

# The Unique School & Academy Charter (US&A) Commonwealth Charter Prospectus

## I. Charter School Overview; Mission, Vision Statement, Community Description

### IA. MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Unique School & Academy Charter (US&A) is to provide students in Springfield, Massachusetts the academic skills, parental and community encouragement needed to improve and complete their middle and high school educational requirements. This charter school concept is coupled with outside agency partnerships and a comprehensive career plan for each student. The US&A charter will be comprised of three academies and the students enrolled will be aligned with one of the following academies:

- (1) Academic Academy
- (2) Athletic Academy
- (3) Vocational Academy

Through strong organizational ties with the community, collaborations with higher educational institutions, partnerships with businesses and industry and prescribed parental involvement the US&A will provide a rigorous academic and extra curricula program to improve student retention, academic standing, behavioral patterns and graduation rates. This five year charter school project will grow into a high school, beginning in the 2012-2013 school year with two hundred and twenty-five (225) students. The 2012-2013 student enrollments will be comprised of seventy-five (75) students at each grade level in middle school, grades 6-8.

The Unique School & Academy Charter Board of Trustees strongly believes in this innovative educational concept and the old adage, *“it takes a village to raise a child”*. The teaching staff, counselors and administrators will be an integral part of ensuring the success of each student. It is this charter school model and the Massachusetts Department of Education Curriculum Frameworks from which effective learning strategies will be implemented to ensure successful completion of each student’s educational requirements with a plan for their future.

It is the intent of the Unique School & Academy Charter, in the planning year, to carefully develop some fundamental but critical strategies needed for successful school operations. In the planning and development stages specific guidelines and regulations, will be established in written manuals and brochures. These materials will cover aspects on; parental involvement, character building, discipline and leadership, academic success, curricula development, accountability and assessment.

It is within this academic, community, partnership framework concept that the character of the student will be developed. It is the process of assigning more adults per student, community service projects, mentors, and business partners to students that self confidence, esteem and character are built. Intermingled within the US&A model, the curricula, career plans, counselors, advisors, teachers and partners, will help students to establish their self worth and purpose. The charter school will be recognized for its strong community involvement and parental programs. A Family Services/Parent Association Coordinator will be directly responsible for scheduling parent training and workshop sessions, parent/teacher(s) meetings, establishing a database of resourceful family services and implementing other methods to keep parents involved in their child’s educational process. It is imperative that the parents are active participants with their children and the charter school; the Family Services/Parent Association Coordinator will be responsible for facilitating this significant relationship between parent, child and the Unique School & Academy.

### IB. VISION STATEMENT

The Unique School & Academy Charter will be recognized for its organizational involvement and partnerships with the community, businesses and parents (including but not limited to: social service agencies, state and federal government entities, business and industry, post secondary institutions, community, non-profit organizations,

guardians, etc..) These collaborative programs will involve the “*entire village*” to facilitate an educational system that will prepare and educate a workforce of citizens meeting the needs of the 21st century. The charter will be recognized for its work with at-risk, potential non-completers of middle and high school students who will now have the support systems and plans to pursue a career goal or vocational interest upon high school graduation.

Every student entering the US&A will be aligned with one of the following career areas; a) Academic Academy, b) Athletic Academy or c) Vocational Academy. Students will work towards improving their academic standing and mapping out plans for their future. The community and parents will recognize and associate students in this charter as those with; a purpose, students who have pride, character, and a positive outlook on life and their future. Students who were once deemed at-risk or in danger of dropping out will now be part of an innovative educational system that encourages and provides support to succeed, not only in academics but also in achieving their career goals. Students graduating from the Unique School & Academy will walk away with a *high school diploma (or an IEP) and a solid plan for their future.*

Each student will be carefully assessed based on their individual learning patterns and abilities in order to determine the appropriate strategies and academic plan. The performance based learning strategies outlined by the Massachusetts Secondary and Elementary State Department of Education will be utilized within this charter school. The US&A Charter will be identified with its community involvement, the staff’s organizational structure and its ability to organize internal and external collaborative educational programs and partnerships that improve students’ retention, outcomes, and high school completion rates

External collaborations are important but more importantly will be the commitment of internal staff and the selection of qualified, dedicated and committed teachers and administrators. Internal meetings and training sessions with administrators, teachers, social workers, academic and career counselors, parents, and support staff will be held periodically to ensure that all concerned parties are informed and have the same agenda for the students’ achievement and the Charter School mission. Teachers will be treated as professionals and made to feel a part of the entire educational process. Their views and suggestions will be shared and valued, thought processes, assessment of students’ learning strategies will help everyone work together for the common goal of the student. It is the intent of the US&A to have the professional adult/student ratio that will far exceed that which is generally assigned to students in public school settings.

