

Somerville Progressive Charter School

Compiled Review

Commonwealth Charter School Prospectus Review 2011-12

Mission Statement Strengths:

Mission statement addresses most required areas.
It is clear that SPCS intends to serve K-8 students and is inclusive of students from all backgrounds. The mission statement clearly highlights the characteristics the SPCS values, including: democracy, inspiring its students, and developing its students' potential in many areas by creating authentic experiences in which to do so.
The mission statement defines the purpose of the school -- a democratic school that will enable diverse students to develop their potential through experiences that reflect their individual needs, interests, and learning strengths. The mission statement defines the values of the school: a school that will inspire and enable students to develop intellectual, social-emotional, and creative potential. The school also values authentic learning experiences that will draw upon students' intrinsic curiosity. The mission statement identifies "children from diverse backgrounds" in grades K-8 as its target population. The mission statement notes that students will "develop their full intellectual...potential." The mission statement is succinct. It is one sentence long. It communicates meaning.
The mission statement articulates the core value of the school: democratic practice, as well as a vision for the expected educational outcomes and philosophical approach to instruction. SPCS' mission statement offers a succinct affirmation of the trustees commitment to provide high-quality and rigorous instruction tailored to meet the needs of individual students using modalities intended to educate the whole child.
The mission statement embodies high expectations for the school and its students, setting a goal to "develop their [students'] full intellectual, social-emotional, and creative potential" and also affirms the ability of all students to reach this goal by affirming their "intrinsic curiosity...and learning strengths." Basic information is easily garnered from this statement: the school values democratic values, diversity, curiosity, and creativity and, consistent with these values, it strives to serve "students from diverse backgrounds." This statement provides a strong foundation for the rest of the prospectus, which integrates these values, such that diversity and curiosity prompt engagement with academic goals and projects and these, in turn, aim to support development in the areas mentioned above.
The mission provides a strong statement that encompasses both academic and non-academic goals for the students the proposed school intends to serve. The statement also makes clear the type of educational philosophy the students will experience. The goals of the mission are reflected in other areas of the proposal.

Mission Statement Weaknesses:

It does not state what educational goals they envision for their students.

While the mission statement is strong, there seems to be a disconnect between some of the big ideas and plans outlined in the prospectus, especially the "Two-Way Immersion Bilingual Education (after-school) Program." Also, it is never really clarified what is meant by progressive education.

The mission statement is generic and does not speak to the authenticity or specialty of SPCS in any way. It could be attributed to any school. I do not get a sense of who SPCS is, based on its mission statement. Though succinct, the mission statement does not set a tone for academic standards or achievement.

The mission statement's identified target population of "children from diverse backgrounds" does not fully reflect the goals of the school, inasmuch as the rest of the prospectus clearly prioritizes linguistic and ethnic diversity over other areas that constitute a child's background. Also, the phrase "authentic experiences" is somewhat ambiguous.

I do not find that all aspects of the prospectus are reflected in the mission statement. Throughout the prospectus, emphasis is placed on educating Somerville's English language learner students. However, this is not clearly reflected in the mission statement. A secondary focus of the prospectus, though not as strong throughout, is a Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) alignment. This is also missing from the mission statement. Additionally, the name of the school is Somerville Progressive Charter School. While the term progressive is used throughout the prospectus it is not contained in the mission statement, nor is it ever adequately defined.

The mission statement is not explicit about who the anticipated student population. The statement indicates students will be diverse, but the nature of this is not fleshed out until the Vision Statement.

Vision Statement Strengths:

There is an apparently strong tie between SPCS's founders and the community it intends to serve, which is captured in its vision statement. The vision statement does further stress SPCS's intention of serving all students. By aiming to address the diverse language needs and the socio-economic challenges of its intended students/families, SPCS stays true to its mission to serve a diverse population.

The vision provides a compelling story of the rich educational experience of potential students at the proposed school. The prospectus describes a school which places high value on rigorous education standards as well as enrichment opportunities during and after school. The vision also indicates a commitment to actively involve members of the school

community, including teachers, parents and students, through a ‘democratic governance structure.’
The vision statement does a good job of describing the school's plans to have extensive access to programs and services for persons with a variety of backgrounds, especially non-English speaking and non-native English speaking, and the intention of the school to provide a strong education in STEM.
Overall, the vision statement is innovative, ambitious, energetic, concrete, and compelling. The founders demonstrate that they are attuned to the strengths and needs of their community, which they state has a strong and diverse immigrant population. In addition, they are interested in capitalizing on their own strengths, crafting a vision that is strongly informed by their collective experience and expertise. The vision statement suggests three key sources of positive impact for students (the core curriculum, after school programming, and the "democratic governance structure"); the governance structure is also implied to be the main mechanism whereby parents are involved in the school and benefit from it. The mission statement and vision statement are linked by an emphasis on diversity and providing students with a variety of development-promoting experiences; for the most part, the vision statement is clearly derived and close linked to the mission statement.
The Vision Statement provides detailed, clear, research-based language in support of the proposed school. The statement outlines the anticipated school culture, which will support the ability of students in a diverse linguistic community to receive critical support and improve performance by incorporating linguistic diversity as a strength. The Two-Way Immersion Bilingual Education (TWIBE) program will be informed by multiple sources: research, interviews with families, etc. In addition, the proposed program will integrate viable knowledge from the STEM curriculum. Another explicit strength of the vision statement is the anticipated inclusion of parents and families in the daily life of the school.
The vision statement does mention how it will impact students, parents, teachers, and other employees. The school's democratic governance structure is provided as the main venue through which families can "shape their children's education." The vision statement promises that the voices of school community members will be integral to running the school and the democratic process will be vivid and accessible. Elements of the vision statement are found throughout the prospectus. The prospectus contains a description of the school's approach to its after-school language program, at times references STEM (but not in depth), and discusses the school's democratic culture.

Vision Statement Weaknesses:

None. In my estimation, the applicant addressed each of the criteria in this section.
A full spectrum of stakeholders is not considered in the vision statement, which is almost exclusively focused on the benefits to students and their families. The only reference to teachers in the vision statement clarifies the expectation that French teachers will be trilingual; the benefits, opportunities, and roles available to teachers are not considered.

While the mission statement and vision statement do connect on most points, the stated emphasis on strengthening students' creativity is not well expounded upon in the vision statement. The importance of the value is restated but it is not clear what concrete steps will be taken to support it within the context of the foreign language and STEM curricula.

