *Yeshi Gaskin Lamour*
* *Mike Larsson*

###### Attendees (Department):

* *Alison Bagg*
* *Ruth Hersh*
* *Joanna Laghetto*
* *Jacqueline Monterroso*
* *Regina Robinson*

###### Why the name Felix?

* 1. The name creation was a collaborative process. We went through a lot of iterations of naming. We wanted it to be clear, simple, and also different. The idea of a statewide community. A lot of things in nature that we iterated around had an organic network feel. We wanted to create a community and culture that was palpable. There was research around different objects, associations, and it helped us to triangulate back to what was the purpose of time. Felix has multiple meanings by design. One is that it is a jellyfish that does not age. It is timeless. An exceptional creature, rooted in timeless theme. Felix represents joy. A somewhat unique name – no traditional school affiliation. We like the fact that it’s a little bit off the beaten path, and it can also be our mascot. There was excitement around this name. Thinking about the name helped us define what we're trying to do that's different for young people regarding the value of their time. Meant to reflect the mission and vision.

**a.** We believe there is an urgency around this work. We are watching what’s happening across our state and across our country, chronic absenteeism is on the rise, and reality about what we know about disengagement and the emerging mental health crisis that so many young people are encountering every day. With all that, there is a different approach that needs to take shape to make sure kids are getting what they need. We’ve talked a lot about what happened after COVID. Many young people were experiencing a level of agency as a result of remote schooling. We took that away from them and did not build off lessons learned, didn’t try to create a different way of thinking about it. Experience for adults looks different.

A majority of the adult workforce had a transition to remote or hybrid work. Kids were not put at the center of the transition. Thinking about how do we do that equitably? We want to blow up the failures of COVID we want to provide good virtual learning and teaching. We want kids to access all the things that connect us to school with the hybrid offerings. Give them the freedom to do it when they want in a way that works with the time that they have with competing priorities in their lives.

* 1. It’s a chance for true diversity. Open a school community to bring in families and kids from all different walks of life and geographies.

**3. A 9th grader from Springfield with an IEP that includes speech and occupational therapy services and a 10th-grade student who recently immigrated from Ecuador** (first language Quechuan) **living in Milford are enrolled in the school. Please walk us through how a personalized learning plan is created for each student, how it is implemented for each student, and how it will be monitored and adjusted for each student.**

**a.** 9th grader: We are going to follow like a traditional school: if a student comes to us with an IEP, we will get a team to examine the IEP, convert it, and see what services are needed that we implement at Felix. Use success coaches – special education and ML. For the 10th-grade student – we have tools that are 508 compliant – accessibility tools will give students access to their individual languages. We will look at students, engaging them in the Home Language Survey, identify what are the needs of the students, in terms of multilingual needs, and provide them with the best support needed. Work in concert with the director of special education and English language supports to get the students what they need in real time. Each student will have a personalized learning plan (PLP). When they enroll, students will take diagnostic assessments, which give us baseline data to then create a personalized learning plan. Their advisor will monitor the success of the PLP based on data to ensure the student is staying on track.

**4. What transportation plans would the school implement to support a student who needs assistance reaching a hub site if their municipality of residence does not have public transportation passes?**

1. One of the things we took seriously in the application was thinking about how to create opportunities for students to take statewide testing in person. Our hub sites are opportunities for that and will serve as MCAS testing sites. Early on we will have a few hub sites, we intend to be located across the state. We will bring students in for a hub site experience if that’s what they want to do. School is 100% virtual for the academic model, and hub site offerings are in addition to what is offered online.
2. We have built into the budget transportation passes for students in proximity to a hub site.
3. We have additional dollars set aside in the budget for transportation for students who need it – students with disabilities may have transportation provided via their IEP. Plus, contingency funds to be applied for students to be transported to locations.

**5. Imagine that you have a 10th grade student from Marlborough, who attends a total of one synchronous class per week, is working full-time at a Home Depot, and is logging in to complete asynchronous classwork 2 or 3 times a week. While they are submitting asynchronous work on time, they are not demonstrating an understanding of standards. What supports and services would be provided for this student? How would the school ensure that students are able to access these supports and services?**

1. Online learning would identify these patterns really quickly. Lower chance for students to fall through cracks. Support system in place via online piece. We have the core learning guide who teaches the class, leads synchronous work, and an advisor who is monitoring this student as part of the advisory group. We have success coaches deployed to help solve

whatever the issue would be. We would want to identify what is holding students back and work with a success coach to help the student – talk to them about what time they have outside of work and what is holding them back. Reminding them of what they need to learn and support them.

1. Our intention is to have the daily check-in every day. There is a synchronous opportunity that is every day, students are meeting with someone, every day over the course of the week so we will have more data. We will lean on the tools that we can use through virtual learning we will have a lot of information about whether students are progressing as they need to, and we will be able to modify on demand with young folk and engage their families in conversations as well.

**6. Since student autonomy and self-direction are key components of the school, how will school structures, resources, and staff support students to develop time management, executive functioning, and self-directed learning skills?**

1. From my experience working with an online higher ed institution that has some of the same components, a really key piece of this is making sure we have structures in place to help get students to achieve their goals. Time management and self-direction is often context-based. Students can be all over and on top of schoolwork that excites them but could procrastinate around areas where they may struggle. The work of the success coach and with the advisory will help students plan and think of the future. Aware that these are high school students who continuously need reinforcement, and may show excellent skills at some times, but students may have times when they are not doing well and need help to build up their skills.
2. At the beginning of the school year, we’ll orient them to virtual learning and what it takes to be successful in an online context. We need to really calibrate what it means to be successful in a virtual school. There are multiple touch points with support staff for students to ensure that they are on track and able to manage their time, with the flexibility that we are providing for them as well.
3. When we think about the skills of learning how to join a remote/hybrid workforce is an incredibly important piece of the model, half of the workforce in the country is working in a hybrid condition and that will only grow. There is learning in that process, we will talk about developing that executive functioning skills in young people as they move through school. It is a lot of autonomy, and it creates a real feeling of autonomy which is important because there’s flexibility in how your time is used, but there are real moments where a young person has to show up on time, engaged, in person, virtually and we are offering both autonomy and accountability. An adult will be able to tell if students are meeting both of those expectations and to really self-regulate in these conditions– adults will identify the barriers that are getting in the way – fatigue, fear of failure, are students bored? Adults will assess the barriers.

