

Reviewers' Evaluation for Public Charter School Application

ACADIA ACADEMY

September 30, 2015

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A. Education Plan

A.1. Mission, Vision, Identification of targeted student population and the community the school hopes to serve

Strengths

- The mission clearly describes the program they hope to implement; direct instruction connected to extensive experiential learning opportunities.
- Development Committee has laid out a solid argument that a school of choice is a need in this area.
- Proposal for a small, community school may be well received.
- The application presented a desire to educate the whole child academically, behaviorally, socially, emotionally, and physically.
- The proposal recognized the needs of students from the Lewiston-Auburn area with a focus on low socio-economic, special education, English Language Learner (ELL), and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) involved children.
- Leverages proven systems, like Saxon Math

Questions, Concerns

- Selected many different programs to balance
- Full of aspirational targets and not clearly stating what it's going to do

A.2. Academic Program

Strengths

- Academic program supports the mission.
- Interesting mix of direct instruction and experiential learning.
- Strong approach to RTI.
- Individualized instruction through the WINK projects is intriguing.
- The proposal appears to support self-directed learning with multiple opportunities to demonstrate success, extended learning through after school and summer programs and small class sizes.
- The combination of using Direct Instruction for basic skill building and then dovetailing with experiential learning is an ambitious approach. It was explained during the interview how the implementation would work for all subjects: math, reading, science, and social studies.
- Although not reflected in the budget, during the interview, a “no cost” approach to including music and arts in the curriculum was shared.
- Experiential to motivate students
- Oriented to behaviorally challenged/learning disabled

Questions, Concerns

- The individual WINK projects may be a real challenge to implement.
- Although they say their programs are aligned to Maine Learning Results, they provide no evidence of that.
- The sheer number of programs and assessments that teachers will need to know may make it difficult to expect the professional development time allocated will be enough to ensure teachers are skilled at all of the programs.
- Success of the overall academic program relies heavily on the teachers having timely and frequent input into the MAPS program.
- MAPS program would be used to track behavioral goals/progress along with academic goals/progress. This may not be sufficient enough to address Maine Learning results/assessments.
- Proposed Pre-k instruction (Building Blocks math curriculum) would need to be more coordinated with Maine’s Early Learning & Development
- It’s unclear to how all the programs will work together
- The sample schedule provided in the application did not include devoted time for math, music, or art. During the interview they did not satisfactorily describe how they would teach these areas.

A.3. Special Student Populations

Strengths

- Strong understanding of the needs of special education students.
- RTI will be a key component of the school.
- MAPS will include IEP goals, integrating Special Education services into the regular education classroom.
- Providing a curriculum for social skills (Strong Kids)
- Extended school year will be beneficial for students with special needs.
- Application shows knowledge of special ed. policy/procedures and instructional materials and practices/MUSER
- Intention is to hire qualified licensed teachers for all student-contact positions

Questions, Concerns

- The program they propose for use with ELL's is not WIDA compliant.
- The school-identified ration that is equal to the local catchment area may not be accurate
- Coordinator of Teaching and Learning will also oversee Special Education.
- There are many new programs and processes that will require support for teachers to implement.
- Special Education Administrator needs knowledge/certification beyond 282 certificate

A.4. Assessment

Strengths

- MAPS and Pride are unique and interesting.
- Goals include social and emotional
- Students play a role in the process.
- Assessment program supports the school's RTI and MTSS program
- RTI modeled: lots of discussion of in-stride assessments and responses
- MAPs will be used to track progress of students and communicate on a regular basis with the parents.

Questions, Concerns

- How will goal lines be established for grades and progressions? How will each IEP be matched to necessary standards measurement and movement forward in grades?

A.5. School Climate and Discipline

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong PBSI approach• Social and Emotional curriculum• Use of Community Meeting• Address both student and teacher behaviors• Positive-Pro-Active approach• RTI approach• Strong discipline policy
<p><u>Questions, Concerns</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• None noted

Education Plan Summary

<p>Is the Education Plan compelling? Are we convinced that the applicant make a strong case for the quality of the program? Describe why or why not.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The plan proposes a unique approach to educating students in the Lewiston-Auburn area with a balance between directed instruction and experiential learning. The special education approach is strong. The plans for a positive climate are compelling.• After the interview, it remains unclear how they will implement RTI/behavioral management/direct instruction/experiential learning into a coherent learning experience for all students.
<p>Does the Education Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Education Plan supports the mission. The balanced approach to instruction, an RTI model, and a positive approach to building community will help the school realize their vision.• The challenge in the plan is that they strongly resemble a school built for emotionally, socially, developmentally challenged students, but purport to welcome all students.