#### **IC. DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMUNITY (IES) TO BE SERVED**

A large percentage of urban schools are failing to educate the students they serve. The perception is that urban students are floundering in an environment of disruption, violence, decaying buildings, poor quality teaching and limited resources. This perception has been fueled by various reports and testimony about conditions in urban schools, which have based their findings on data and observations gathered from selected urban schools. According to these reports, students in urban schools have lower levels of achievement, completion of high school and higher education and employment. (Carnegie Foundation, 1988; Louis and Miles, 1990). These conditions are also prevalent in the Springfield area and within the School District. The US&A plans to address the realities and counteract the socio-economic conditions that plague urban communities and the youth that live within them.

The school will have a strict discipline policy, all of which will be clearly outlined, reviewed by students and parents. There will be low tolerance/no tolerance for misbehavior and such actions will be addressed immediately and properly to reduce reoccurrence. These procedures will be reviewed and acknowledged as part of the enrollment process. The US&A will assess realistically the community and personal situations of each student. With these factors taken into consideration methods, strategies, prevention and intervention techniques to help students overcome these types of barriers will be applied within this charter.

The US&A will address many of the socio-economic issues that interfere with students’ resources and learning abilities. More than a decade ago education historian Diane Ravitch warned that “we must take care not to build into

public policy a sense of resignation that children's socioeconomic status determines their destiny. Public policy must relentlessly seek to replicate schools that demonstrate the ability to educate children from impoverished backgrounds instead of perpetuating and rewarding those that use the pupil's circumstances as a rationale for failure". Now is the time to heed this advice. To close the nation's achievement gap, we must replace the culture of excuse in our schools with a culture of accountability that works relentlessly to provide high-needs students with effective teachers (J.I. Klein, 1990).

From the view of city school administrators the challenges of education for today's urban youth are daunting, with more and more students presenting problems such as "poverty, limited-English proficiency, family instability, discrimination, disability, malnutrition and poor health" (Council of the Great City Schools 1994, pviii). Lack of parental support and unsafe communities are also cited as detrimental to urban students (Carnegie Foundation 1988). Urban schools themselves are often portrayed as decaying and crowded facilities that are inadequately staffed with overworked teachers lacking the basic tools of teaching, who must function under poor leadership in an overly bureaucratic and anonymous environment (Louis and Miles 1990; Walker 1989 Carnegie Foundation 1988).

The Unique School & Academy Charter design concept is an innovative program that will operate within the public education system and provide opportunities for various types of learning strategies and assessments. This charter will provide parents and students a viable option within the Springfield School District. Administrators, teachers and staff of the US&A will be part of an educational system that provides an alternative innovative method of instruction, school configuration and management. All facility and staff will be appraised of the Charter's academic and academy theory and its utilization of performance-based strategies and assessments. The US&A Charter's Board of Trustees, teachers, administrators and staff will be held accountable for the educational achievement of the students. This charter will introduce to the Springfield community an educational strategy and school/business alliance process that has proved successful in numerous districts in New York and will prove to be a model that can be duplicated in Massachusetts. Additionally, the Board of Trustees and partners will be a source of and provide resources to other avenues of funding and development of grant initiatives to sustain the financial aspects of the charter.

### ***Demographics and Economic Framework***

The City of Springfield is located in western Massachusetts along the east bank of the Connecticut River. Settled in 1636, Springfield is the cultural, commercial, and health center of western Massachusetts. Springfield was incorporated as a town in 1641 and as a city in 1852. In 2000 the City had a population of 152,082, making it the third largest city in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the fourth largest in New England. Springfield has the third largest school district in Massachusetts.

### ***School Lunch/Income***

81.6% of all students receive free or reduced price meals. The median household income is \$34,090.; the median income for families is \$41,478. Families make up 62 percent of the households in Springfield; this figure includes both married-couple families (31 percent) and other families (30 percent). "One of the most significant factors influencing high school dropout rates is family income. According to the U.S. Department of Education, students from low-income families are six times more likely to drop out of high school than students from high-income families." (Measuring High School Drop Out Rates, Hampton Road VA,/U.S. Department of Education)

### ***Graduation and Drop-out rates***

The Springfield District graduation rate in 2008 was 54.5% as compared to the Massachusetts rate at 81.5%. The drop out rate for the District is 9.6% while the Massachusetts dropout rate is only 2.9%. "With the federal government ready to invest billions of dollars into turning around low-performing schools, the time is right to form the federal, state and local partnerships needed to transform or replace the low graduation-rate high schools that drive the nation's drop-out crisis" (Bonds-Staple and Dodd, State's High School graduation rates in 'Crisis' July, 2009)

### ***Educational Attainment -HS/Citizenship***

Thirty-six percent (36%) of the population 25 years and older have obtained High School Diploma/GED. At least 24% of the population has not graduated from school or obtained a diploma or GED. Of the foreign born population 52% are naturalized U.S. citizens and 47% are not U.S. citizens.

**Language**

Among people at least five years old living in Springfield in 2006-2008, 32 percent spoke a language other than English at home. Of those speaking a language other than English at home 79 percent spoke Spanish and 21 percent spoke some other language. 46 percent reported that they did not speak English “very well”.