**a.** We are all veterans of schools, and we know this is hard, right? This is actually one of the

difficult things. We live in a society where many people speak many languages other than English, and we have frankly a dearth of educators who have all of the language skills to actually serve all our young people in the way that they need to be served. So that’s the starting point. One of the great things about this particular model, is that we have technology components to help really amplify, there are over 100 languages that can be translated through the platform we use in Canvas. We have young people who may speak languages that our staff do not speak who can get their core learning experiences translated. We know that we need to engage, train, and support them in growing the student English language proficiency. Get kids the content in their language and also grow

student English language proficiency. Will provide staff with PD on MLL. We are linked to Arizona State University Preparatory Digital (ASUPD) that provides virtual instruction PD. We can lean on people who are best in class, who have been doing this work for a number of years and can support our folks from day 1. We have technology, ASPD experience, skill.

1. Our staff will need training in WIDA standards, how to implement access, and accommodations for MLL students. We will be in compliance with all state regulations for MLL or special education students. We will provide any tools and training to be successful.
2. There are hard skills you need to be a special education teacher, and this is me as a former special education teacher as well, skills that you need that are differentiated, based on the kids in front of you, that happens in professional learning that’s like an anchor to our work. Other thing that is part of our model, we get to learn from ASU and Khan, we think that there is going to be a lot of professional learning in the ASU and Khan national network – taking lessons learned and get to know a professional network. Grapple with problems of practice and solutions that are specific for a virtual context. We are not going at it alone in our brick-and-mortar building; we are part of a community.

**8. What do you think are the benefits and challenges of providing special education and EL services in a virtual environment?**

1. Similar to traditional schools we will face challenges around looking at an IEP and how to deliver the minutes in an IEP. Regardless of the context you’re in. One of the benefits is that technology has a lot of accommodations that will provide more access to students and allow students access to us. Our competency curriculum meets students where they are at and brings them where they need to be.
2. The greatest challenges structurally is serving a high need community is unexpectedness and trying to staff against them. Dollars come in at a different phase than when you know who you are serving. Strategic strength of this design, not necessarily because it's virtual, but simply because there was so much forethought and being able to tap other partnership schools that have gone through the startup phases. And they've iterated multiple times over. And all of the wisdom of this group of having been school leaders, and what have been the structural barriers is often the budget. We designed not a scrappy start up budget, we know what quality takes, you need to pay for the expertise. We know what quality takes. In line item, competitive salaries for folks who have that experience and licensure. Whoever comes in first year of enrollment, we will be ready. We are experienced fundraisers, grants can backstop, we did not want to compromise on quality of services. This is what we wish we knew and wish we had when we were starting our own schools.

**9. Describe the physical education program and wellness programming at the school and how the school will provide that.**

1. We understand we are obligated to provide PE for students. We anticipate providing special dailies for student one would be PE. Our students will engage in PE in a virtual capacity.
2. We have a number of ideas for this, and we are trying to figure it out. We can work with PLP to determine a PE plan for each student. If there is a digital movement elective, it be synchronous or asynchronous. There’s a certain set of things that you do to be able to get your body moving. At the simplest level, you could have tools in home, can run around block, push up or sit ups. What we also imagine, and these are the parts that feel really exciting about the PLP, let’s say that Mike is a competitive swimmer. We can have Mike actually transfer in some credits from swimming at a local Y, being able to swim on a daily basis, logging those hours. We may also serve world class athletes. There are a lot of ideas. PE has many different levels to it and we imagine working directly with young people and their families to actually meet the needs for those individual folks. It’s an exciting part about the tailoring model of the school.

**Clarifying question: I'm hearing some people say about their 100% virtual model for all students. And then I'm hearing about the hybrid model, which is what the application talks about. So that's why I'm getting a little confused.**

1. Floor is 100% virtual. Hub site is optional. It’s a virtual school with an opportunity for in person activities if people want them. Kids can sign up for the 100% virtual experience or they can want something a bit different, and that’s where the hub sites come in and you’ll be able to sort of lean into that support where it makes sense and pull away from it where it doesn’t. This will work just around the sort of flexibility of your life with the opportunity for you to have in person experiences if they make sense for you. There may be students who have special needs or who are struggling who may need to come in for an additional support. Gives parents flexibility as well – kids are at home 2 days at hub site 3 days. This is accessible 100% through a virtual space. It’s going to depend on their needs.