There are critical problems in this section in regard to their proposed implementation of a program of "two-way immersion bilingual education" (TWIBE): 1. The program they describe is not a two-way immersion program at all. Not all students will be 'two-way immersed' which means Non-English speaking students being immersed in English and English speaking students being immersed in another language. 2. The non-English component of the program occurs on a voluntary after school basis, rather than during the regular school day which confuses the issue of whether it is part of their formal academic program or is an after-school club. 3. The purpose and content of the after school native language activity is not clear: is it native language support (instruction in how to speak their native language)? Is it academic support (native language support in acquiring the academic content provided in the classroom)? Is it a cultural club? Are English speaking students welcome, and if so, how would they participate (i.e. is this an opportunity for them to learn the other language?) If this is an actual two-way bilingual program, then English speaking students would HAVE TO participate and HAVE TO be instructed in the other language(whatever it is)- but this activity is described as an after school elective. Note: In the next section they describe the after school TWIBE as "structured learning time" and as "reinforcement of grade level content in the native language (of the student). Which is not a two-way program at all, since there is no provision for English speakers to learn the second language. They should be asked to explain why this is not simply an "end-run" around c. 71A English-only immersion requirements. They should also be asked what comparable academic support activities will be operated for English speaking students (the schedule calls for "academic enrichment" during the after-school block, while the ELLs get "academic support". What if an English speaking student's needs academic support, not enrichment?)

The vision serves as an organizing principle throughout the proposal with varying degrees of implementation. For example, the STEM education theme, use of students' personalized education plans (PEP), and Responsive Classroom practices are underdeveloped. However, it does not in general a clear organizing principle The vision statement may grow out of the mission statement, but it actually seems like quite a different school concept/vision. The vision statement brings in many ideas: habits of judgment, engaging in inquiry and creative problem solving in the social world, with a special focus on language and STEM. However, the STEM educational theme for example, though the potential for hand-on learning and English language learners learning STEM is compelling, this idea does not seem to translate into a comprehensive educational program.

Though the vision statement describes how SPCS will engage its students to meet its goals, it does not clarify what the end product will be, i.e. what the school and its students will exemplify if successful at reaching its goals. It speaks more to the process rather than the goals of the schools. The foci expressed in the vision statement (STEM, civic responsibility, second language acquisition and proficiency, habits of judgment, and skills for 21st century success) are not echoed in the Mission Statement.

I can only visualize certain aspects of the school's vision statement. The school's democratic governance structure is well illustrated, but the language program and STEM programming are not well illustrated. The prospectus recognizes the power and impact of a Two-Way Immersion Bilingual Education Program on the literacy and academic success of an English language learner student, yet relegates this program to an optional after-school time slot. In this after-school, optional form, the TWIBE program is neither immersion (for it is only for a small portion of the day), nor is it Two-Way (as you must control for an equal number of English and non-English speakers for a true Two-Way program). Likewise, the prospectus recognizes the excitement behind hands-on STEM opportunities; however the vision does not provide a compelling picture of STEM. Nor can I find a complete picture of STEM in the body of the prospectus. In the school's sample schedule (pg 15) it seems like STEM may occur once a week at the most. The vision statement only aligns with the mission statement in the description of a democratic culture. STEM and language programs that are illustrated in the vision statement are not included in the mission statement. The vision and mission statements are not well aligned -- they seem to propose two different schools. I do not find the vision statement to be meaningful. Many of the programs proposed in the vision are not well thought out or integrated in a meaningful way throughout the prospectus.

Community(ies) to be Served Strengths:

This section does describe the value of the school as: setting high academic expectations, offer expanded learning time, accelerating the pace of English language learner engagement with content, training teachers in effective ELL instruction strategies, and promoting family engagement and collaboration. However, many of these are not fully described throughout the prospectus -- as noted in the weakness section below. The prospectus describes the target population as student's whose first language is not English and low income students. Does not fully discuss the needs of these groups. The founding group selected Somerville because the district performs in the lowest 10% on the MCAS statewide. The prospectus also states that there is one charter school that already serves Somerville students, but the charter school has a low percentage of limited English proficient students. The prospectus also defines the strategies to be used to help ELL students succeed in school. Those strategies are: high academic expectations expanded learning time (language programs), innovative ELL instruction, teacher training in Sheltered English Instruction, and promotion of family engagement. The prospectus does not specifically state how the founding group assessed parental support for the proposed school, but states that over 100 families have expressed interest in applying to the school. The prospectus states that a Commonwealth charter is necessary to provide the autonomy needed to create the school.

The Communities to be Served section provides a strong empirical and research-based statement in support of establishing the proposed school. In particular, the applicants tabulate the need within the targeted community; discuss measures currently in place in that community; and, most importantly, the limitations of those supportive measures (Ex. LEP enrollment at Prospect Hill Academy, See page 2). The applicants make a compelling case for the need to have an autonomous structure to provide more comprehensive services to students. This case is bolstered by their grounding in the essential principles of the charter

movement: extended instructional time, high expectations for student performance, additional support for high-quality instruction, parent and family engagement, etc. (See page 3.) Finally, the founding team is rooted in the community and can leverage their connections into meaningful social and instructional cohesion that cements the school culture. (See page 4.)

The applicant group makes a strong argument to provide additional capacity in Somerville to serve LEP students and raise student achievement through the freedom to implement specific strategies geared to support LEP student learning.

The needs of the community are clearly stated (p. 2) including data figures to support their claims and the founders have already solicited strong support from the population it aims to serve. SPCS aims to meet a distinctive need in the community which is not being met by the district or other charter schools in the area.

The application in general, and this section in particular, explain in good detail how this school would meet the needs of ELL and FLEP students through programs and approaches that other schools in the district do not employ. The founders have identified numerous concrete tools and research-based methods to address the needs of their students and community. The decision to focus on this population is very logical: the founders all have strong ties to the community and personal reasons to be strongly committed to this initiative, as well as the experiential knowledge necessary to relate to the local immigrant populations. Furthermore, the founders are cognizant that charter schools are charged with demonstrating and disseminating best practices and have built at least one mechanism to do so into their curriculum: the TWIBE (Two-Way Immersion Bilingual Education) model was selected in part because other schools could replicate it without altering their core curriculum.

Community(ies) to be Served Weaknesses:

The applicant group does not provide evidence that this programming is sought after by Somerville parents of LEP students nor does it discuss other types of students/families in Somerville that may choose the school. This section does not speak to the group's reasons for proposing this type of school, how it meets the population's needs or their ability to implement it. The applicant group emphasizes that the proposed programming of the school will provide an option not found elsewhere in Somerville though it is not fully supported by the presence of many aspects of the proposed school at SPS' Healey School and the UNIDOS TWBI Spanish/English program. The following statement needs to be clarified: 'experience has taught them that progressive education will not succeed in schools with a high percentage of school-dependent learners if it is implemented as a half-measure and without accountability' – the applicant group must make it clear how they believe their proposed school will result in academic achievement for all students. The optional after-school programming is confusingly described as 'expanded learning time' – depending upon the family financial situation it may also be fee based. Expanded learning time is a longer school day and/or year.