**Ethnic Makeup/District Population/Grade Levels**

The ethnic makeup of the Springfield School District (total population 25,360 students) consists of:

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Population %</b>
Hispanic	54.8%
African American	23.2%
White	15.7%
Multicultural	4%
Asian	2.2%
Native American	0.1%

The Springfield Public School District serves grades K-12 with a total student population of 25,360. The school district levels and number of schools are as follows;

<b>School Levels</b>	<b># of Schools</b>
Elementary K-5	30
Elementary/Middle K-8	2
Middle School	7
High School	5
Academy for Excellence K-12 one (1) K-5, two (2) - 6-8, three (3) 9-12 and two (2) college prep	8

The city also has several private schools and the Roman Catholic Dioceses of Springfield operates five catholic elementary schools in the city and others elsewhere in the diocese. The Dioceses operates Cathedral High School, the most prominent Catholic high school in the area.

There are currently four charter schools in the Springfield Public Schools system. The charter school enrollment for the 2008-2009 school year was 2,512. The charter schools and grade levels are as follows:

<b>Charter School</b>	<b>Grades</b>
The Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Excellence	K-5
The New Leadership Charter	K-8
Robert M. Hughes Academy Charter *	K-8
Sabis International Charter	K-12

\* Robert M. Hughes Academy Charter license in question.

**Characteristics of the Springfield School District**

The Springfield District is one of the ten districts that form the cohort of the Commissioner’s Districts. These districts were identified because they share the following characteristics:

- 10,000 or more students
- highest poverty and subgroup enrollment in the state
- three or more schools in Corrective Action or Restructuring in the aggregate for ELA, math or both
- in Corrective Action either in the aggregate or for subgroups as a district

The Commissioner’s Districts are believed to be large enough to sustain an infrastructure to manage, oversee, and support the improvement of standards based teaching and learning for all students in their districts.

The Springfield District is a large district with 30 elementary schools of which 1/3 of the schools are reported to be transformation schools and will receive extra assistance from the DESE. The Springfield District services a large minority community with over 75% of the population being Hispanic and African American. The graduation rate in 2008 was just barely 55% while the state rate is over 80%. There are currently four charter schools in Springfield serving approximately 2,500 students. Since 2007-2008 the Office of Urban and Commissioner’s District (UDA) has been charged with providing customized support to the Springfield District and others to enhance their capacity to support high need schools.

**Academic Performance (SAT scores and report on elementary schools)**

The SAT average scores for the District in Verbal, Math, and Writing fell below the State and National Averages and in some cases the Springfield District fell as much as 100 points below.

SAT	District	State
Writing	420	513
Math	423	525
Verbal	425	514

This statistical information is based on the 2008-2009 school year.

It is the Founding group and Board of Trustees’ belief that **all** children should be afforded a quality educational system. “No child should be left behind” because of their socio-economic status, language spoken, ethnicity, or disability. Students’ needs are nationwide and children in urban areas born into poor economic circumstances seem to suffer even more and should not be denied a good education. Several board members are from Massachusetts and the Springfield area, with strong ties to the community and a desire to be part of something positive. They are inspired by this innovative concept and have contributed ideas, time, expertise and strategies for the design of this charter. Members of the board, the founding group and partners bring their knowledge and commitment and desire to be a guiding force in this initiative. This diverse group will assist with the formation and makeup of the academic, operational, athletic, vocational, parental, financial and other configurations of the US&A. The members of the US&A board have in one way or another experienced working with this population, are a product of this environment, represents the ethnic groups served in Springfield, has proven success working with this targeted group, are concerned about the future of all youth and are willing to step forth to make some change.

In brief, the following gives some background for the selection of the community and the founder’s ability to serve this particular area. It is the Founder, Lisa M. Harris’, years of successful work experience creating school/business partnerships for youth at-risk in districts in New York that inspires her to want to implement these and other techniques within a charter school. Ms. Harris’ work experience has been straddled between two entities, business

and education, for the development of partnerships that enhance learning through vocational and educational strategies. Mr. Torrel Harris, Member of the Board, lived in Springfield, MA during his middle school years, at that time his parents were separated and he was sent to live with friends and relatives. He can easily attest to the statement that *"it takes a village to raise a child"*; Springfield has always been his home. In the late 1990's when his apparel business, licensed product of the National Basketball Association (NBA) and National Football League (NFL), was doing very well Mr. Harris decided to invest in a community that invested in him. He purchased a large four story building (See Attachment #1) with the intention of expanding his company and to provide employment opportunities that would help the economic growth of Springfield. Currently, he would like to utilize and develop this space for the Unique School and Academy Charter. His personal connection with the community, the desire to help youth at risk youth, the valuable expertise of the board, founding members and partners, and an opportunity to build an exemplary educational program and create the most appropriate environment briefly foretells the strong desire to have an impact in this community.

The innovative methods to be used by the proposed charter school diverge from the district in several ways. The organizational structure will be different; the hiring and selection process of qualified teachers and staff will also differ. The level of coordination and involvement of the teaching staff and team teaching, training and professional sessions all year are other aspects that will be offered at the US&A and differ from what is offered in the district. The academy concept and coordination of strong organizational ties with outside agencies will also be at variance from what is offered in the public school. The extended school day, extra curricula activities, career goals for every student and a plan to achieve them are also methods that will be implemented to address the needs of this student population.