**10. What does high-quality instruction look like at the proposed school, for both virtual Core Learning Guides, and/or in-person/virtual Success Coaches? How will the virtual school ensure high-quality instruction and a rigorous academic outcome to satisfy the needs of all students including students with disabilities and English learners, across platforms and across employers (ASUPD/Felix)? How will teachers be supported and evaluated for**

1. High quality instruction is an important aspect of our model. Competency based approach. Aligned to Masscore for HS graduation and to state standards. All curriculum is aligned to Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF). We are working with ASUPD to build out curriculum aligned to MCF. Make sure that all students are aligned to Masscore for graduation. There are two types of folks who work with students directly: core learning guides (teachers) teach and serve as advisory – academic side of the house. Success coaches take a more holistic approach supporting our students. For example, students with disabilities and students with multilingual needs can have access to a success coach to support the needs of those students. Also, general success coaches that will support general learning needs. They take care of the holistic side of the house where the core learning guides take care of the core academic side of the house.
2. When I went to ASUPD annual conference. Convening of all schools. Many models, micro, whole schools, etc. What was striking was to meet real life teachers and instructional leaders to hear them talk about their craft. They were passionate about their experience. Ability to provide more 1-1 instruction via the virtual model. Example was one teacher with 15+ years in a district brick and mortar setting, she was allowed additional time with students. There are definitely certain elements that are replicable in our model. For example, some of the methods of weekly/biweekly rotations for adults, use tools for adults to look at lesson plans, provide peer feedback. Adults had so much more time in addition to a well-designed weekly agenda for adult learning.
3. What we’ll see at Felix is the educators working in parallel process to students because of the use of time, flexibility in time and way instruction is delivered. There are protocol driven tools, conversation tools, writing strategies, really thoughtful processes. Ensures that multiple voices are heard feedback is given, and that is the magic of the space. Real world skills – develop an idea and waiting for others to inform and build on that idea in a way that is not always sequential. Powerful use of time and protocol. Real planning around that. So, in addition to that beautiful individual, one on one experience, there’s going to be group experiences that have to be thoughtful and methodically planned. That’s what we are excited about seeing happen. We want to build on that.
4. One of the things we are excited about is using tools already existing at DESE. We will adopt DESE evaluation rubrics, ask folks to set their expectations at the beginning, do self- assessment, for principals’ instructional leaders to observe and provide feedback. We will use protocols (noted above) for engagement and conversation and use tools to evaluate

where teachers are. The question does assume that there are two employers. Felix will be hiring the teachers and evaluating the teachers – not ASUPD. I would imagine that since this is ASUPDs first foray into Massachusetts, and where we are working behind the scenes, to help really develop this curriculum that we are going to know that there are some components here that are about virtual teaching and learning that are different than what is in the framework. We will be able to lean on ASUPD to make modifications and adjustments based on ASPUD’s experience. It is our intention to use these tools as a floor, a strong floor because it just has great tools and people have been using for years and years.

1. Teachers are not sages on stage, but more guides on the side. Taking best practices, instructional practices, as you can see in traditional schools and applying them to our online school model. We are going to ensure that high quality instruction will happen. School leaders will facilitate observations, feedback, coaching. Teachers will have ongoing PD. Teachers will get prep time to collaborate with colleagues to learn and build strong practices.
2. Competency-based curriculum drives rigor. No path for a student to get a 70% after one year and then move on next year. That forces the educators to ensure that students are progressing.

###### Clarifying question: Can a student test out of a course?

1. There’s a complicated response to your question. We are still wrestling with how this thing will work. We are still trying to hash it out. the people who we hire will still hash out these questions. We will work with ASUPD, will ask other virtual experts. If a young person shows up and they are ready for 10th grade level ELA, they have demonstrated skill, mindset through Exact Path there is no reason not to go on the 10th grade. Tougher if a kid has demonstrated competency with all 9th grade skills 3 months into 9th grade. We think that kids should move along to 10th grade. What happens to their linked tutorial? They had a core learning guide working with them and a success coach who were supporting them, we would move them on to 10th grade ELA and transition then to a new tutorial. This is student specific. This is about time; we want to free kids to advance at the rate that they can handle.

**11. How will the Tiered support model be tailored for a virtual platform, to support the range of student strengths and needs, academically, behaviorally, as well as social-emotionally?**

**a.** The Director of community and culture and Director of special education and MLL will manage the MTSS model at Felix. We are still working on the details. We will engage in RTI model, starting with diagnostic/assessment data. Where are the students coming and how do we meet them where they are at. Using PLP with diagnostic we can determine what tiered level of support academic or social emotional will a student need. We provide additional academic supports through Exact Path and Edmentum. We will use core CASEL aligned curriculum such as RULER to help our students – will look at that from a piece to provide supports. Everyone in this team is fully of the mindset that we are going to have a restorative justice approach when we are supporting kiddos and we are also going to be looking at how to leverage that particular piece, from RTI perspective to support student’s needs.

**12. Please clarity how many total hours of mandatory synchronous learning students have each week?**

1. Weekly schedule. Model is a weekly seminar 2x a week, led by the advisor/learning guide “teacher” who facilitates an interdisciplinary seminar application of skills and knowledge of core skills and knowledge. Culture building and relationship building in this seminar. Weekly tutorial 1x a week for every class – led by learning guide. Success coaches will do some small group follows up. 1x week check in with success coach. Check on attendance or progress in asynchronous work. Depending on students PLP we have separate roles that success coach

will provide – special education or ML synch blocks. That is the base. Leaves room for adjusting based on what students need.

1. 60% of our courses are asynchronous; 40% of the course work for student’s is synchronous.
2. We are counting the optional synchronous time in that calculation.

**13. Please clarify the general adult to student ratio, then more specifically, Core Learning Guides, Success Coaches, Special Education teachers, EL/ML teachers, etc.**

1. We all had our fingers in the budget parts. Average student to adult ratio is about 1:30. In terms of instructional staff it gets to 1:8 (success coaches/learning guides). Those are our initial staffing ratios. Core learning guides carry the subject course work. Personnel is the majority of the budget.
2. Our ratios change as we grow. We are not scrimping and being threadbare in any way. We actually want to lower these ratios over time and have as many opportunities for young people to engage with teachers as possible, so that 17 to one on the core for the instructional is a really important one that'd be built the entire model around. We believe that it's worth that investment. And we can run the budget based on the average per pupil for the Statewide for the foundation budget. We feel good about that.