B. Organizational Plan

B.1. School Calendar and Daily Schedule

Strengths

- The extended school year will provide much needed support and remediation for “summer forgetting”.
- Summer program is open to all students free of charge
- Clear on required elements
- School calendar and daily schedule provide evidence of opportunity for ongoing professional development for faculty/staff.

Questions, Concerns

- The schedule provided in the application had no math in grades 2-6. After the interview, additional materials were provided, which included a revised schedule with math in grades 2-6.

B.2. Student Recruitment and Enrollment

Strengths

- Development committee has a strong understanding of the needs of the area.
- Plan to translate materials to meet the needs of residents.
- Logical plan to recruit students.
- Small school that will be growing into themselves so they will likely hit their targets with MMCC connection and earned media.

Questions, Concerns

- May have underestimated the percent of students with Special Needs.
- \$2,000 marketing budget seems underfunded to carry out their marketing plan.

B.3. Staffing and Human Resources

Strengths

- Time is allotted for Professional Development
- Schedule includes additional time at the end of the day for planning and preparation
- Focused on training teachers to do the thing they aspire to implement
- Self-aware enough to say teachers with special education background will be hired

Questions, Concerns

- Expectations for staff are high
- No express thought on art/music/health/PE capabilities
- No special education director (double hatted on assistant principal/curriculum manager)
- 40k seems like a good salary, but teachers are expected to work 12 months a year.

B.4. Pre-Opening Plan

Strengths

- Comprehensive
- Demonstrate what they need to execute
- Will leverage MMCC policy/program to be successful in opening

Questions, Concerns

- Some tasks assigned to a Director of IT, but that is not included on their staffing list.
- No building/timelines for renovation which creates some operational risk to opening.

B.5. Management and Operation

Strengths

- Logical organization.
- They will benefit from the experience that exists with MMCC in this section

Questions, Concerns

- Doesn't address all the teachers they will need
- Administrative staff will be overloaded, creating risk to curriculum execution, especially in IEP/RTI model.
- Organization chart at Tab 20 suggests board runs the school, which is probably not what they mean, but evinces a lack of maturity in what a board does.

B.6. Community Development

Strengths

- Volunteer opportunities and newsletters will keep families informed
- Student-led conferences
- Plans to continue building relationships with local businesses
- Parent Handbook available
- Very parent-oriented in keeping with their behavioral teaching orientation
- Training for families

Questions, Concerns

- Few community partners/school connections identified

Management and Operations Summary

Are we convinced that the school has an effective plan to recruit, retain and grow an outstanding staff? Describe why or why not.

While the school aspires to do some really good things, many factors may make it difficult for the school to be successful:

- With a longer school year, multiple programs, and expectations for monitoring student growth, the expectations for teachers are high.
- School appears to have underestimated their ELL/behavioral/disability draw, which, coupled with their unpracticed use of RTI/direct instruction/IEP for all/experiential learning, will create significant operational risk in delivering the curriculum.
- Application didn't expressly address how they will staff expertise in music/art/PE/health for higher grades.

Does the Management and Operations Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- Yes, the parent handbook clearly aligns with the school's mission and vision.

C. Governance

C. 1. Governing Body

Strengths

- Proposed by-laws included.

Questions, Concerns

- Does not stipulate the number of members from John F. Murphy Homes. In the interview they stated that the intent is to have no more than 1 or 2 members of the JFMH board on the Acadia Board.
- Draft bylaws internally inconsistent on number of board members and the numbers of officers on the board
- No 501(c)(3) application evidenced
- Bylaws are still in draft form after 2 years as a board.

C. 2. Governing Board Composition

Strengths

- Board questionnaires indicate a high degree of interest in, and knowledge of, the proposed school.
- The governing board members bring a variety of experience to the governing body.
- Board appears to be composed of many educators and education professionals.

Questions, Concerns

- There should be a balance of educators and parents with board members with other skill sets.
- From 2014 Review Team report: "The proposal did not contain a clear plan for the Board to review and evaluate the success of the school and the school leaders or identify the data to be used in making evaluative determinations." Although the 2015 governance section in the application was stronger than 2014, there are still some areas the board will want to strengthen relating to maintaining clear lines of responsibility between the school executive director and the Governing Board and the Education Services provider.
- While the board has many education professionals, the board lacks clear school management experience.
- In the interview, 2 board members did not contribute to the discussion.

Governance Summary

Are we convinced that the Board members and Executive Leadership have the skills, background and understanding of their roles necessary to make this a viable and sustainable public charter No. MMCC Director did substantially all the talking, except for banker interjecting some.

The review team had concerns about the capability of the board to run a school:

- Bylaws are clearly not thought out and are inconsistent
- Independence questionable because of weak bylaws and lack of clear ownership by board of the school and its construct.