Today many charter schools look to recruit the best students and those seeking to enter college. The Unique School & Academy Charter is looking for that less certain student, one that may be a potential drop out, that has poor attendance and lacks a real interest in school or education. The US&A anticipates the challenge to turn a student's life around and will be that system, the catalysts in the community that encourages and represents a motivating force. The Unique Charter will work closely with parents, teachers, support staff and the community to help change students' outlook on life and education.

In a most recent survey taken in Springfield, questions were asked pertaining to the Springfield School District and the Charter schools in the District. Six questions were asked and rated on a scale of 1 thru 5, where one rated the lowest score and 5 rated the best or excellent. The results showed that the majority of parents were not pleased with the school system and several acknowledged that the graduation rates are very low. When asked to rate the charter schools most thought that they were good but there were not many charter schools in the area. When asked about the concept of a charter school with a career focus and business partnerships many gave the score of a 4 or 5, very good and excellent. A Commonwealth charter is necessary in order for this school concept to exist or succeed because of the need to be flexible, to be innovative and involve the parents and community to a larger degree than that of a public school.

## **II. How will the school demonstrate academic success?**

### **IIA. EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

The core beliefs and values of the Unique School & Academy Charter is that *it takes a village to raise a child* and all members of the community need to support the educational system of our youth, particularly parents. Our beliefs are that if a student is situated in the right learning environment, has the correct learning tools and resources, a support system of family and other positive adults, attends a structured and organized educational system with a devoted and committed team of teachers and interacts with the community at large...then, all students can indeed learn and become successful members of society.

"During the past decade, the emergence of a global marketplace and the use of new technologies in the workplace have dramatically changed the skills needed to make U.S. businesses competitive and productive (Carnevale, 1992;

Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), 1991). In addition, research in the cognitive sciences has produced new insights into how people learn most effectively both in school and at work (Berryman & Bailey, 1992; Resnick, 1987). School programs—including school-to-work programs—that reflect indicators of meaningful, engaged learning have great potential for preparing all youth with the competencies that they will need in pursuing their careers.

As Berryman and Bailey (1992) state:

“Economic and educational institutions face virtually the same challenge. That challenge is to organize their activities, whether learning or production, to capture the power of the fact that human beings are naturally sense-making, problem-solving, and environmentally interactive. This means that educators and employers have to re-conceptualize human potential, thought, and action.” (p. 12)

These developments have fundamentally altered how schools and businesses interact. School curricula must be adjusted to reflect the skills that every student will need to enjoy satisfying, productive employment experiences and to face the challenges in the workplace. Schools need to have real-world settings through which students can develop and pursue meaningful career and education plans after high school. Teachers are finding that school-to-work transition programs and transforming K-12 classrooms; teachers must now integrate academic skills with those required for successful employment.” (D’Amico, From School-to-Work—and back Again, 1994)

The founding’s group core beliefs and values about education are that the student needs must be assessed and addressed carefully. A real look at the children, their families, environment and learning abilities needs to be thoroughly embraced to provide the right learning approach. Methods of learning for children in poor urban areas needs to be altered in a manner that is meaningful to the population it serves. The middle school will begin with building character and leadership qualities, a solid academic plan coupled with community and career exploration, then the selection of an academy and career focus in high school. The follow through with a future plan mapped out is a much needed educational strategy for the students in Springfield.

The US&A Charter will work with the community to create a culture of success. Administrators and teachers will work together to make the curriculum relevant for the students by addressing their academic needs and career goals. Support staff, counselors, teachers, and coordinators will foster relationships with students, their families, businesses and the community to ensure that students are attaining their academic requirements and career goals. “Nationwide, nearly one in three U.S. high school students fails to graduate with a diploma. In total, approximately 1.2 million students drop out each year- averaging 7,000 every school day or one every 26 seconds. Among minority students, the problem is even more severe with nearly 50 percent of African American and Hispanic students not completing high school on time.” (Garland and Wilber, High School Graduation Rates Rise in Some Major U.S. Cities, But Significant Work Remains to Curb Dropout Crisis, April 2009) These statistics are also reflective of the graduation rates in Springfield. The Springfield High School graduation rate in 2008 was 54%, a little more than half.

“Partnerships with businesses, non-profits or other community groups offer schools an opportunity to succeed in achieving their goals.....Most of the successful, long lived partnership programs have a formal structure; written guidelines; a partnership handbook; comprehensive databases; evaluation tools; recognition programs; and policies about such issues as confidentiality, commercialism and safety.” (Daniel Fund, 2007). Since the US&A will begin in 2012, the planning year will allow for the development of a formal structured school/business partnership plan. Written guidelines and a partnership handbook will be established to ensure that this component of the program is implemented and carried out properly. In that the partnership programs are an essential part of this charter school concept close attention will be paid to formulating a solid document intended to yield results addressing our mission and goals of the charter.

