**Student Opportunity Act Plan: SY 2021-2023**

***Veritas Preparatory Charter School***

# → Commitment 1: Focusing on Student Subgroups

## Which student groups will require focused support to ensure all students achieve at high levels in school and are successfully prepared for life?

Veritas Prep serves predominantly high needs students, with 82% of our students identified as high needs. While we met or exceeded 79% of our accountability targets in 2019, we know from earlier years’ data that our students with disabilities subgroup has inconsistently met their academic targets, especially in English Language Arts. In 2019, our students with disabilities subgroup met the state set targets for achievement and student growth. However, there was still a gap between our general population and our students with disabilities subgroup in English Language Arts in particular. This is seen most starkly in our ELA achievement data. While 51% of our whole student population met or exceeded expectations in ELA, only 6% of our students with disabilities met or exceeded expectations. For context, 15% of students with disabilities met or exceeded expectations in ELA at the state level. Because of learning loss associated with COVID and remote learning, we anticipate that our students with disabilities are especially at risk for increased literacy learning loss. Therefore, focusing our attention on this student group with this subject area over the next three years is essential to ensuring their literacy achievement in school and in their preparation for life.

A second area of focus for us is around chronic absenteeism. For both our high needs and economically disadvantaged subgroups, which make up 82% and 78% of our student population respectively, we did not meet the chronic absenteeism targets in 2019. Addressing the social, emotional, and physical wrap around services that are needed for these two subgroups to consistently attend school is imperative to ensuring equitable learning opportunities for both of these groups of students, which is the majority of our student population.

A third area of focus is around science achievement for our high needs students. While our achievement data in science has been consistently strong in 5th grade science, our 8th grade science achievement has been inconsistent. In 2019, while 46% of students met or exceeded expectations in 8th grade science at the state level, only 31% of 8th graders at Veritas met or exceeded expectations in science. Ensuring students have a strong background in science is important to their opportunities and success in high school, college, and beyond. As we prepare to launch a high school, we need to ensure adequate resources are being put toward improving the quality and alignment of science education to the Next Generation science standards for our students, 82% of whom qualify as high needs.

We are committed to closing these opportunity and achievement gaps for these groups of students, and we know that this will take our whole community--parents, students, and staff--operating as one unified team to make this happen.

# → Commitment 2: Using Evidence-Based Programs to Close Gaps

## What evidence-based programs will your charter school adopt, deepen, or continue to best support the closure of achievement and opportunity gaps? What resources will be allocated to these programs?

During the last two to three years, Veritas has been working towards addressing the opportunity and achievement gaps identified to the best of our ability given constraints around staffing and budget. We leveraged a grant from the charter school association to work with a special education consultant to help us work on both academic and social-emotional supports for high needs students, especially students with disabilities. We leveraged free and open science curriculum resources from a fellow high performing charter school In Massachusetts to improve our science curriculum materials for teachers and students. Funds from the SOA will allow us to deepen and improve some of the steps we have already

begun to take to close the three opportunity and achievement gaps we named earlier: (1) literacy (or ELA) achievement for students with disabilities, (2) chronic absenteeism of high needs students, (3) science achievement for high needs students.

###  Improving literacy achievement for students with disabilities (aligned with ESE evidence based program #7:

 **Inclusion/co-teaching for students with disabilities):** During the last two years in particular, our team has been systematically evaluating what tier 1 supports are in place in our ELA and history curriculum to support the literacy development of all students, especially students with disabilities. We have invested in professional development about research-based approaches to teaching reading and writing for some of our literacy teachers. In light of remote learning for the COVID crisis, we have invested in technology resources to help us better digitize and provide accommodations for texts to support our students with disabilities in a remote or hybrid environment, an example of ESE’s high-quality program component “assistive technology.” But there is more we want and need to do to address this achievement gap for students with disabilities over the next three years. We would like to invest more deeply in systematic professional development around reading and writing instructional strategies for struggling readers for both general education and special education teachers. We also need to shore up accommodations and adaptations for particular reading needs such as systematic phonics and fluency needs of our most struggling readers by either investing more in professional development for our special education teachers or possibly hiring an additional staff member who brings expertise to our team around reading development such as a reading specialist.

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| **FY21 budget item** | **Amount** | **1****Foundation Category** |
| Personnel - Reading Specialist | 65,000.00 | Classroom & Specialist Teachers and Employee Benefits/Fixed Charges |
| Technology (ie: assistive devices, diagnostic tools, assessment platforms) | 40,000.00 | Instructional Materials, Equipment and Technology |
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| **Evidence-based program identified by the Department:** | Inclusion/co-teaching for students with disabilities (especially, Accommodations and Adaptations, Targeted Instructional Strategies, and Assistive Technology) |
| **SOA program categories:** | D (hiring personnel) and F (curriculum and equipment) |

###  Decreasing chronic absenteeism for high needs students by providing more holistic supports (aligned with ESE

 **evidence based program #6: Increased personnel and services to support holistic student needs):** Over the past several years, we have been shoring up our multi-tiered system of supports for behavioral,

social-emotional, and mental health needs. As a result of those increased supports and training for staff around deescalation and strategies such as check in/check out and a break room, we decreased suspensions dramatically for our school. This past year we worked on sharpening our systems and early tracking systems around attendance to better address chronic absenteeism. What we have been learning is that we need to increase personnel and services to support the holistic student needs we see emerging as we delve into the root causes of certain students’ absenteeism. While we have leveraged the use of counseling interns to support increased social emotional needs of students and families, over the next three years, we need (1) to embed more expert support staff within our school community, (2) to increase the community partnerships and providers to support our students’ and families’ needs (both enrichment needs and mental/physical health and well-being), and (3) to build staff knowledge and skill with supporting the complexity of students’ holistic needs.