**Clarifying question: There are different ratios seen towards the back of the application, is that for when you are further built out. I am seeing ratios that are 1:100. Can you clarify?**

1. It is showing up as page 81 for me. But attachment B, the org chart shows engagement ratios, and that is capturing for just the first year. So that's the intention. The ratios do change over time as we grow. Our thought was by starting with that you get a sense of, you know, 17 to one. I think this is one of the pieces we were saying early on is that as folks in the field, we are actually intent on not scrimping and being threadbare in any way. We actually want to lower these ratios over time and have as many as many opportunities for young people to engage with teachers as possible, so that 17 to one on the core for the instructional is a really important one that'd be built the entire model around and we believe that it's worth that investment. And we can run the budget based on the average per pupil for the statewide for the foundation budget. We feel really good about that.

**14. What specific strategies will be used to foster a sense of community and belonging for students, families, and staff with the specific model proposed (for students who attend and who cannot attend the hub sites)?**

1. Culture is the bedrock of our model. We believe it is super important to build a strong and healthy school culture for students. I heard some folks talking about reengaging students. That’s part of why we’re building the Felix School and so we have in our model, in our budget the Director of Community and Culture who is really responsible for designing unique experiences for our students and families. In building up that culture we are going to have a lot of possibilities. For example, for families, we are going to have virtual town halls where families come together and learn with us, engage in what we’re doing at school, really just continuation to tether the parts as partners in our work. The glue that really connects the culture and community at our school are very specific like the seminars we are going to implement for students are part of that. The weekly touch points, office hours, the InSpace, digital technology. There are certain specific ways that we’re really trying to build culture, to really foster that sense of belongs for our students.
2. The personalized path that each student has really does foster a sense of belonging. Everybody is going to have an adult that cares about their own personal journey, and where they're headed right? So different than in a traditional model where it's really easy for students to feel like no adults are keeping an eye on them. Everybody's going to have an adult that cares about their own personal journey, and where they're headed right? Every single student will have someone, multiple people who care about their progress and adjust their services.
3. There are opportunities when students are learning together, and there is going to be community building that’s happening sort of naturally. You are right, there won’t be the same hallway transitions, but some kids still don’t feel part of a community when they are in school every day for 6 hours. That is not the way to build intimacy. When we build the seminar experience, we will plan for students to connect with one another. Hub model will allow kids to explore their relationships more, they can start a relationship online and then allow in person meet ups. This can be helpful for a young person who has not had a great experience in brick and mortar, the student can control the ways in which they have relationships with other students in the hub sites. They get to navigate the intensity of those relations at the speed that feels right for them. That’s part of the beauty of the model, like you get to self-direct, not just your learning, but get to self-direct the ways you want to have relationships with other students at the school. That is a powerful community move.

###### Clarifying question: what happens for kids who don’t have access to hub sites?

1. Until we are at scale that will be an early challenge; all kids across the commonwealth will not have access to hub sites. For students who are in western mass, in year 1 we will be in eastern side of MA, it will force us to design how we will connect that culture to our cohort. We know that some things just work regardless of location – the intake process and recruitment process is so important, kitchen table conversations. How you start that journey together. Onboarding can be done virtually. We hosted several focus groups of students in Lawrence. 75 of them. Feedback and enthusiasm. Excited to have this choice. Students wondered about pep rallies. How do we involve high school age students in culture design and listen to them generally about where they are connecting socially – their relationships really happen online. We will monitor safety, but we want to ensure it is not an adult monitored channel. We need to open up that those shared experience can be delivered virtually.

###### How will you bridge access gaps into hub sites – what if hub site is understaffed?

1. The first hub sites are in Boston metro area where 2/3 of state population resides. We think 2/3 of our population will be able to access. The other 1/3 it doesn't, that’s where there's some possible pain points that we are designing for from day one. We do have a digital campus with InSpace – you can move throughout virtual hallways. There are digital tools that simulate brick and mortar bumping into each other, go into different classrooms, office hours, start a club. When we think about this at its most evolved stage, this is a concierge model school that is publicly funded, if you don’t have a resource that does not fit needs the success coach can modify your PLP to find a way to get you close to a pool. We are dreamers but also implementers that worked within systems that put up barriers. We will see the hurdle and design against it.

**15. Let us talk a bit about your budgetary assumptions. Who developed the budget? Did all members of the proposed board review and provide input/feedback on the budget? How did the applicant group ensure assumptions around funding and expenditures were accurate and reasonable?**

**a.** We all developed and had input into it. We are actively arguing about it, in a good way. We think it will keep evolving.

**16. We also have some particular questions about the budget. Feel free to reference it as we discuss. Please talk about where on the budget can we find the payment to ASUPD? If the per pupil rate is $7,600 for ASUPD (and it ranges in some places - on page 56 it’s $7,600 and later, it is $7,800) … but we would expect to see that the first year of 200 students would be approximately over $1.5M payment to the vendor but only see $270K in the budget in terms of Purchased Management Services (the expense line).**

1. This is one of those places that we weren’t exactly sure how to represent something that

shows up in lots of different line items. Of course we would use best practices with DESE to move it in the right line item that makes the most sense. if you go to line 36 (attachment M budget: appears in instructional supplies and materials), shows $1,522,700 using the $7,800 per pupil number, (ignore $7,600, it’s evolved over time), that is the year 1 cost to pay ASUPD (for 200 students). It would also include a number of pieces of that contract. That includes 12 MA certified teachers that are core learning guides and benefits, curriculum, learning management software, IT, all professional development for teachers. That is four different line items we are still negotiating the final contract. We wanted to show you what we are representing.

**Clarifying question: But there is 270K for purchase management services and 320K for teacher salaries? (Line 46)**

1. We can disaggregate and get more details on these.
2. We may have a number of different teachers in different buckets. How do we create a budget that meets your needs? ASUPD presents a package that we are offered support for. We can renegotiate with ASUPD.
3. 270K is a contracted service for nursing.

**17. How many paraprofessionals to anticipate hiring during the first 3 years? (**see line item 30,

$50,000) What is the average paraprofessional salary?