The prospectus does not fully describe the needs of low income and English language learner students. The prospectus does not fully illustrate how the proposed model differs from those programs offered in Somerville public schools. While the intentions of the prospectus are innovative -- offering a democratic, ELL focused school -- the ways in which the school proposes to deliver aspects of the program are not compelling. The dual language program is optional and afterschool, the description of "innovative, comprehension-based approaches to language instruction" for ELLs is vague (page 3). The prospectus does not describe how the educational option will address the needs of the low income students who are also identified as a target population.

Although there is a strong association and connection between members of the founding board and the community, there is no mention of the expertise that exists among the members to meet the needs and challenges of the community and students it intends to serve. It is not clear what the correlation is between participation in the TWIBE program and a students' overall academic success. Success of the TWIBE program in meeting the needs of its ELL's depends on students' enrollment which is optional. There is no discussion in the application about how the school plans to address a low interest in the program if necessary. Does the financial success of the TWIBE program depend upon subsidy from families of students that can afford to pay to participate? What if these students do not sign up for the program? In this section, the applicant stresses a commitment to developing its students' skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. It does not, however, mention science and technology/engineering as it did in its vision statement. This demonstrates a lack of focus and consistency in the different areas of the application. Again, it is not clear what the true goals of the school are.

According to the data, 82% of students that are likely to enroll at the school are not English-language learners. This section provides limited evidence of considering the instructional needs (with respect to language) of this large segment of the population. While there may be significant language deficiencies within this larger segment of the projected population, this section reflects a clearer focus and prioritization around the needs of ELLs.

Although the application states that this school would seek to compensate for a weakness within the surrounding district (i.e. the poor performance of ELL students), it does not concretely attempt to explain the causes of this weakness in district schools or explain why the proposed approaches would not be available to a public school and, thus, require the autonomy of a Commonwealth charter in order to be implemented.

Educational Philosophy Strengths:

The prospectus proposes a progressive model of education. However, it only provides a brief description of what a progressive model entails: to inspire and support children's natural curiosity; to challenge them academically; and to use creative practices to respond to each child's unique learning needs. The prospectus identified the "creative educational practices" to be used: aligned curriculum made relevant to student interests; mixed-age classrooms and collaborative learning; experiential, thematic, and extended learning; targeted remediation;

allowing students to direct a portion of their own learning; and bilingual education. Most of this aligns to the school mission -- except for the bilingual aspect. The prospectus does contain multiple references to research that promotes many of the chosen instructional strategies -- such as differentiated instruction, experiential learning, thematic learning, multi-age grouping, integration of arts, and bilingual education.

The educational philosophy continues the strength of the previous sections by laying out a clear, research-supported methodology for addressing the needs of diverse learners by proposing a dynamic, engaging, and collaborative environment in which students have a clear voice. It flows logically from the previous sections and each part of the philosophy is deliberately discussed in the context of diverse needs. Expectations for both teachers and students are elucidated. Moreover, this school model seeks to address the whole child, emphasizing social-emotional support and growth in parallel with academic growth. The proposed Personalized Education Plans (PEPs) that each student would complete exemplifies this strength, inasmuch as it allows students to simultaneously focus on academic attainment and personal skills/characteristics like goal-setting, self-evaluation, and confidence.

The applicants crafted a statement on the educational philosophy which meets each of the required criteria. Research-based citations affirm the instructional and philosophical approach chosen by the founding team. The core value system (that an educator's most important functions are to inspire and support children's natural curiosity and desire to learn) is reinforced through the curriculum design, pedagogical methods (pg. 6), and overall school design (low student/teacher ratio, pg. 6) This statement reaffirms that the overall program is intended to meet the acute needs of several types of ELLs and other members of a high-need student population. The applicants espouse the use of varied assessment and intervention methods, based on empirical studies, to best serve their target population. (pg. 6) Further, the applicants provide evidence of having sought and obtained evidence to answer the question about what mix of supports will contribute most to academic achievement. References to studies on student's formation of the learning process and the TWIBE approach demonstrate strong evidence of a thorough commitment to gathering empirical support (pg. 7).

The prospectus provides a clear and succinct description of the underlying beliefs in both the teacher's and student's role in effective learning. The group's constructivism philosophy aligns with their mission and vision. This section provides specific details about the programming choices made by the group and targeted research to support those choices in fostering student achievement. The selected strategies rooted in the educational philosophy provide evidence of the possible implementation of a comprehensive educational program as well as the potential to serve diverse learners.

SPCS has included lots of research to support its philosophies and school design. SPCS's school design is very student centered and includes many opportunities (PEP, self evaluation and goal setting, participating in governance) for students to play a significant role in their educational experience SPCS has anticipated ways to address students in need of academic intervention (RTI, LLI).

Educational Philosophy Weaknesses:

The STEM aspect is not well integrated into the prospectus's educational philosophy. It seems like a good idea that has been borrowed and added on to this prospectus, but not well integrated into the philosophy in a coherent way. Additionally, the proposed bilingual program also seems added on to the progressive school model, but not integrated in a holistic manner. While the prospectus does state that teachers will differentiate the curriculum, provide several educators per classroom, use Response to Intervention, and additional educational strategies, the prospectus does not explicitly address how these strategies will serve all students. The prospectus does not reference the specific subgroups of students that are to be included in a recruitment and retention plan. I am concerned that the prospectus states that the optional after school program will be used to help diverse learners progress. What happens if these children who need extra help do not opt to attend the after school programming? The prospectus does not contain any explicit research references to progressive education models.

This section might have more explicitly addressed the role that parents and families will play in this community. Previously, the authors stated that they would "depend on family involvement", but the only mention of parent outreach/involvement within the educational vision is the planned home visits in the summer before the school opens.

While the educational philosophy is robust, it is not clear where the STEM vision fits in to the educational philosophy. It is also not clear how the "additive bilingual education" piece will operate with an educational program for English language learners, as a part of a comprehensive educational program.

In some instances, the citations to studies reflected secondary or tertiary take aways from the work. Wang, Haertel & Walberg's 1993 work was not principally focused on asking students to set goals and assess their own progress. The principal finding on classroom management might have been woven in more powerfully given that this will form a critical part of the SPCS professional development plan during the summer session.