First and foremost is to establish our students with the core base academic foundation (described in Part II. D – Curriculum and Instruction) needed for all students to learn, meet their educational requirements and to function as members of society. Based on studies and strategies utilized for partnership programs and effective dropout

prevention techniques, the US&A plans to implement the following systems:

### **Mentoring/tutoring**

Mentoring is a one-to-one caring supportive relationship between a mentor and a mentee that is based on trust. A strong mentoring component will be developed for the students in the Vocational Academy. Career mentors will be assigned to each student, for example; if a student wants to become a mechanic or a restaurant manager a mentor will be assigned to the student in that or similar career. Tutoring is also a one-to-one activity, focuses on academics and is an effective way to address specific needs such as reading, writing and math competencies. Tutors will be assigned to all students needing academic assistance. The tutoring program will be held in the morning and after school providing our students with an extended day.

### **Service Learning**

Service Learning connects meaningful community service experiences with academic learning. This teaching/learning method promotes personal and social growth, career development, and civic responsibility and can be a powerful vehicle for effective school reform at all grade levels. All students in the US&A will be required to participate in 10-15 hours (or in some cases 15+ hours) of community service each year. These assignments will be organized by the school through the administration, coordinators and counseling staff.

### **Alternative Schooling**

Alternative schooling provides potential dropouts a variety of options that can lead to graduation, with programs paying special attention to the students' individual social needs and the academic requirements for a high school diploma. Alternative schooling methods such as co-operative education, work study, internships and blended college courses will be organized as an option for students with varying learning disabilities needing to meet their academic requirements.

### **After school Opportunities**

Many schools provide after-school and summer enhancement programs that eliminate information lost over the summer months and inspire interest in a variety of areas. Such experiences are especially important for students at risk of school failure. College-Bridge programs, athletic training, community service, co-operative education, internships, summer camp activities, tutoring, clubs, family training, workshops and other means of after school programs will be available for the student body.

### **Family Engagement**

Research consistently finds that family involvement has a direct, positive effect on children's achievement and is the most accurate predictor of a student's success in school. Parents will need to be a part of the US&A educational process and rules will be written and put into effect prior to the first day of school within the *Parental Agreement* (will stipulate the parents role in the educational process). These guidelines and procedures will also be established within the planning year of the charter school development.

### **Professional Development**

Teachers and staff who work with youth at-risk of academic failure, need to feel supported and need to have an avenue that they can continue to develop skills, techniques, and learn about innovative strategies. Administrators, teachers and staff will be required to participate in training and professional development sessions to ensure that their methods of training are current and relevant to the population it serves. The teaching staff will be made to feel a part of the system, a contributing factor to the delivery of services and they will be valued and treated as professionals.

### **Active Learning**

When educators show students that there are different ways to learn, students find new and creative ways to solve problems, achieve success, and become lifelong learners. Learning materials and methods will vary and different techniques will be utilized for different student learners.

### **Educational Technology**

Technology offers some of the best opportunities for delivering instruction that engages students in authentic learning, addresses multiple intelligences, and adapts to student's learning styles. If we are indeed preparing our students for the future, then the technology must reflect the real world also. Having the planning time will allow us to raise, solicit, write grants, and seek funding for the money needed to purchase the appropriate technological equipment.

### **Individualized Instruction**

A customized individual learning program for each student allows teachers flexibility with the instructional program and extra curricula activities. For those students having various learning or other disabilities, customized learning programs will be designed for their needs. Academy Coordinators will ensure that all students are actively engaged in specialized instruction.

### **Making the most of the wider community**

Students who come to school bring traces of a wider community; when students leave school, either before or after graduation, they return to that community. The school should not be isolated within the walls of the school building. Effective efforts to keep students in school take advantage of these links with the wider community. This is the partnership concept that will allow the US&A an opportunity to make the most of the wider community and engage the students properly into the fold.

### **Systemic renewal**

Systemic renewal calls for a continuing process of evaluation of goals and objectives related to school policies, practices, and organizational structures as they impact a diverse group of learners. The renewal process will be written into the school calendar and check off points for evaluating staff, student learners, curriculum effectiveness, achievement of charter goals, budget analysis, state department regulations, etc..

### **School-Community Collaboration**

When all groups in a community provide collective support to the school, a strong infrastructure sustains a caring environment where youth can thrive and achieve. Partnerships with non profit and community based organizations will help to build a strong infrastructure and build support from the community.

### **Career and Technical Education**

A quality guidance program is essential for all students. School-to-work programs recognize that today's youth need specific skills to prepare them for the larger demands of today's workplace. Each of the Academies will have Counselors, Academy Coordinators and a Social Worker assigned to the program and in turn assigned to the students within the programs. The Counselors and Coordinators will ensure that each student's academic and extra curricula plan and schedule is fulfilling.

### **Safe Schools**

A comprehensive violence prevention plan, including conflict resolution, must deal with potential violence as well as crisis management. Violence prevention means providing daily experiences at all grade levels that enhance positive social attitudes and effective interpersonal skills in all students. Partnerships with law enforcement agencies, the Police Department, social service agencies, health services, the court systems etc. will help to organize activities related to safe schools, prevention plans and conflict resolution methods.

