

Reviewers' Evaluation for Public Charter School Application

SNOW POND ARTS ACADEMY

October 1, 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

- Solid philosophical grounding (i.e., Paideia approach), all children can learn and merit the best education possible
- Impressive breadth of partnerships
- The school, with a sound mission and vision grounded in education philosophy and research, seeks to support the growth of arts and music in Maine youth, where this state does not have a school totally devoted to the arts.

Questions, Concerns

- Vision statement wording contains cumbersome phrasing that obscures the clarity of meaning regarding the transformative power of the arts in overall education as celebrated by people like Elliot Eisner.

A.2. Academic Program

Strengths

- NESSC Global Best Practices drives curriculum (integrated with arts education)
- Anchored by the Paideia philosophy with its emphasis on core knowledge, inquiry-based/integrated curriculum, etc.
- Standards based (tied to common core and Maine Learning Results – exceeds standards significantly in the arts)
- Strong professional development throughout the year
- The blended model on paper is at the heart of a “gold standard” 21st century education
- Anchored by philosophical base, based on MLR and Common Core, provided evidence of framework for curricula in core subjects, sample lessons

Questions, Concerns

- Maintaining a proper balance between the role of school-based and K12-based teachers in directing and delivering the academic program (some details yet to be resolved with K12 in this regard)
- As a new entity for a charter school, the blended model raised questions regarding how the Snow Pond teachers and the K12 online program would produce integrated curricula. The 10/1/15 interview clarified many concerns; however, Snow Pond and K12 have details to work out.
- For those students at risk of dropping out or not meeting graduation requirements, all that is in the application are 30 minute support sessions, not a full system and structure.

A.3. Special Student Populations

Strengths

- Application shows a realistic understanding of, and healthy respect for, the role special education plays in delivering an effective public education today
- Assumed that 18 % of student body will qualify for special education services
- Understanding of requirements, implementation plans, and policies.
- Use of the positive term “neuro-diverse student” and what these students can add to the learning environment

Questions, Concerns

- No description of discipline procedures for students with disabilities
- Cannot put a cutoff date for referral (April 1 in application)
- Some outdated information in policies and description of basic special education procedures
- Need special education administrator who is not head of school

A.4. Assessment

Strengths

- Components of the comprehensive assessment model (i.e., cyclical assessment cycle and data management system)
- Components of SPAA response to intervention system (i.e., leadership, teaming, curriculum,

use of data, service delivery system, monitoring and action planning, and professional development)

- Role of Power School in the accountability process
- Time built into the schedule to bolster, enrich, remediate and accelerate student learning
- Presented a clear, credible and sound plan for measuring and reporting educational performance and progress of students with local and state assessments.
- Plan describes the cycle of assessment and adjustments necessary for success.
- Philosophy of when students are not succeeding they are not given the right supports.

Questions, Concerns

- K12 role in assessment (balance importance again)
- Timeliness and coordination of student data from K12 and Snow Pond Teachers.

A.5. School Climate and Discipline

Strengths

- Habits of Mind approach is a well-regarded tool and fits with mission of SPAA
- Student problem issues also looked at through instruction, practice, curriculum adjustments, as well as other supports.

Questions, Concerns

- Ensuring that what is laid out on paper is executed with accountability in practice
- Parent engagement, stated as attending performances and conferences, and going to school to talk about career, seems limited. 10/1/15 Interview applicant spoke to having a parent on the Board, a PTA and using Power School to help share communication

Education Plan Summary

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.

- Affirmative on both counts. What is laid out in the application came alive during the interview, and from several different respondents in SPAA leadership community.
- Yes. The Education Plan is compelling and made a strong case for producing a quality program based on educational philosophy, research, assessment, cycle of adjustments and establishing a positive learning climate.

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

- Yes. The employment of the blended model in delivering an integrated curriculum, anchored by the Paideia philosophy, is solidly aligned with the school’s mission and vision.
- The Education Plan supports the vision and mission by creating a sound basis on which to bring the arts and music program to Maine students by relying on a blended program.

Special Note: The one caveat. Successful execution depends heavily on the SPAA-based teachers playing a leadership role in delivering the education program.

B. Organizational Plan

B.1. School Calendar and Daily Schedule

Strengths

- The two-hour daily block for the arts program
- The blended program permits a rich array of curricular and extracurricular offerings
- Meets hours of instruction.
- Aligns with the school mission and vision providing integration of the arts with core curricula and specific, focused arts time of rehearsals and performances

Questions, Concerns

- Adjusting schedule to use adjuncts and allowing for other non-Snow Pond students to attend after-school program

B.2. Student Recruitment and Enrollment

Strengths

- The applicant has spent three years meeting with school and community leaders, prospective families and education partners to assess the overall need and potential reception of SPAA.
- Catchment area evidence of enrollment potential strong (e.g., 280 home schoolers).
- The longstanding reputation of SPCA gives the school a “leg up” on credibility.
- Applicant has built interest through their other programs, discussions with community and school leaders in catchment area.