SPCS mentions using mixed-age grouping for collaborative learning but does not elaborate on it; and no research is quoted to support this approach. It is unclear what is meant by "hold them (students) to high standards in Social-emotional spheres." (p. 5) Again STEM is mentioned as an academic focus to promote inquiry-based teaching and learning, but this has been an inconsistent focus throughout the application. SPCS says that the arts will play a significant role in the school's curriculum (p. 6), but this is the first time it is mentioned at all in the application. I again question if the after-school TWIBE is such an integral part of the schools academic plan for success, why is it optional and not free for all students?

General Curriculum and Instruction Strengths:

The curriculum and instructional models are designed to provide students with a two-year mixed-age course of study in grades 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, and 7-8. Math leveled by grade and not

mixed-age. Providing students with 90 minutes of ELA and an additional 60 minutes of ELA integrated arts classes a day will promote the school's vision of educating English language learners. However, ELLs are not explicitly mentioned in the school's mission.

The proposed curriculum aligns directly with the mission and vision of the school, inasmuch as it empowers and respects students' individual strengths and interests through an interactive, integrated, and project-based structure. Overall, it appears to be sufficiently researched and presented with a reasonable amount of detail.

The prospectus provides a generalized overview of the curriculum and instruction planned for all grades of the proposed school. The group intends to perform curriculum mapping the summer prior to opening. The prospectus names a variety of popular curriculum resources that the school has selected (reasons not provided) and intends to implement as well as inquiry based opportunities.

There is a consistent thread of integrating content across curricula, which is in line with SPCS's educational philosophy and vision. SPCS will have a science specialist on hand to foster collaboration among the teachers. SPCS is consistent about involving many members of the stakeholding community in many of its decision making processes (e.g. teacher hiring and evaluation.)

SPCS provides strong evidence of addressing the need for curriculum alignment. The statement further affirms the mission statement and educational philosophy of the proposed school. Research citations are provided to reinforce the instructional and school design decisions of the founding team.

General Curriculum and Instruction Weaknesses:

Research is not found in this section and is predominately in the educational philosophy section.

While the 2-year curriculum and classroom structure is innovated and justified in the application, the founders do not explain how they will effectively integrate students who enter the school during the second of one of the two-year block and, therefore, may be behind their peers in the curriculum and perhaps also find it more difficult to integrate into the culture of the classroom.

The experiential nature of the curriculum could be refined throughout this statement and in subsequent sections of the prospectus. In particular, the question of curriculum integration could be expounded upon in a more illustrative manner.

The curriculum section is not explicit about how the curriculum will be differentiated to reflect students' individual needs and curiosities. Instructional model is very brief. It presents a picture that teachers will use a variety of strategies. The prospectus does not contain research that demonstrates that the chosen instructional and curriculum models result in academic achievement.

In the application, SPCS mentions the CCSS separately from the MCF, which they should not. They should be aware that the CCSS were incorporated into the current versions of the math and ELA MCF. They should simply refer to them as the MCF. It isn't clear if the Professional Growth Plan is based on a template or is free formed.

Specific Curriculum Strengths:

The non-academic goals, in particular, are especially well-aligned with the mission and values of the school. For example, commensurate with the stated appreciation for democratic values and leadership, the selected Responsive Classroom curriculum will allow students to be "entrusted with responsibility for directing part of their learning" and "encouraged to engage in regular self-reflection." This focus on creating self-directed and reflective learners, moreover, is consistent with the school value of enhancing student creativity.

The curriculum choices provide rich opportunities for student learning consistent with the mission and vision.

The applicants provide a detailed statement on the planning that influenced the design of the curriculum, the format and scope of that curriculum, and the anticipated outcomes from instruction within that framework. The curriculum addresses each of the critical areas and provides instructional time which is commensurate with best practice across the state. The high-quality of the instructional materials and the nature of the school enrollment plan suggest that classroom management (two-grades in a single classroom for multiple lessons) will place a premium on the collaborative planning time afforded to teachers to ensure lessons are engaging for accelerated learners, well-paced for moderate learners, and well-organized for struggling learners.

Curriculum outlined in the prospectus has been chosen because it has been used at the founding group's proven provider's schools. Curriculum descriptions are very clear in terms of English language arts and math. The prospectus will use the Responsive Classroom model of classroom management in order to promote the school's non-academic goals. The non-academic goals are lengthy, but are aligned to the school's mission. The prospectus contains a plan to develop the school's curriculum. Both the school's director and teams of teachers are expected to develop curriculum materials. The director of the school will create Curriculum Master Plans (CMP) which will outline the major content, concepts, and skills to be taught in each of the major subject areas for a two-year course of study. This will cross reference the MCF.

SPCS emphasizes students learning and math and science skills, which are a key feature in the new math CF and will also be a key feature in the new science CF. The week-long end-of-year course of study will allow students to apply what they have learned across curricula, which is in line with the school's vision of students working creatively and taking ownership of their work.

Specific Curriculum Weaknesses:

In science, SPCS mentions developing "thematic units". However, what are listed in the application are simply topics within the different domains of science, not broad cross-domain-linked themes (such as Energy.) Based on the topics listed and the curricula mentioned, it isn't clear how science will be integrated into/with math or ELA.

Curriculum descriptions of the social studies, science, and language programs are not as detailed as math and ELA. I don't understand how students will get 45 minutes of PE a week when it is offered in 25 minute blocks during recess. The math does not work. In terms of the after school programs, I am not sure how this will work: "Fees will be changed, but the academic support programs will be free for those who qualify." I think that this needs further explanation. The curriculum development plan needs further clarification in order to completely illustrate what is contained in each curriculum element -- the CMP, the two-year lesson plan, and the weekly lesson plans -- need further details. The description of ongoing curriculum evaluation and adjustment is vague and needs further clarification. While the CMP will outline the two-year course of study, I wonder how each teacher will have the flexibility to accommodate individual student interests and curiosities (as outlined in the school's mission) -- this could be a continual source of tension.

The process by which the School will continue to redefine the curriculum and massage teaching and learning in this inquiry-based environment is less clear. Much of it appears to be contingent on the capacity of those initial faculty hires, and a director who could be facing extended instructional support requirements (page 11). While the applicants have consciously and explicitly contemplated this challenge, the organizational chart suggests that opportunities to lead, incentive pay and other features of diversifying the leadership pool may come into play earlier than anticipated (page 25). A great deal of the high-quality instructional programming (and focus of this prospectus) seems to be on the optional after-school program. There is a fiscal aspect to this concern as well; however, my curricular concern is that the needs of the whole child which could so clearly be met after school (from 3:00 to 5:30 p.m.) may not be addressed as comprehensively during the regular school day.