## **IIB. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

The primary goal of the Unique Charter is to ensure that the students attending this charter are meeting and/or exceeding State Education academic requirements. The Massachusetts Curriculum frameworks, research based practices and programs will be utilized as the primary base for all subject areas and teaching strategies. These educational frameworks will embrace the mission and educational philosophy of the Unique School & Academy Charter (US&A). The Curriculum programs utilized in this charter will address reading and writing in all subject areas; speaking, listening and vocabulary; innovative comprehensive literature and adaptive technological support (smart boards, interactive computer programs, digital and print sources) will be current and adaptable to the world of work.

Curriculum programs will focus on differentiated instruction to apply techniques applicable and effective to teaching students with various academic needs, challenges, and performance levels in math and science. The curriculum will be enhanced to incorporate key concepts and sequential information to improve and complete the middle and high school educational requirements. The various subject areas will include a pyramid type structure of basic to

chronological sub-categorical areas of interest that will facilitate teachers in planning appropriate innovative techniques. These techniques will involve the collaborative efforts with teachers in other subject areas as well as with business, industry, and higher educational partners. This internal and external development process will integrate and enhance the curriculum frameworks, relevant to the real world and the specific academy.

The US&A proposes to begin a middle school charter, in the fall of 2012 that will progress into a high school within the next five years. Teachers will be required to meet periodically within departments and with other subject matter specialists. The teaching staff will be made aware of subjects being taught in the various departments and the status of the students in those subjects. The staff and administrators will work towards achieving the US&A goals of; improving high school graduate rates, attendance, SAT scores and fostering students' successful entering college or gainful employment. The curriculum is the foundation that enriches the strengths and improves the weaknesses in our students through standardized-based instruction, student portfolios, character building, student relationships, and support from the faculty, staff, parents, community, and businesses.

An effective curriculum starts with the basic educational frameworks offered by the Massachusetts State Education Department coupled with character building, leaderships, parental and community support. In order to provide students with a high quality standard-based curriculum this charter will comply with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks that support equity, assessment, and professional development. English, Math, Science, English Language Learners (ELL) advisory and preparation pilot programs are instrumental in organizing and creating viable curriculum that addresses the academic, technical and employment skills necessary to compete in higher education and high performance workplaces. "Advisory programs can play a critical role in a school's overall academic and student support services plan. Advisories are a primary vehicle for creating a more personalized learning environment where all students are well known by at least one adult." (Educators for Social Responsibility – ERS, 1982) It is the intent of the US&A to utilize the advisory programs to ensure that the students have the attention and support of the staff and to ensure that the ratio of student per adult far exceeds that which is provided in public school educational systems.

The Unique School & Academy Charter embraces an academy theory where students will select a specific career focus and be aligned with one of the academies consisting of the (1) Academic Academy, (2) Athletic Academy, or (3) Vocational Academy. The academies are within the charter and ultimately when a student reaches the ninth grade they will have selected the academy of which they will begin their career path. The Academy Coordinators will coordinate relationships and ties with pertinent resources that will assist students in achieving their academic and career goals. Each student will select one of the three academies to improve their skills and maintain success in the curriculum-based programs.

The English Language Arts (ELA) will incorporate Massachusetts English Language Arts Curriculum Framework (MELACF) and Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). The English Language Arts curriculum program will include phonological awareness, decoding, encoding, oral and silent reading, vocabulary definitions, semantic associations, morphological and syntactical structures, literal and critical thinking literary passages, rephrasing literal and inferential language. Class instruction will include a multi-sensory approach, such as auditory organization, phonological segmentation and blending, story sequential recall through visualizing, writing, and comprehensive group discussions. Visual, auditory and tactile techniques will help students learn comprehensive strategies that match their learning style. For example, a student might have difficulty decoding the grapheme and associating the consonant-vowel combinations. The student might learn best through vocabulary, picture imagery, or motor feedback to help the student recall and blend the phoneme patterns. Teachers will meet and work together to

identify the most appropriate learning styles for all students particularly for those students who have learning disabilities.

"Effective learning in the classroom depends on the teacher's ability ..." (Ericksen, 1978, p. 3), therefore a stringent selection process for qualified teachers will be used in the interview and recruitment process for the US&A. The teacher's instructional process in the classroom will provide opportunities for students to approach and explore reading and writing through auditory organization, memory, visualizations, and group discussions. The curriculum format and sequential procedure will include listening and speaking forums so that oral expression can be used for measuring the student's contextual knowledge of the topic. In the classroom, the students work in small groups to exchange ideas and express their interpretation to literature and answer questions. Research shows the small or large group provides a forum for students to actively participate, exchange ideas, and ask pertinent questions. This interactive exchange is a learning venue to stimulate the minds, "challenge each others' ideas and responses; create new responses; teachers providing support during discussions and group work by moving from group to group; modeling questions and comments that will cause deeper discussion and analysis; encouraging questions and challenges that cause students to think more deeply."(The Office of Educational Research and Improvement 'OERI', U.S. Department of Education, May 2000 support Judith A. Langer with Elizabeth Close, Janet Angelis, and Paula Preller -The Center on English Learning & Achievement 'CELA')