1 The foundation categories are: Administration; Instructional Leadership; Classroom & Specialist Teachers; Other Teaching Services; Professional Development; Instructional Materials, Equipment, and Technology; Guidance and Psychological; Pupil Services; Operations and Maintenance; Employee Benefits/Fixed Charges; and Special Education Tuition.

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| **FY21 budget item** | **Amount** | **Foundation Category** |
| Personnel - Manager of Student Services | 70,000.00 | Pupil Services and EmployeeBenefits/Fixed Charges |
| Personnel - Counseling | 65,000.00 | Guidance and Psychological |
| Contracted Service Providers | 20,000.00 | Guidance and Psychological |
| **Evidence-based program identified by the Department:** | Increased personnel and services to support holistic student needs |
| **SOA program categories:** | D (hiring personnel) |

###  Improving science achievement for high needs students (aligned with ESE evidence based program #4:

 **Supporting educators to implement high quality, aligned curriculum)**: Over the last two years, we have been transitioning our science program to align with the Next Generation science standards that Massachusetts has been adopting. Using curriculum materials from Brooke Charter School in Boston, we transitioned our science program to an integrated science model. Just transitioning materials is not enough, however. We need to invest in ensuring content expertise in our teachers and coherence across grade levels. Over the next three years, we plan to continue building science content leaders by ensuring our teacher leaders have access to high quality professional development. We also plan to increase and improve our use of student data and student work in science by embedding higher quality end of unit science tasks and use of MAP’s science diagnostic tool in our science assessment plans.

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| **FY21 budget item** | **Amount** | **Foundation Category** |
| Personnel - Curriculum writing | 20,000.00 | Instructional Leadership |
| Technology (ie: assistive devices, diagnostic tools, assessment platforms) | 10,000.00 | Instructional Materials, Equipment and Technology |
| Professional Development | 10,000.00 | Professional Development |
| **Evidence-based program identified by the Department:** | Supporting educators to implement high-quality, aligned curriculum |
| **SOA program categories:** | D (hiring personnel/stipends for content leadsl), E (PD), F (curriculum/assessment materials) |

# → Commitment 3: Monitoring Success with Outcome Metrics and Targets

## What metrics will your charter school use to monitor success in reducing disparities in achievement among student subgroups? Select from the list of Department metrics or provide your own.

We have three main metrics to monitor our success in reducing disparities in achievement among student subgroups. They are listed below in this table provided by the department using department provided outcome metrics:

**Department outcome metrics:**

* ELA achievement for students with disabilities: This is our metric for our first focus area

around the literacy gap between our general education population and special education subgroup.

* Chronic absenteeism, especially high needs students: This is our metric for our second focus

area around our chronic absenteeism rates for high needs students, which is the vast majority of our school population.

* Science achievement for all 8th grade students, esp high needs students: This is our metric

for our third focus area around science achievement for our high needs students, which is the vast majority of our school population.

# → Commitment 4: Engaging All Families

## How will your charter school ensure that all families, particularly those representing the student subgroups most in need of support, have the opportunity to meaningfully engage with the charter school regarding their students’ needs?

Veritas is committed to engaging and communicating with families regularly. We have a co-advisor model which pairs two teachers with a group of 25-30 students. Co-advisors are expected to communicate and document communication in Deanslist (our software program for tracking student attendance, homework completion, behavior needs, and family communication) once every two weeks at least. In addition to close-knit family relationships, we survey families monthly using POSSIP, a text based messaging app, to invite frequent feedback from families about what is and isn’t working for them and their student. Each trimester, we host in person parent-teacher conferences for families and teachers to reflect on each students’ strengths and growth areas from the previous trimester and to set goals for the upcoming marking period. Each week DRIVE (our core school’s acronym for our core values) reports are sent home, which share information regarding students’ academic work habits such as homework completion and behavioral successes and challenges. For special education and EL students, we are working to increase achievement by improving our engagement and collaboration with families through our Parent Advisory Councils. Most recently, we designated a role on our operations team to increase family engagement and communication with parents of our students with disabilities, in collaboration with our student support team. This new role is especially important because the scheduling of annual IEP meetings and three-year reevaluations, which include the whole team, can be a logistical puzzle and can be confusing for families given all the education jargon associated with special education compliance. By investing in a bi-lingual person who can help facilitate communication with families, we are aiming to better demystify special education compliance for our families and more meaningfully engage with them around their students’ needs. As a part of that process, our principal has also been working closely with special education teachers to support them in improving and simplifying their communication with families in terms of their special education progress reports and in their facilitation of team meetings. We will measure increases in family engagement in two ways: through our end of year parent survey response rate and through parent interviews of certain subgroups of families.

# Certifications:

### ✔By checking here, I certify that our charter school has engaged stakeholders in our community in accordance with the Student Opportunity Act

**Please summarize your stakeholder engagement process, including specific groups that were engaged:**

Our stakeholder engagement process has included utilizing feedback from parent/family surveys to inform the plan and sharing data and seeking feedback from (1) our teaching teams around strengths and weaknesses with literacy instruction and science instruction, (2) our special education team of teachers around literacy instruction and tiers of support for literacy interventions, (3) our school operations and culture/counseling teams around systems of support to decrease chronic absenteeism, and (4) our Board’s Academic Achievement Committee around both achievement metrics and, in particular, our accountability targets for 2018 and 2019 with the state’s new accountability system.

### ✔ By checking here, I certify that the Veritas Prep Charter School Board of Trustees voted on our Student Opportunity Act Plan.

**Date of vote:** December 17, 2020 **Outcome of vote:** Unanimous Approval