Although the curriculum selections are clearly justified in the context of school values and mission, the process of this selection is not explained. Instead, the section reads a bit more as if the founders worked backwards - first selecting a curriculum and then finding ways to justify how that curriculum aligned with their goals.

No rationale is provided to explain why math is taught at grade level while all other subjects are taught in mixed grade looping classrooms. It is unclear whether all students are required to study one of three foreign languages or if studying a foreign language is optional until grade 7. Based on the curriculum description, students have a fine arts (ELA integrated) class for an hour a day yet physical education for 45 minutes per week. The prospectus does not indicate specific measurable non-academic goals but rather expectations for student development. In other areas of the prospectus, it is clear that students will be evaluated on work habits and habits of mind as well as self-assessment via PEPs. The prospectus describes the general plan for working with & improving curriculum but the actual

functioning of the system with staff and student data over the span of the school year is unclear. The prospectus describes a commitment to provide professional development instructional strategies to all teachers during the summer as well as the intention to hire highly qualified staff through a rigorous hiring process.

Specific Instruction Strengths:

This section provides extensive information on the variety of strategies to be used in the classroom and the commitment to incorporate strategies that require higher order thinking skills as well as multiple learning styles. The prospectus describes a self-reflective teacher evaluation process that supports teachers through goal-setting, collaborative teams, administrator support, and a transparent evaluation process.

SPCS provides a clear outline of how it intends to address the language acquisition needs of all its students.

The process for teacher evaluation is clear and well described. Professional development will be based on observations and evaluations of staff. Teachers will also have the ability to identify professional development needs. Each teacher will have a professional development plan.

The applicants propose to use an array of instructional methods designed to meet the needs of different types of learners. This approach is largely consistent with the mission and educational philosophy of the school. It is also consistent with research-based efforts to reduce the achievement gap. The applicants have made an explicit commitment to providing additional support for teachers with respect to LEP instruction. Also, SPCS has established partnerships to subsidize the education of those teachers at Lesley University (pg. 12) The applicants also propose a multifaceted and rigorous evaluation tool for teachers. Formal evaluations, ongoing observations, systems for timely feedback on performance, and collaborative communication systems should promote high-quality instruction across the faculty.

Diverse learners are seamlessly integrated into the selected pedagogy, which are reasonably well described in the application. The founders clearly have high expectations for their teachers, as well as their students, and this is reflected in the hiring criteria that expects all hired teachers to come in with foundational "progressive teaching experience within their disciplines" and the large toolbox of instructional strategies that teachers will be trained to use as appropriate. In addition, teachers' feedback is a critical component in determining the professional development opportunities available each year.

Specific Instructional Weaknesses:

This is a strong segment of the prospectus. No weaknesses cited here.

While, as stated above, diverse learning needs seem to be well-integrated into the selected curriculum and pedagogy, the school might still need a more targeted approach to meet special education and ELL students' needs. Even within a highly-staffed classroom, teachers will nevertheless have the capacity to provide only a finite number of diversified curriculum layers for any given lesson. Some more concrete procedures, therefore, might help prioritize to ensure that the most at-risk students are not left behind.

SPCS mentions having several adults in a classroom at any given time which seems a bit much. SPCS's plan to identify and provide necessary accommodations to students with disabilities seems superficial. It lacks clear details as to how the school intends to address the specific challenges many of its students will bring. (p. 19)

The description of instructional strategies lists a wide variety of methods -- from direct instruction to role playing. This section does not provide additional context to the list of strategies and a discussion of the pedagogy is absent from this description. After the list of many instructional methods, the prospectus provides one research reference that does not seem connected to the list. The prospectus does not explicitly describe how the instructional methods will provide for all types of diverse learners. The prospectus states that teachers will be hired who have progressive teaching experience and use progressive methods, but again the prospectus has not clearly defined progressive teaching or methods.

Assessment System Strengths:

The prospectus describes a comprehensive assessment system that includes externally and internally developed tests. The group intends to use regular varied assessments to monitor student learning and identify students for additional supports. The prospectus addresses how each stakeholder will be able to access performance data.

The basic plan for assessing student progress thoroughly covers multiple ways to measure students' growth in basic math and literacy skills, as well as their growth in non-academic areas. In general, it is commensurate with the school's mission and equips teachers, administrators, and students with sufficient data to hold themselves to high standards. There are some plans for differentiated and remedial instruction as individual students' results call for this. The student-written Personal Education Plans (PEPs) seem to be the most innovative and interesting part of SPCS's assessment plan, especially as these plans already include ways to engage multiple stakeholder groups around this data; school administrators will be engaged in students' progress toward non-academic goals primarily through these plans, and parents will be informed and involved through biannual PEP conferences.

The applicants describe (pg. 13) a robust assessment system designed to capture student performance across multiple indices. SPCS proposes to establish a system of standardized assessments as well as a system of self-assessment to be used by students.

The director will oversee the assessment system. The prospectus does not detail who will collect and compile the data, but it will be stored in individual student portfolios. This

system needs further clarification and detail. The prospectus states that the following literacy assessments will be used: PPVT, PALS, TROLL, Fountas and Pinnell's benchmark assessment, and DIBELS. These assessments will inform the school's literacy RTI program. There is also a general statement that assessment data -- from internal and external sources -- will be used to provide targeted intervention and to communicate information about student progress. The focus on literacy assessment is consistent with the school's vision as one that serves an ELL population. The prospectus describes an internal assessment system -- mostly consisting of commercial curriculum assessments. However, the description of why these internal assessments were chosen and why they serve the school's population is vague. The prospectus describes that students will create personal education plans that include both academic and non-academic goals. Both teachers and students will reflect on these goals quarterly. The description of the assessment system does discuss that school teachers and administrators will use the data to make adjustments to the educational program, identify the need for professional development and to better coordinate cross-disciplinary lessons. However, the prospectus does not detail how this will be done.

SPCS's goal of having students take some responsibility for their education is supported by having them complete self-evaluations, PEP's, and regularly discussing their progress with their teachers and administrators. SPCS has presented a clear outline of how it intends to assess its students' academic and social/emotional progress and how that progress will be communicated and addressed among key persons.