When the teacher acknowledges and validates the students' verbal output it reflects intellectual knowledge that will serve as a catalyst to encourage the students to write and expand their informational and creative ideas on paper. When the students' literary knowledge is appreciated, the students will be motivated to approach writing structures, formats, and editing of written work. Oral expression links to written expression in all subject areas. Modeling, scripts of formats, preparation, repetition, and positive reinforcement, and constructive feedback are the components to stimulate listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in the classroom. When the reading foundation is stable, the students' willingness, motivation, and skills, takes them on a journey to social studies, math problem solving, science, novels, poetry, and writing. When students are able to read their written language, their writing style evolves into reflecting internal and experiential knowledge. Comprehensive writing is important in every aspect of the English Language Arts. The Listening and Reading Story passages require students to write their interpretative knowledge, compare and contrast, or make predictions and inferences about the underlying meaning, or message in the passage. "Whatever level of motivation our students bring into the classroom, will be transformed for better or worse, by what happens in that classroom." ([Jossey-Bass](#), 09/01/99) The Unique School & Academy Charter theme "it takes a village to raise a child" coupled with character building reinforces the importance of motivating at-risk students with a team of teachers, administrators, counselors, and advisory programs.

## **IIC. ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

### **C. Assessment System**

The students who attend the Unique School & Academy Charter must have opportunity to be competitive, realistic and productive about the educational standards implemented in Massachusetts. Our educational philosophy for all students, including LEP/ESL students, is the same with different approaches based on informal and formal assessments. The school advocates a balance and thoughtful attention to influential applications of classroom assessment. Formative assessment practices have a positive impact on students' motivation to engage and learn. Our students' performances are measured based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework standards. Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) measures performance of students and this meets the requirements of the Education Reform Law (1993).

The Principal and the Assistant Principal are primarily responsible for scheduling and informing the teachers of the calendar dates and preparation time given for state assessments. The Counselors reinforces the timeline for practice tests to be reviewed and implemented by subject area teachers. The specialists, counselors, school psychologist and special education coordinator will review the lists of students who have disabilities, special accommodations and

modifications. They will also review of LEP/ESL students who will participate in the MCAS. Once the lists are compiled, the Assistant Principal coordinates with the specialists and the students who need flexible settings, testing modifications and the teacher ratio for each class during testing.

Normative data from other standardized tests will allow educators to compare the accuracy and consistency in students' performance. Massachusetts State Department of Education releases test and re-test items from its comprehensive assessment system, MCAS, which provides our students opportunities to practice. "Socrato.com" is a web-based test prep and assessment site, which features tests in multiple grades to prepare for MCAS. Teachers can upload their own questions and track students' progress. Pre-tests will be made to emulate the areas focused on in the MCAS. It will highlight the parts of the test that students need to review and pinpoint the areas of relative strengths and weaknesses.

An effective classroom assessment system needs to rely on assessments that meet standards of quality in order to work well, and addresses MCFS. The team of teachers, coordinators and specialists need the skill and knowledge to collect accurate evidence of students' learning profile, and effectively promote further instruction toward the state standards in ELA and Math assessments. The Unique School & Academy Charter will be devoted to providing a nurturing, informative and realistic "teaching climate" in the classroom. It is important for directors, coordinators, counselors, specialists and teachers to establish a communication network some examples of this to be implemented will be planning periods with students and/or team members; "e-boards" from each teacher that show their students the syllabus, daily class schedules, and homework assignments leading to quizzes, unit tests, or rubric chart for essay writing, and reports. Small group discussions, and peer team meetings are available to impress upon students the importance and purpose of informal and MCS assessments, and develop study plans for them to practice their skills on the computer, or during study group discussions.

The MCAS indicates all students must be tested, which includes students with disabilities and Limited English Proficient students (LED)/English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL). The Education Reform Law requires tenth grade students to fulfill local requirements and pass tests in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics as one stipulation of eligibility for a high school diploma. In addition, the MCAS program assesses the progress of school districts with the objective of the "No Child Left behind Law" that all students will be proficient in reading and math. Spanish-speaking LEP students in grade 10 who are in school for less than three years and can read and write near grade level in Spanish, can take the English/Spanish version of the Mathematics test. Students may write their answers in English or Spanish, but this does not apply to ELA. LEP students, who participated in MCAS, must take the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA) tests in reading, writing, speaking, and listening every year. The US&A advocates a balance and thoughtful attention to influential applications of classroom assessments. Formative assessment practices have a positive impact on students' motivation to engage and learn.

When students understand the intended learning and the assessment criteria, and receive practical, accurate and descriptive feedback, students relate assessments to purpose and self-regulation of progress and mastery. An extension of formative assessment goes beyond providing the teacher with useful information. It involves students into the equation as important users of assessment results.