**a.** 1 para for years 1-3. We start there and then depending on needs we will make changes, that is why we have 10% contingency line.

**18. The federal Charter School Program grant is strictly for charter schools-how would the school make up for the $1M of revenue budgeted?**

**a.** We will make an argument that we should have access to those start-up funds. If we don’t get that the contingency can cover us. Line 64 we have 450K for contingency will cover the

333. We need to invest in start up to invest in quality.

**19. At this juncture, there is no federal reimbursement nutrition funding for CMVS. The budget for nutrition funding is over $1.8M for the first 3 years. Have you investigated other funding sources and how will the school still provide the nutrition plan in their application if federal reimbursement is not available?**

**a.** My hope is that we would considering this together. We could look to philanthropy, if we want this to be built to last, this needs to be a funding mandate, how will learning happen without nutrition. It would not last without these funds.

**a.** The governor signed a bill (S261 and House 603) to use state funds to cover the difference. Hope that would help us. We will advocate.

**20. The Hub Site costs were reported quite differently in the budget compared to the budget narratives. Please look at the table below… page 56 and the narrative on page 57 have different amounts. Please clarify which is correct and if one of the narratives are correct explain the source for the additional funds that will be needed.**

1. There are places that we played with numbers; we may not have updated to have the final estimates. Are you asking what is the final annual cost for hub sites?
2. $211 per student for building access for the first year (line item 51). $95 for enrichment activities (Line item 32). 114K in line 55. Hub site contract include meals, which is the reimbursement model we will rely upon. Costs per student cost is $178. Assuming that not 100% of students will attend.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Estimates for Facility/Hub Site Annual Costs** | | | |
| **Source:** | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Budget – line-item 51 – rental lease/building and grounds | $37,980 | $78,239 | $141,025 |
| Table p.56 (Cost Per Student  $1490/$1535/$1581) | $298,000 | $614,000 | $1,106,700 |
| Narrative p.57 (Cost Per Student  $1900/$490) | $380,000 | $196,000 | n/a |

**21. If the school were granted a certificate, what would the group do if the final per pupil tuition rate was less than $16,000, more like $12,000? What elements of the group’s proposal were factors in requesting a CMVS tuition rate that is nearly 40% greater than the current tuition rate for the two operating CMVS?**

1. We are looking at average foundation rate. This is why we built a contingency in the budget knowing that there may be flux year to year.
2. Our instructional costs are higher, more wrap around for staff support, we have a lower instructional ratio from student to staff. Current CMVS are underfunded and don’t get good results right now. We know that CMVS could be more efficient. Optional hub sites, we want to make something so innovative and unique that funding is needed there. There needs to be a higher cost to educate students statewide. We want to do this well. Cost of teacher and low ratio is driving cost. We have 6 success coaches per hub site in year 1.
3. We want it to cost more. We are proposing an innovative school model, not compared to other virtual schools. The comparison should be what districts spend per pupil across the commonwealth, which we know in some cases can go as high as 30K+. This model is a bargain. Our intention is to reframe and to run on average foundation per pupil, we believe that there is space in legislation for that to happen. That’s what we are arguing for. There is not a good reason to give us a lower per pupil. The model falls apart where we cannot get to implement. If we are talking about 15K vs 16 that is something that we could make work, but if we are talking about 12K, this model just doesn’t work at that number and that is something that we would have learned that earlier in the process. To be frank, right? Our intention is to provide a world class education to our young people with this virtual model that has in person experiences that is as strong or better than any district.

**22. The proposed payment to ASUPD (ranging from $7,600 to $7,800 per pupil annually) would be the highest per pupil payment (and highest percentage of the requested per pupil tuition) of any contract between an educational options school and its contracted vendor. You told us exactly what services will the school receive for these payments. (answered above) How did the board determine that was an appropriate amount?**

1. I am not sure what the comparison is, do they include FTE. Do other contracts include FTE? I think it would be comparable. Majority of cost includes the 12 MA certified teachers in year one. We are budgeting 85K per teacher for 12 teachers – a little over 1M that puts curriculum, PD, IT, LMS around $500,000. It is $2,800 per pupil then.

**RH – Clarifying question: If you are the employer of teacher, why are you paying ASUPD for teachers?**

1. We have a number of different teachers in different buckets. The question is how do we organize the budget for DESE to meet your needs? Despite differing opinions, the consensus is to place the cost clearly to the vendor. Comparing this to other organizations, such as ASUPD, the team agrees to renegotiate the package of support for teachers and training. We plan to disaggregate the different components into different buckets, to provide more detail. The team is currently crunching the numbers to provide more detailed information.

**23. How did members of the application group learn about ASUPD and Khan Academy and what criteria did you use to vet and assess this potential partner?**

1. We were motivated by their student results. Success rates – 84% of students matriculate to

2- or 4-year institutions, 67% of seniors are enrolled in at least one college level course, 83.1% graduation rate. ASUPD has results that are compelling. Because we know that looking at the landscape of virtual schools right now, some aren’t doing very well. But ASUPD has results that were compelling. Best in class curriculum. Khan World School – proof is in the pudding. We wanted to partner with someone who had that capacity to give us that support. Khan World School sees results 5x the typical growth in math for students, 3.5x the typical growth for students in reading and 4.8x for the growth in ELA. So, in our vetting, we were looking at outcomes, outcomes to really drive our decision. Keeping students at the center and getting great results for students. And that's what we want to replicate here, with Felix, in our model.