Assessment System Weaknesses:

The application is not clear on how academic performance will be measured in subjects other than ELA and mathematics. (See pgs. 13-14) In addition, given the applicants are not explicit about how the rigor and quality of non-standardized assessments will be established, measured or maintained (See pgs. 13-14). The prospectus notes, "Collectively, student data will be maintained, organized, and managed by the School's Information Technology Specialist." The organizational chart does not include this specific position. The chart does include an IT Support person (pg. 25). The assessment system is likely to be more reliable if the contents of that system are organized, analyzed and reported by a dedicated staff person with a background in student performance data and the systems used to collect and process such information. It is unclear if the application proposes such a structure (pg. 13)

While the current plan covers most of the basic prospectus requirements, more information would be helpful in several key areas: -Grade level differentiation: The only grades that are currently identified as having unique assessments are K-3, but SPCS's grade span goes up to 8th grade. -Math skills: The prospectus states that founders are still "in the process of deciding on an assessment." ELL/Special Ed. students: Neither group is specifically mentioned in this section of the prospectus. Admittedly, assessment procedures for both groups are explained in a later section; however, especially given that ELL students are one of SPCS's target populations, this section could have been used to justify the appropriateness of the proposed assessments for these special needs groups. Student investment: The prospectus states that "students will regularly discuss their academic...growth with their

teachers and advisors," but it is not clear how or by whom students' test results and academic progress will be translated and communicated to them, nor how SPCS will augment students' intrinsic investment in these results. PEPs: Inasmuch as "progress toward non-academic goals will be measured through Personal Education Plans," the PEPs seem to be intended to contain both academic and non-academic student goals. However, how these two types of goals will be balanced, as well as short-term versus long-term goals, is not clear.

It is still unclear how progress towards non-academic goals will be measured and used in a consistent and thoughtful manner. The prospectus appears to indicate that curriculum will only be evaluated and refined during the summer in response to student performance during the year. This is not a timely response to student data.

The description of literacy assessments is very detailed and specific. The description of math assessments is minimal and vague -- mostly dependent on the curriculum specific assessments. The prospectus does not detail how math assessment data will be used. The prospectus does not clearly state why the specific literacy assessments will be used for the school's targeted population. I cannot find any reference to research that supports the selection of the assessments listed in the prospectus. The assessment system described does not illustrate the use of absolute, within-year gains/losses, and year to year gains and losses. The prospectus does not offer that level of detail about the assessment system proposed. The assessment system discusses in general how the school will measure and report on school performance and how each stakeholder group will use such data. However, it is not specific and does not reference actual assessment data or actual assessments.

It isn't clear how school-based assessments will be developed, whether by individual teachers or in collaboration. There is no mention of assessment in science or of scientific literacy, which is supposed to be a part of the school's STEM focus as mentioned in the school's vision.

School Characteristics Strengths:

The prospectus provides a few examples of developing strong partnerships that would enhance school programming. The prospectus describes the three underlying beliefs that will pervade the school's culture; recognizing individual value, individual responsibility, and community member support. The prospectus describes the specific strategies it will use from house visits prior to opening, student goal setting, daily community meetings, student advisors, diverse lunch offerings, etc. To establish and maintain school culture. The prospectus also describes a number of ways family members are included in the governance and operation of the school.

The school proposes characteristics which meet the majority of the criteria established under this section. In particular, SPCS will align its calendar to the district of location and provide an extended day for students. The school proposes a small school model with low student-teacher ratios intended to optimize learning support for ELLs and other high-need populations. Particular strengths of this section include the discussion of the day in the life of

a student and a teacher. In both instances, the rich, diverse design of the proposed school (curriculum, class size, age grouping, instructional methods, community engagement, etc.) appears as a coherent whole. Further, the overall coherence of the model is strengthened by specific and detailed references to high-quality external partners. The needs of the anticipated population appear to be aligned to the instructional and cultural profile of partners.

This was one of the strongest sections of the application - each component is written in context with the school's mission statement and vision and paints the picture of a vibrant, collaborative, effective learning community where key stakeholders all have clear voices. Throughout, the founders clearly lay out a number of goals and expected outcomes. Commensurate with the vision to create a school based on democratic principles that empowers students, families, and teachers, this portion of the plan lays out several involvement layers that allow stakeholders to choose how and how much they want to participate in the school. Students have some level of control over their schedule during the day, as well as a variety of optional after school activities, and parents can become involved through the Board of Trustees, Advisory Committees, or volunteering at the school. Teachers have a slightly flexible schedule in terms of start/end times and benefit from a large block of time to plan and collaborate in the middle of the day. Further flushing out the capacity of the school to offer a wide variety of options to students, SPCS has already established a number of community partnerships; 6 different organizations are named in the Prospectus. Overall, this section makes it clear that the founders have determined that the only way to meet the needs of students and families is to start early; 20 full days are scheduled for planning with the full staff in the summer before the school opens and student PEPs will be initially completed during that time frame, when teachers will make home visits to each student signed-up to attend in the fall. Moreover, they are sensitive to the language needs of parents and state that tutors can be provided for parents that wish to serve on Advisory Committees.

180 days. Daily hours from 7:30-2:30 (6.5 hours a day).The school will be organized in multi-age classrooms for instruction. The prospectus states that students will have 945 learning time hours a year. Students must be 5 years old by September 1st to be eligible for Kindergarten. The prospectus notes a few external partners -- Lesley University will place student teachers at the school. Tufts University students will volunteer as classroom assistants. Latin Roots will help to design after school programs. The Haitian Coalition will also provide advice about after school programs. The prospectus outlines an academic program wherein students are placed in multi-age classrooms with multiple adults (at least one teacher and one assistant in each classroom). Math is the only subject that will be taught at the grade level only. Teachers will have the choice to work one of two shifts. In order to support diverse learners, the school will provide "sufficient and qualified staffing" and will use a Response to Intervention model -- offering three tiers of instruction for those who need help. Also, the school proposes to provide Sheltered English Instruction, "innovative comprehension based approaches to teaching" ESL, and the optional after school language program. The school culture will be based on a number of factors: Responsive Classroom, school values, home visits, student Personal Education Plans (academic and social goals), a community weekend, the democratic governance structure, a daily morning meeting, and advisory groups for students, a broad cultural diversity and the school's promotion of

language appreciation. Parents are expected to volunteer at least 4 hours a week -- or obtain a hardship exemption. If parents fulfill the volunteer requirement, they are able to run for and vote for a seat on the school's board of trustees. Parents can also join advisory committees.

The sample daily schedule included (p. 15) provides a clear example of a typical day for a student. True to its mission of serving students from diverse backgrounds, SPCS plans to connect with many various community organizations that specialize in working with a particular population or have an academic area of focus. SPCS's described processes for establishing a culture of respect and personal responsibility are very detailed and in-line with the school's vision.