Does the Governance Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- Yes. The board questionnaires provide insight into the current board members. They appear to understand and support the mission of the school.

D. Business and Financial Services

D. 1. Budget

Strengths

- The offer of donated space will favorably support the program.
- Good discussion of 3 financial models (based on facility choice)

Questions, Concerns

- Although we had questions relating to the pre-opening budget, the interview was helpful in clarifying this area.
- The budget provided in the application (the rental option) was one of three the school had prepared based upon facility options. The assumptions used in the version of the budget we were provided (based on renting a building) were explained in further detail during the interview.
- Didn't provide relevant budget for current facility choice, requiring inference from submitted budget model
- No provision for line of credit liquidation as its being made by ESP
- Insolvent operation in year one
- Taking out ESP-based loan for startup
- Makes provision for small cash reserve only by not paying down ~\$590k line of credit
- Interview evidenced some lack of clarity in presenting info from JFM CFO who apparently developed budget documents

D.2. Financial Management

<u>Strengths</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong fiscal partner with an agency that has already developed fiscal accountability policies and procedures• Fiscal administrative staff is well qualified.• Has local community banker and JMG finance person on board
<u>Questions, Concerns</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No CFO selected• Outside auditor is JFMs, though JFM CFO said the board could pick someone else.

D. 3. Facilities

<u>Strengths</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer to receive donated building and at-cost renovations
<u>Questions, Concerns</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other than the fact that it is donated, we do not have any other information• No picture, plan, or budget presented as of team interview• Although the application shared they were pursuing three possibilities for a facility (rental, purchase/rehab, donation of a building), it was clarified during the interview that the donation of a building seemed probable.

D. 4. Transportation

<u>Strengths</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seemed to understand the budget impacts• Van for field trips
<u>Questions, Concerns</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No Letter of Intent with vendors• Awaiting enrollment

D.5. Insurance

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• None noted
<p><u>Questions, Concerns</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No coverage limits shown; no binder for Acadia• Apparently proposes to be under the JFM insurance umbrella• No CFO bonding identified

D. 6. Food Service

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Want to mitigate their shortcomings by working with good shepherd food bank• Plan on having backup food for children who don't bring their lunch
<p><u>Questions, Concerns</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No food service for a likely demographic that is economically challenged and in need of food support.

D. 7. Closure Protocol

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• None noted
<p><u>Questions, Concerns</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• None noted

Business and Financial Services Summary

Are we convinced that the applicant has operating capital adequate to open the school and for the first years of operation and have a viable sustainable model for the next five years? Describe why or why not.

The review team looks forward to a complete budget reflecting the donated space, otherwise:

- Significant line of credit debt anticipated which dwarfs cash reserve in budget that was presented with no plan for payback
- Line of credit is granted from ESP
- No fundraising plan, though they do have a benefactor with donated building and supposedly submarket renovation cost, which should help.

Does the Finance Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- No, line of credit with ESP and no apparent plan to liquidate it over time.

E. Education Service Providers

Strengths

- Relies on JFM, a known entity within the area and likely population.
- Tab 38 contains terms outlined to serve as the Service Agreement between John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. and ACADIA Academy, Inc. Services areas listed: Nursing Services, IT Services, Payroll, Bookkeeping, Human Resources, Educational Consultation, and Training.

Questions, Concerns

- There is no evidence that Acadia Academy researched education providers to ensure they had the selected the best partners in providing services to the school.
- In Tab 38 the Service Agreement between John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. and ACADIA Academy, Inc. needs to be in more official “legal language” and needs to include arms-length agreement with ESP, no ability to terminate or to find different/cheaper services from other providers.

Does the Education Service Providers Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- Although the ESP has experience that will be beneficial to the school, it is concerning that the board has little latitude to manage the vendor, as shown by lack of an arm's length contract.
- It does to the extent that the implied purpose of the school is to serve the kind of populations that JFM is apparently expert in.
- Board has little latitude in managing the vendor and does not evidence the apparent desire to do so in an arms-length fashion.

Application Summary

Are you convinced that this is a unique viable model that will meet the needs of the students it wishes to serve? Describe why or why not.

- The school's proposed educational model clearly defines how they propose to meet the needs of students in the Lewiston-Auburn area.
- The program is unique and based on researched best practices.
- Untried delivery model that hopes to do too many things with staffing model that is unlikely to be prepared for the special education cost/impact
- Unclear that it will support all Maine Learning Results, especially in subjects outside math and ELA.
- The budget presented may underrepresented likely special education and ELL enrolment
- The application materials demonstrate questionable independence from JFM/MMCC.

- Overall Assessment: Would you recommend this application for further consideration by the Commission? We recommend that the Maine Charter School Commission move this applicant forward to the Public Interview and Hearing phase of the process.

Recommendation: Deny

Approve