Questions, Concerns

- Most student recruiting is through existing network. 10/1/15 interview helped to define other avenues.

B.3. Staffing and Human Resources

Strengths

- Lots of early indicators that there will be strong demand from high-quality teacher applicants
- Again, SPCA's longstanding reputation will be a big help in recruiting and retaining a strong faculty for a school with SPAA's mission and vision
- Presents strategies for recruiting staff
- Presents a plan for professional development throughout the year
- Presents a staff performance evaluation plan

Questions, Concerns

- Need development of staff employment policies
- It is not clear that there is time provided at the beginning of school to train in K12 operations and integrated curriculum efforts.

B.4. Pre-Opening Plan

Strengths

- Key opening responsibilities on chart

Questions, Concerns

- A narrative would expand understanding of how pre-opening relates to mission and vision and other programs.

B.5. Management and Operation

Strengths

- The organizational model, while complicated, seems well thought through once explained during the interview. It seems designed to ensure the school's independent operation while staying connected to all other entities in the NEMCA umbrella.
- The lease and shared services agreements seem well designed (e.g., NEMCA will collect the revenue and pay all of the bills for all entities).
- Lists duties for administrating school
- Model for management includes Oversight Committee to address concerns and resolve issues.

Questions, Concerns

- What looks good on paper will work in practice if all entities are committed to the overall mission of the organization and to transparency in all aspects of the operation
- The 10/1/15 interview provided some clarification regarding concerns of relationship with entities of music camp, music school
- Agreements in application will need to be fully communicated

B.6. Community Development

Strengths

- Impressive array of community partnerships stemming from NEMCA's longstanding presence in the region.
- Community partnerships developed by NEMCA programs and relating to the charter school provide a strong component.
- Communication has been established with catchment area school districts to facilitate potential collaborations in arts programming.

Questions, Concerns

- Need to have more information on strategies for informing parents about the school's development.

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.

- Yes. They have already begun effective outreach activities and go into that undertaking with a lot of credibility – i.e., SPCA’s experience and positive reputation.
- Community partnerships developed by other programs and relating to the charter school are strong component.
- The application speaks to recruiting in professional sites, outlines an application process, provides for professional development, and a performance evaluation plan.

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

- Yes. The school’s management and operations plan is an integrated one among entities that share a common cultural commitment.
- The vision and the mission are supported by the management and operations plan through scheduling and hiring appropriate staff.

C. Governance

C. 1. Governing Body

Strengths

- Founders’ Council a good way to strengthen governance without enlarging the board.
- Oversight Committee ensures that the shared services agreement is transparently observed
- Best practices documents from respected sources utilized in drawing up bylaws, establishing board committees, etc.
- Lots of good boilerplate material on governance.
- Academic Excellence Committee a good idea.
- Standards for effective charter school governance are well articulated.
- Charter School operation is consistent with the organization’s overall mission and operation
- Application included Board on Track governance materials.

Questions, Concerns

- New England Music Camp, Snow Pond Music School and Charter School will have organizational relationship. 10/1/15 interview helped to relieve concerns regarding Snow Pond Arts Academy as an independent functioning entity.

C. 2. Governing Board Composition

Strengths

- Eight (8) directors now on way to 15 by the end of the year.
- Rob Moody's experience at MeANS and Good Will Hinckley a plus for SPAA and SPCA because the former has already faced issues similar to those confronting Snow Pond.
- Recruiting efforts to date suggest that the school is primed to attract talented people with the variety of skill sets needed to oversee this ambitious operation.
- Outside group helped recruit talented board members (Bull Moose Group)
- No board members with overlapping membership on any other SPCA entity (helps ensure SPAA independence).
- Composition and membership skill sets of Governing Board members inspire confidence to oversee the operation of a school and maintain its sustainability.
- Board members are aware of their duties and have taken an active part in the application.

Questions, Concerns

- Important to regularly evaluate the performance of the board and school leadership and formalize the process with an annual written assessment that includes evaluating interrelationships between/among the NEMCA entities.

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 school? Describe why or why not.

- Yes. As was evident in the interview, the SPAA board contains members with the kind of varied professional backgrounds essential to good oversight and exercising all other elements of fiduciary responsibility.
- Yes. Resumes of the Board Members demonstrate a diverse and strong skill set and during the 10/1/15 interview financial, educational, and operations questions were directed by the Head of School to specific individuals who showed their capacity and understanding of the issue directed to them.