Letters of support were provided for proposed collaborations. (Tufts, Lesley, Haitian coalition, etc.) Responsive classroom cited as intervention strategy. Overall this section demonstrates a strong knowledge of school operations, with concerns noted below and under #29. Are all children required to be present between 2:30-5:30? Are classes held at this time electives or is this really "after school"? This is a critical issue because if it IS part of the school day, then this time CAN be used for mandatory ELL and sped support and service delivery, but those services canNOT be delivered during after-school time. BUT if 2:30-5:30 is part of the "regular school day" that *may* have implications for the permissibility of their proposed native language support services.

School Characteristics Weaknesses:

This is the first time I have seen a K-8 school open as a full K-8 program and not start with a few grades and build out over time. What's the rush? It raises questions about the capacity of the school to manage itself effectively from the outset. The schedule sample provided is for students in grades k-6... what about grades 7, 8? The daily schedule includes a block dedicated to "heritage language" ...but isn't that the purpose also of the after-school program? Again, if this is a 2-way program English speaking students MUST be immersed in the second language so they would HAVE TO attend this block as a second language acquisition program- but then it's not really a 'heritage language", per se. Lunch/recess: indicates that 45 minutes per week of PE will be provided "during recess periods". It is either "recess" or it is "PE", not both. Also, I'm concerned about a program that contains only 45 minutes per week of PE for students in grades K-8: that's only 1 period per week. After-school: special education support cannot be provided after school, TWIBE programming is problematic, for the reasons I indicated earlier.

With respect to the physical requirements of the school, it is unclear if the school will require 9 classrooms for 9 classes or 5 classrooms for 9 classes (page 15).

The school culture and schedule does not reflect the immersion and STEM aspects of the school's vision.

Again, there could possibly be many adults in any given classroom at any time including the lead teacher, an assistant and/or co-teacher, an ELL and/or SPED teacher, and volunteers. It

is not clear how having this many adults working together with a small number of students will be productive. The school plans to allow only 3 hours at the end of the day for field trips. Although it plans to go to nearby facilities, three hours may not be enough time to allow for meaningful exploration of a site and integration of that experience into a particular curriculum. The school's culture and methods for establishing and maintain its culture are very much focused on meeting the social and emotional needs of its students. There is very little to no focus on establishing a place where academic rigor and progress are valued and stressed. This is not in line with the school's first goal (p. 3) of establishing high expectations for all students' academic and social growth. There is heavy concentration on students' social growth, not their academic growth.

The applicant must also consider snow days within their school year schedule to meet the minimum number of school days. It is unclear, after the school grows to full enrollment, which grades will accept new students, outside of state backfilling requirements. Based on the educational philosophy and desired programming, it remains unclear why the applicant group does not pursue a longer school day and school year. As a Commonwealth charter school, it would result in additional time on learning and allow the incorporation of enrichment opportunities into the school day for all families. The applicant group makes the unusual choice of opening the school with 20 students in each grade K-8 during the first year of proposed operation. This strategy could pose difficulties in terms of staffing and financial/resource management and is concerning – no rationale is provided. A sample schedule for grades 7 & 8 was not provided – it is unclear if they have the same school hours. The staggered schedule for teachers is confusing and not well explained. Why would teachers be absent during the breakfast period and miss an opportunity to connect with their students – this seems in opposition to the school's ethos. The description of the proposed three-hour afterschool fee for service enrichment program, though innovative, raises concerns about the cohesiveness of the school as a whole. While the proposed school describes the "Two-Way Immersion Bilingual Education Program" as a centerpiece of the program for the literacy and academic success of ELLs, it is an afterschool option.

There are a few small concerns about the current proposed schedule: First, no transitional time is currently scheduled, despite the fact that students seem to be switching classes and activities quite frequently. Second, 45 minutes per week seems like a very small amount of time to schedule in PE, especially with the growing national concern about childhood obesity. Conversely, 2.5 hours feels like a long time for an after school activity. Although students will be transitioning and engaging in a diverse array of activities during their school day, it's unclear whether they will have this same experience after school. Will each activity be expected to run for the full 2.5 hours or will students be able to divide their time between different activities? The proposed faculty advisors are a very positive part of this prospectus; however, their expectations are somewhat unclear: will students have the same faculty advisor the whole time they attend SPCS or will they be reassigned as their age and needs change?

Special Student Populations and Student Services Strengths:

The description of how the school will assess and meet the needs of its ELLs is very detailed.

This is a very strong section of the application. It addresses all required elements and demonstrates a thorough knowledge of special education and ELL, nutrition and student support services programming and requirements.

The option of a two-way immersion language program is a strength. The focus on family engagement is a strength. Careful attention in the application to requirements pertaining to English learners is a strength.

SPCS envisions serving a diverse community of learners. The current approach, based on meeting the needs of individual students, is aligned with serving students with disabilities through various modalities. The applicants propose an assessment, review and instruction approach which meets the requirements of state law and is consistent with research.

The school's basic model allows for the seamless integration of students with diverse learning needs and the founders state that they wish to create a school where "accepting and including people who are different is a non-negotiable moral value." Such an environment is likely to encourage parents to seek services their child might need without fear that it might generate a stigma against their child. The procedures laid out for the identification of and delivery of services to ELL and special education students are clean and appear to meet requirements.

The prospectus includes procedures for identification and assessment that is in alignment with the state recommendations. Programming is based on the current standards (benchmarks and outcomes) for ELLs and includes a plan for training teachers in all four categories of sheltered English immersion. Students will be placed with teachers who are qualified to work with English language learners. It is obvious by the proposal that there is knowledge of state and federal requirements, programming implementation and best practices. An example, p. 20 paragraph 3, progress will be measured annually by MEPA and MELA-O (required) portfolio development assessments (best practices). These assessments will influence instruction and intervention.

The applicant group appears to have sufficient regulatory knowledge of the policies and procedures to serve ELLs. The prospectus contains clear information regarding the nutrition program as well as basic student/family support services.

The school plans to provide students with disabilities access to the general curriculum through qualified and sufficient staffing, pull out support, and the RTI model of tiered instruction. The school plans to provide for English language learner access to the curriculum through: initial identification and assessment; proper placement, grouping and instruction; and comprehensive monitoring and support. All of the provisions offered in the details are in line with other ELL programs. This prospectus also offers an after school,

optional language program. The prospectus states that the MELA-O assessments will be completed by a trained, qualified administrator. The prospectus does not identify any further qualifications that the ELL administrator must possess. The school will use an RTI model of tiered intervention as a way to identify students in need of special education services. The nutrition program will offer students breakfast, lunch, and snacks. The school expects to offer contracted outside therapists (occupational, physical, speech/language, and psychologists). The school will also provide a part time counselor and full time nurse.