1. We did not want to reinvent the wheel, we wanted to get to know them, will this be good for MA rather than just AZ or FL. The outcomes looked really interesting. So began a courtship over several months. Some of us went out to ASUPD to see what was happening on the ground, how they are thinking about K-12 instruction but also college learning. ASUPD came here to engage with us in Massachusetts and meeting partners at the Boys and Girls club as we’re thinking about this hub site design, which is a slightly different model then what they are engaged with before. So, it’s outcome driven, and it became relational. I think the team felt really good about the folks who are driving their core values and how they are thinking about learning and their commitment to innovation, their interest in risk taking and also aversion to trying to do anything that isn’t evidence based.

**24. Describe the specific knowledge and experience in virtual education that members of the applicant group possess.**

1. Last to be added to group. I worked in partnership with SNHU – via duet- how to track data for online programs, and difficulties. We understand deeply about recruiting students for online programs and what that looks and how to track data for online programs. Really something that I have been working heavily on at higher ed level – 1500 students.
2. We are lucky to have ASUPD team and Mike. ASUPD – they can train us and we have a lot of learning to do.
3. I work on video games that are all phonics based. We are thinking about the game-based learning and content driven partnership with publisher. Thinking about game-based learning and assessment learning.
4. I reimagined a school at Boston Public Schools where blended learning was a big part of the design. Flip design of learning pre-pandemic. In my work as a Doctoral student at Boston College, I have taken on research of virtual learning.

**25. Particularly for the relationship with ASUPD, what specific protocols, structures and mechanisms will the board of trustees use to hold the proposed partners organization accountable for academic achievement, financial management, student wellbeing? What metrics will be used to measure the effectiveness of ASUPD’s services and ensure they are meeting the needs of students in the proposed school?**

**a.** We’d have data driven conversations, we are outcomes focused, make sure students are growing. We want to deliver a best-in-class school. I think all of us optimistic. The relationship will continue to prove positive; we’ll look at trends across the sector and hopefully outperform right? That's the goal. And then, I think, at the same time, there has to be a process as a board where we're taking inventory of what is currently happening in terms of student outcomes, and then assessing, if we feel like the model is delivering in the way that we need to. And then the obviously the leadership working to drive the changes where it makes the most sense.

**26. How will the school disaggregate student data? How would the board react if, after two years, you discovered that students who are 100% virtual outperform students at hub sites? What if you discover the inverse to be true? How would the board react if they discovered a significant difference in student performance between hub sites?**

1. We will be data driven, our board is going to be really thoughtful about creating a process with our school leaders to be able to report out on those metrics and not just to the board, but the community. BOT will have leadership report out, we describe how we will monitor progress. If there are gaps, we will work to plug them. We will face gaps, as a board we will push school leaders to pay close attention, school leaders is paying attention to instructional work. Board will say tell us and show us.
2. Conversations will happen much sooner than 2 years down the road. We will get data pretty quickly.

**27. What proof do you have that there is a demand for this statewide virtual school, which serves 4,000 students in grades 7-12? Have you collected interest forms from potential students? If so, how many?**

1. Statewide survey facilitated by MassInc – 500 respondents for families in our age span. Encouraging response, not just for a new school, but for a school with a virtual platform and online component. More than half were Latino or lower middle income.
2. Survey of 800 plus similar age group and families – over 60% expressed interest in virtual school opportunity. Families have students who want flexibility and something new and different.
3. Two focus groups at potential hub sites with young people (75 in Lawrence). Fascinating to hear from middle and high schools – we heard good questions from attendees – how will you have a pep rally and how will you keep me accountable? Show of hands who interested QR code to show interest – about 70-75% of focus group participants were interested. They were interested in not only the flexibility in time, but the ability to go at their own pace, take college courses, take extracurricular activities that they have had to forgo because of the need to be in a traditional school schedule.
4. Interest forms – about 200 students total from focus groups and interest forms were interested.
   1. Poll of focus groups – 57 students from first focus group, 50 from second. So over 100

students raised their hands to say that they were interested after the focus groups.

* 1. Interest forms via websites – 50 responses.

**28. Boards of trustees can be challenged by partnering with vendors whose curricula are difficult to modify and need supplemental materials to align with MCF, and whose external staffing are not directly under the authority of the school leadership and boards of trustees. How will the school address any inadequacies in ASUPD's performance if it does not perform as well as expected?**

1. When Yully and Brandon went to visit ASUPD’s annual conference. We spoke to other superintendents and principals who have worked with ASUPD for years – longest was 7 years. Asked them how it went. First, universally high degree of satisfaction – micro school, hybrid, and fully in person. ASUPD has a long-standing experience with adapting curriculum to fit needs – ELL or rural communities. Reason why some of their success has been their ability to adapt to local context. They have a team who vets and reviews all curriculum. Khan Academy has been a new partner for ASUPD. They are in year three of the experience. Not a cookies cutter for any of their partners, they have had to address a variety of custom needs from other school models. That gave me a lot of confidence.
2. From our experience from other partners, there was a lot of flexibility. Liked meeting the community who were able to share best practices around their own modifications. We left

feeling empowered. It’s not an absolute model that required fidelity at any cost. There was a lot to play with. Like any element of accountability, our work is about student outcomes we have to see young folks winning and growing. Like any schools, if we don’t see outcomes, we have to see a wholesale assessment of the practice – may be instructional, need to get at the meat of why students are not accelerating. Hopefully, that is not a bridge we have to cross. We all have experiences with complex organizations. Some of these difficult conversations won’t feel so new. Hopefully, the leader of the school will see us as the board as thought partners.

1. When we were in design discussions, we talked about Codman and EL relationship. Achievement First Network. We have a lot of experience assessing if a program needs to evolve to fit the needs of the students.