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

- Yes. Both the organizational chart and makeup of the SPAA board and other NEMCA entities strongly enhance the school's chances for success (e.g., Oversight Committee, skill sets of board members, passion for the mission and vision, etc.).
- Yes. The Governance Plan supports the mission and vision by establishing people with the necessary skill sets and the organizational structure to frame the work.

D. Business and Financial Services

D. 1. Budget

Strengths

- NEMCA oversees all facilities and all aspects of the shared services agreement.
- Targeted grant requests are submitted to avoid overlapping request.s
- While the philanthropic goals/targets are necessarily ambitious to ensure a top-notch school, NEMCA's four plus decade experience strongly suggests that SPAA will be able to meet them. If not met, NEMCA has the capacity to see the school thru until the tide turns.
- Budget priorities are consistent with the mission and the vision of the school with music program well-funded in the budget.
- Evidence that the school leadership understands appropriate financial responsibilities among administration and governing board.

Questions, Concerns

- An operating budget surplus/reserve not shown in year three budget as required because philanthropic targets underreported. Reporting actual results at the end of the fiscal year should ensure the required surplus.

D.2. Financial Management

Strengths

- Oversight Committee ensures that the shared services agreement is transparently observed.
- Rob Moody's experience at MeANS and Good Will Hinckley a plus for SPAA and SPCA because the former has already faced issues similar to those confronting Snow Pond.
- The lease and shared services agreements seem well designed (e.g., NEMCA will collect the revenue and pay all of the bills for all entities.
- Existing trained personnel and systems in place.
- School has a previous superintendent until permanent head of school is hired.

Questions, Concerns

- None noted

D. 3. Facilities

Strengths

- Shared lease and services agreements.
- 40-acre campus serving the NEMCA operating as the SPCA and other entities for 80 years.
- Existing campus and facilities, renovation planned out for winterization and expanded use of space.

Questions, Concerns

- None noted

D. 4. Transportation

Strengths

- Anticipate RSU 18 contract and van service.

Questions, Concerns

- Transportation options for students outside the catchment area not discussed. Lack of transportation may limit participation.

D.5. Insurance

Strengths

- Evidence of Insurance proposals.
- Budget supports insurance expenses.

Questions, Concerns

- None noted

D. 6. Food Service

Strengths

- Using existing NEMC Association, which has past experience, for food service of lunch and snack.

Questions, Concerns

- Did not describe how students who are not able to provide themselves with lunch will be accommodated, plan figures 50% free lunch, 50% will supply own lunch.
- No contingency plans for students requiring special foods due to a medical condition (or accommodations).

D. 7. Closure Protocol

Strengths

- Standard language shows a system of transition in case of a closure.

Questions, Concerns

- Application seems to give responsibility of record transfer to other school districts.

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.

- Yes. NEMC has a history of raising significant resources to fund an ambitious range of programs. SPAA should furnish an attractive fundraising opportunity.
- Snow Pond Arts Academy through its budget and its relationship with NEMC and its capacity for fundraising demonstrates the capacity to have the operating capital needed.

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

- Yes. Its ambitious scope and the NEMC's impressive physical plant offer SPAA a great opportunity to create a top-notch public charter school.
- The Finance Plan supports the vision and the mission with the arts supported in the budget and by an existing facility.

E. Education Service Providers

Strengths

- K12 curriculum matches up well with SPAA's educational philosophy and programmatic ambitions.
- K12 is a known online provider delivering core knowledge content.

Questions, Concerns

- Evidence has not been provided of the ESP's success in serving the needs of arts students.
- The ESP does not provide a detailed explanation of the performance evaluation measures and timelines.
- There remain details to be worked out regarding SPAA and K12 arrangements.
- Unclear as to how K12 will be providing training to the school staff in the one week before school and subsequently in the school year.
- The provision of services by K12 for students with identified special needs has not been addressed.
- The application does not address the relationship between the Governing Board, the school leadership team and K12 or how SPAA will monitor and evaluate the performance of K12 or the internal controls that will guide the process of how the Board and school leadership will ensure fulfillment of performance expectations.

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

- Yes. The K12 curriculum matches up well with the School's philosophy and program.
- Yes. The ESP supports the vision and the mission of the school by addressing core content issues; also, on -the-ground teachers will provide the integration, and both entities will provide data to assess student proficiency and progress in the academic areas specifically.

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.

- Yes. If approved, SPAA will become the first public secondary school in Maine devoted to liberal arts education with a special emphasis on the arts.

- 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