Special Student Populations and Student Services Weaknesses:

Program evaluation procedures and time frames for special education and ELL are not discussed. In addition, the information provided about ancillary services is rather sparse.

Exit criteria are not exactly specified yet the recognition of the fact that FLEP students may need continued literacy or native language support is stated.

Though the group describes the process for employing RTI for struggling students, the prospectus does not provide information regarding the provision of support services specifically to identified students with disabilities. There are concerns that the applicant group consistently discusses after-school programming as a way to serve these special students populations. It should be pointed out that these students are required by law to have their needs met within the scope of the regularly scheduled school day. Supplemental learning opportunities are valuable but cannot replace required support services during the school day.

The school's plan to provide students with disabilities and/or LEP students' access to the general education curriculum is superficial and lacks substance.

The prospectus is vague about how the school will provide specialized instruction to students who have been identified as requiring special education.

The prospectus stops short of stating that they will operate a resource room if needed. They say they will deliver services "in and outside of the general education classroom". The prospectus identified a number of assessments to be used in the special education identification process, but is not clear that additional assessments (beyond those listed) will be utilized as needed to explore particular disability types with profiles not aligned with the particular assessments they list. On TWIBE: Again, their program is neither "two-way bilingual" nor is it "immersion" (other than the English immersion component), so this acronym really needs to go, because it is confusing and misleading. The program as they describe it is properly characterized as "after-school native language support". This calls into question the knowledgeability and/or candor of the applicant group. Do they 1) really not know what a two-way program is, or 2) do a poor job of describing their program or 3) are they simply trying to skirt the English language requirements in 71A? Are they being candid about their intentions regarding whom they intend to serve and the kind of program they intend to operate?

Capacity Strengths:

<p>The applicant group is a very large diverse assembly of community members with a strong commitment to serving Somerville children. Of the individuals identified as possible board members, qualifications and expertise are extremely diverse and some of great utility to a charter school board - social work, law, business, special education, school administrator, teacher, scientist, engineer, early childhood education, real estate, non-profit administrator, etc.</p>
<p>Overall, the founding group and proposed trustees have a wide range of professional and educational experiences. The method by which the group came together suggests that the coherence in the plan was derived organically and over time. Further, the trustees have extensive connections into many of the communities to be targeted by SPCS. The exception of the Haitian community is notable.</p>
<p>The founding group consists of a wide range of educators and other professionals from within the community the school intends to serve. Most of the people on the found and advisory group are bilingual and immigrants which speaks to the school's ability to identify with the needs of its students who are also bilingual and/or immigrants.</p>
<p>The 30 member founding group has met monthly since June 2010. Additionally, the founding group has eight committees who meet periodically (not specified). The founding group has a diverse set of expertise. Out of 30 founders, seven are involved with K-12 education. The only areas of expertise that appears to be lacking is finance and development. Virtually every member of the founding group lives in Somerville and has ties to the community. All founding group members have submitted statement of commitment and a resume.</p>
<p>The founding group is an eclectic group of individuals who bring a variety of talents and experiences to the tables. It is clear that they each have their own reasons to be personally committed to the success of this school and together create the capacity to create an academic community that matches their vision.</p>

Capacity Weaknesses:

<p>It is not clear who the identified school leader will be or how he/she will be chosen.</p>
<p>There are no apparent weaknesses in this area.</p>
<p>It is never fully clear why these founders came together, or how often they met. While the founders have a diverse set of skills, of the proposed board members, finance expertise appears to be lacking.</p>
<p>The prospectus does not detail how and why the founding group came together to form this proposed schools. I am unclear how two of the proven providers are aligned with the school.</p>

While Nora and Pendergast are listed as proven providers, they are not mentioned anywhere as members of the founding group, have not submitted statements of commitment.

It appears that none of the 30 members of the founding group are Haitian or have any formal connection to organizations serving the Haitian community. It is unclear which people will provide the principal fiscal management expertise for the proposed school. A few people have small business experience, which may be relevant, but it is unclear if any of the founding group has school-based fiscal experience or non-profit sector fiscal experience.

Governance Strengths:

Clear and appropriate reporting relationship between the administration and board of trustees. The board of trustees plans to identify board seats according to desired set of expertise and recruit to fill those seats.

There is a clear plan for governance that establishes plenty of committees and opportunities for parent involvement. Responsibilities are structurally divided on the Board to create a clear ownership over essential functions and tasks.

The applicant group appears to have a clear basic understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the board. The group has already made some important choices, such as the school leader not being a member of the board, establishing board and advisory committees and using staggered board terms. These strategies will eliminate possible governance complications and focus governance action effectively.

The governance of the school provides a clear, concise statement which is consistent with the educational program and philosophy of the school. The trustees approach to governance espouses a democratic orientation that permits the full engagement of parents and families and school employees. The trustees propose to ensure competency through varied means including training, elections, and committee membership requirements. The school proposes a dynamic advisory structure which allows for widespread, transparent communication in critical areas of school operations which can include finance, personnel, facilities, legal & compliance, and education (pg. 24).

Board members will be required to attend at least one training session offered by ESE or some other qualified consultant.

Governance Weaknesses:

A greater explanation of 4-hours-per-month service requirement for parents could be used, especially to explain the logic behind connecting this requirement to voting rights. Also, the prospectus states that "Board members will recruit qualified candidates to run for open Board positions, if necessary," but does not lay out any mechanisms for recruitment beyond that. In order to truly involve a diverse group of stakeholders, mechanisms may be needed to

reach beyond the immediate network of Board members.

The school's governance structure needs further explanation -- it is vague. The school's administrative structure does have many people (6 plus all teachers) reporting to the school's director, who then reports to the board of trustees.

Of the founding members, 17 individuals are identified as proposed board members – yet the governance section describes the board with a limit of 11 members. If the school is granted a charter, the individuals identified as board members in the final application (charter) are the board of trustees. The group may require internal discussion on this point before committing to a specific number that would become part of their charter, if granted. The description of the board elections is confusing – it is unclear if existing board members participate in board elections. It is also unclear if community meetings occur prior to scheduled board meetings and whether board members on advisory committees report back to the board. The effort to communicate a ‘democratic governance model’ has resulted in a murky complicated description which requires some additional thought and clarification. Though the organizational chart is clear, it presents a complex reporting structure for a relatively small school. The director has a great number of direct reports and it is surprising that classroom teachers would be responsible for managing and evaluating multiple staff within their classroom in addition to their other duties. Perhaps some additional thought is required.

It is not clear how students will be elected or chosen to participate on an advisory committee. Particularly in a school with mostly students that are elementary school aged, it is unclear how such young people will contribute to the governance of the school.