**29. Please discuss the board’s expectations for the hub site employees. How and when will they be interacting with students? What services will you be expecting? How will the school ensure that students will not have unmonitored contact with individuals who are not employed by the school? Also, can the board ensure consistent quality among hub-**

1. The benefit of this model is to the ability to engage with partners. If we want to have success across various metrics and modes that children need, we need to engage with partners because school resources are limited. We are able to tap into Boys and Girls Clubs who provide high quality extracurricular. Have college going programing. Senior leadership team know what they are doing. Many kids who go to programming are Boston Public School students. We are used to this technical challenge of working with partner. At Codman we had PE classes at the Dorchester Y. We sent Codman staff to be present during the spin class, or swim class. At each hub site we will have Felix staff on site to be with young people. Other questions – if you send a young person for early college, internship, and extracurricular. How do you ensure high quality? Students could be taking classes at night; we will ensure there are strong accountability systems in place.
2. When I think about a community school, there is a partner embedded in the organization. Great community schools have great collaboration between the partner program and the school. There is relationship that has to take place and take form. Create communication structures across the organizations. As we bring on a team, that will be part of how we’re thinking about what success looks like.
3. There is a director of community and culture and there will be success coaches at each site. Admin leaders will be spending time at each hub site. Same challenges and opportunities to work with partnerships outside of the school staff. Dr. Tina Cherry from the peace institute who came to speak at Codman can really speak about conflict in a way that was better for our staff.

###### RH – Clarifying question: About 5 Felix employed adults who will be housed at each hub site?

1. The school, which is its own LEA, reporting to the state, has its own back office/district office. Those staff will be able to flow between each space and deploy them as needed. We are virtual first. Deploying folks to deliver teaching online. Second tier is showing up for hub sites in person to support students. We will allocate staff accordingly. Deliver support virtually primary, will be on site for those who need it.
2. For the initial hub sites, largely they are empty – our org chart has a good portion of staff outside of core learning guides – their first allocation is to the hub site. The missing variable is the student and family enrollment. When we know more information during application phase and recruitment – we will figure out how many students will come to the hub sites. During intake enrollment process we will figure out when students want to come in, we will use the real-life information and map to logistics and our human resources. We want to bring people back to good teaching. While they are all going online from the hub site, that is the beauty of it, they may start at hub site virtually, if a student does not show up it does

not disrupt learning, we won’t rely on staff from hub sites to support learning, we benefit from the systems for the hub sites – have to have an ID card, go through security to get in, everyone is CORIed. It is secured, we know there is custodial staff. They have some day staff, but they are all getting ready for after 3pm.

**30. Imagine its year three of operation, the student churn rate is high, chronic absenteeism rates are high, academic performance places the school in the lowest performing 5% of schools, and the school is under-enrolled. How would the board know about the school’s outcomes? How would the board react? How would the board address these issues?**

1. Speaking from experience having run my own board meetings, where Bridge had early success, then got different students in middle years, did worse and expanded to upper grades. We had a great board with expertise, setting up a style of dashboard reporting, making sure the full calendar cycles through a year of reporting. Committees do the background work and do the deep dive. Map multi-year boards meeting against site visits, renewals, multi-year reviews. Depending on the year we will bring on particular expertise on the board – special education or upper grade education. Having that planned for by the time you are hitting that lowest performing 5%, if we did our work well the board will see it coming. We should already be working on turning it around. It is a 3-5 year run to turn around poor performance. You are trying to adapt and managing your teacher and staff to do the work. They would know in advance, will have seen trends coming, approve budgets that we can make improvements on. Should see some improvement in 3 years event though it may not have made it into our top-level data.
2. These are great questions that school leaders are struggling with. The percentage of BPS schools for which these stats are high – roughly a third. This is the difficultly we are facing as leaders. We are going into this with the idea of asking many questions of our leaders. We want reports often and timely we will be getting this data continuously every few months. We will be asking leaders to share different metrics on a regular basis – social emotional, fiscal – regular reporting. It’s all virtual, all children delivering content via Canvas and through InSpace we can see the metrics in PowerSchool of how students are performing and pull that data in real time. How will we react? – this is serious, here are our concerns, leaders how will you make changes, how can we support, how can we advise you in making those changes? Will tackle the problems as they present themselves.

**RH – Clarifying question: how you might think about different rates of churn in a virtual environment. What are you thinking about that?**

1. It is different, but there are elements that are similar. A kid who has not come to school is not there, you are thinking about creative ways to develop an attachment. Some strategies will look different – there is a reason that someone is not showing up, virtually or in person. Team needs to care about doing the inventory what is holding the child from not showing up how create a bridge or remove the barrier that is making it difficult. The thing that changes young people lives is a caring adult who believes them and knows them and are willing to show up for them. Takes leadership to train people to do that. Yes, good pedagogy

- but school is about knowing kids and caring about them. How do we get this right so we can show how it is done to other people?

1. We can stand on our experience and track records. Our schools differed in grade span, design, and delivery. One metric we always knocked out of the park was attendance. Our families and kids showed up – I hire people who do relationships very well. If you cannot get to young people from a position of humility and understanding, you’re going to get nowhere. A lot of these kids are digital natives. In person will be leveraged, but idea that kids cannot feel connected online and would not seek it out denies where we live know. We have a lot of assets in our hand that we can put together.
2. Relationships are the core. We have been asking experts in field, children, and families, we

have to do relationships well. We have to connect with students. I think that the churn metric has to be grappled with differently. It is more than norm than not. If people are not coming to school if voting with their feet, if they are changing schools, how do we then use that baseline data to understand how to better serve students who are moving a lot? We should address what students know, how do we grow them to the next level, how do we keep them with us, if they move on, how do we ensure they keep track how they are doing. If we attract populations we want to grow (black and brown, low income, high percentage multilingual, high percentage IEP – the most mobile folks), this model can help young people because they can attend no matter where they live. We think that our model is different from current virtual offering and can help solve this issue. Outcomes have to matter at a high rate here.

We have to get kids performing well.

1. We are building a school that will attract folks who have struggled to make meaning and progress in a traditional setting. That is important work. I want to see those kids win. May require the team to work in a different way.



**Proposed Felix Commonwealth Virtual School**

**Summary of Public Comment**

**Summary of comments received**[**1**](#_bookmark9)

**Written comments received:**

##### Letters of support were received from 42 private individuals via email.

* A letter of support was received from Greater Commonwealth Virtual School (GCVS) which included feedback to the applicant group.
* A comment letter was received from one superintendent: **Dr. Mary Skipper, Superintendent, Boston Public Schools**

BPS acknowledges the efforts of the proposed Felix Commonwealth Virtual School, which would serve up to 4,000 students statewide in grades 7-12, in providing educational opportunities and options to students across Massachusetts.

However, BPS has concerns that the proposed school may have implications for the BPS community and system as a whole, with regards to student enrollment. The total number of grade 9 to 12 students in Boston is declining.

Between October of 2017 and October of 2022, the total number of Boston resident students in grades 9-12 declined by roughly 5%. Over the same time period, the number of Boston resident students in grades 6-8 declined by 9%. The decline in the number of students in grades 6-8 will lead to further decline in grades 9-12 in the future.

BPS would support the creation of a virtual school that will serve students from the BPS community that the district is not currently serving, in particular, those students who have dropped out between the ages of 16-22. A virtual school may be uniquely positioned to serve the needs of overage and under-credited students who have dropped out of traditional high schools, in particular students with disabilities and multilingual learners who may benefit from alternative options. Should Felix Commonwealth Virtual School be able to target this population to be served, BPS would support this proposal.

#### Public hearing speakers:

##### During a hybrid public hearing, held on December 6, 2023, at Ashburton Place in Boston and over Zoom, 11 private individuals provided comments in support of the application.

1 Letters available upon request.

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Meeting: March 26, 2024 Agenda Item: Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools –

Award of Certificate

MOVED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with General Laws chapter 71, section 94, and 603 CMR 52.00, and subject to the conditions set forth below, hereby grants a certificate to the following school, as recommended by the Commissioner.

#### Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual School: Felix Commonwealth Virtual School

Maximum Enrollment: 700

Grade Levels: 9-12

Certificate Timeframe: July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2028 Per Pupil Tuition Rate: $14,598 (minus $75 admin fee)

Pursuant to General Laws chapter 71, section 94, and 603 CMR 52.00, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education hereby imposes the conditions on the certificate of the Felix Commonwealth Virtual School:

1. By May 1, 2024, the board of trustees must submit to the Department an action plan that outlines the steps it will take to open the school. The applicant group’s action plan should cover the period from April 1, 2024, to the first day of school and must outline the strategies, steps, and designated point person(s) and provide a clear timeline for opening the school. The action plan must be specific and consistent with the school’s mission, vision, and objectives.
2. By May 10, 2024, the board of trustees must submit to the Department a draft contract with Arizona State University Prep Digital (ASUPD) for review and approval. The contract must include, but is not limited to, an outline of the services and a clear justification for the compensation and contract payments. It also must include accountability measures and goals sufficient to measure the performance of ASUPD and to permit the board of trustees to terminate the contract if the goals are not met.
3. By June 1, 2024, the board of trustees must submit to the Department an updated budget proposal approved by the school’s board of trustees for the pre-operation year and the first three years of operation. The budget proposal must include a detailed budget narrative, staffing plan, and cash flow projections based on the school’s anticipated enrollment. The budget proposal and associated documents must demonstrate capacity to ensure the fiscal health and solvency of the school.
4. By June 1, 2024, the board of trustees must develop and submit to the Department a comprehensive plan that ensures all students enrolled in the virtual school will have reasonable access to an “in-person hub site,” a main component of the applicant’s proposal. Reasonable access must consider both distance from and travel time to the hub sites for all students. This plan must include the school’s plan to provide for transportation of all students, including students with disabilities, to and from the hub sites. If the school is unable to provide reasonable access and transportation to and from hub sites for all students statewide, the school must seek an amendment to the enrollment region specified in its certificate.
5. By June 1, 2024, the board of trustees must submit to the Department an updated and comprehensive staffing plan, aligned with projected finances, that includes clear expectations for instructional quality and strategies for effective and differentiated online instruction for all students.
6. By June 1, 2024, the board of trustees must submit to the Department documentation and information sufficient to justify the proposed per pupil tuition rate in its certificate granted by the Board. If the Department determines that the documentation and information submitted are not sufficient to justify the per pupil tuition rate in its certificate, the Department will amend the school’s certificate to specify a tuition rate consistent with the per pupil tuition rates of other CMVS.
7. By November 1, 2024, the board of trustees must complete alignment of the virtual school's curriculum to the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and submit documentation to the Department sufficient to assess and confirm such alignment.
8. By February 1, 2025, the board of trustees must submit to the Department a special education program plan and policies and procedures for education of English language learners that are sufficient to meet all applicable federal and state requirements.
9. By May 1, 2025, the school must submit to the Department pre-enrollment data sufficient to meet the enrollment levels outlined in its final application for its first year of operation.
10. Before opening, Felix Commonwealth Virtual School must comply with the Department's opening procedures for virtual schools. Successful completion of the opening procedures process is required to open and to operate a CMVS.

In addition to these conditions, the Felix Commonwealth Virtual School, like all Commonwealth of Massachusetts virtual schools, must also comply with the terms of its certificate and request and receive approval from the Commissioner in advance of implementing any change to the terms. The Commissioner shall review and report to the Board on success or lack of success of the Felix Commonwealth Virtual School in meeting the conditions imposed on its certificate and, based upon the review, shall recommend or take such further action as deemed appropriate.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts virtual school shall be operated in accordance with the provisions of General Laws chapter 71, section 94; 603 CMR 52.00; and all other applicable state and federal laws and regulations and such conditions as the Commissioner or the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education may establish, all of which shall be deemed conditions of the certificate.