"It takes a village to raise a child" is an African proverb embraced by the US&A because the charter's foundation revolves around "team motivation, team involvement", and progress to analyze, and modify approaches and preparations in the school day. When our students learn from our examples and practices of professional commitment, they will embrace the hard work discipline to prepare for internal and external assessments. The faculty and staff our role models to set the "Can Do" levels for all ages. Teachers, coordinators, counselors and specialists need to relate and motivate all students to have a purpose in their educational, vocational, and athletic experiences. All three academies require motivation to self-improve in character and exceed expectations. The mission is to prepare students with the assistance of coordinators, counselors, and teachers who are in the same "village" of knowledge to educate our students at of all levels abilities.

Coordinators, counselors, specialists, and teachers will review the purpose of each assessment and the way it measures and determines students' skill levels and witness the process of improvement. The students' performance level on formal and informal assessments will determine their level of participation in classes, athletic, or vocational programs. The faculty and staff will clearly state the requirements at the middle school level that will affect the eligibility for a high school diploma. (e.g., create a rubric that complies with the MCF). Another process is to use an appropriate assessment method (e.g., selected response, essay, performance assessment, or personal communication) with procedures that ensure the accuracy of results. It is important to communicate effectively the results to maximize further learning. The final step will involve students where appropriate in the assessment process (e.g., checklist of rules to organize writing, follow the "four step" math method for problem solving, and have "error review" sessions in order to discuss and explain the types of mistakes that were made on a given test).

The MCAS examines students in all public and charter schools across the Commonwealth to guarantee that schools are meeting the standards set by the Massachusetts Department of Education, which includes ELA and Math. However, other measurements are used to assess middle school students, as a scale it is easily adapted to address specific program outcomes. This system, called Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) is a computerized test in the subjects of math, language usage and reading. At least twice each year, students in grades 6-8 will be able to take these tests. The data collected will help teachers instruct students according to their individual levels of performance.

There are portfolios with the accumulation of their academic achievements that relate to nonacademic events in their community. Vocational, Academic, and Athletic Counselors will administer a profile checklist on paper or online to fill out and assess students' areas of interests and schedule onsite and off site experiences. Students' character building, peer support, communication, sportsmanship, and motivational skills will be measured while participating in after-school programs and clubs. Students' participation in community service, volunteer work in different designated businesses of interests, sports and school extra-curricular activities or fund-raising events improves students' social exchanges and judgment. These activities address and compare expectations versus performance in an academic and nonacademic learning environment. After their career development experiences, students return to school to evaluate their level of motivation, commitment, and responsibilities in nonacademic settings in comparison to academic forums. The counselors will review the students' potential and performance through a survey completed by both students and adults to assess their productivity and behavioral patterns. The results can be as a pre-programmatic assessment and as a measure of progress during implementation (e.g., create a 42-question survey, with 25 items related to perceptions of students, and 17 items for perceptions of adults. Five-point Likert-type scale responses – "almost never to almost always").

Quantitatively and qualitatively, immediate feedback to students are imperative to keep make the performance measurement relevant to building their foundation and excelling to the next level and prepare for MCAS. The structure of progress is the immediate feedback, weekly assignment grades, monthly progress review, and quarterly rubric measurement of overall performance in school. Narrowing the achievement gap is widely recognized as one of the biggest challenges in public education. The school is relevant to our students' quality of life, through college interns, mentors, and community service and business partnerships. All students will have a caring, supportive environment at school and in the community. Students' feedback is a subjective, but essential, component of the measurement of the school's mission and performance.

When students understand the intended learning and assessment criteria, and receive practical, accurate and descriptive feedback, students relate assessments to purpose and self-regulation of progress and mastery. An extension of formative assessment goes beyond providing the teacher with useful information. It brings students into the equation as important users of assessment results. This is assessment for learning, in which students are intentionally involved in the entire assessment process.

Educators understand that the middle level education is the center of learning and engaging students in ways that allow them to assume responsibility for their own success. All students can be involved in their own assessment by identifying the attributes of a good performance, using a rubric to analyze strong and weak anonymous work

samples. Our students learn to adapt a variety of strategies to self –improve and evaluate their performances. Partnership with their teachers to set goals on planning for learning based on current test results.

**Standardized assessment tools:** The US&A will administer standardized tests for the following six reasons: First, the tests will provide a baseline for measuring student achievement (e.g.; informal tests, screening tools provide a gross measurement of students' abilities in cognitive, language, and core curriculum areas). Second, the tests will measure each student's yearly growth. Priority strategies for professional development link directly to the district's curriculum plan (e.g., districts' literacy plans). The design and delivery of curriculum, includes the use of data from long and short-term assessments to guide core instruction for all students and supplemental, or intensive intervention in the general education program for struggling readers in grades 6-10. The integration of language and literacy and content knowledge in science, history/social sciences, mathematics, and literary writing are across domains. Foundations of literacy professional development, includes phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, motivation, writing, and language development. Students will need to demonstrate their abilities on standardized tests such as MCAS, SAT, and GRE, therefore the staff will ensure that students are equipped with strategies to help them learn and perform well on standardized tests.

Age-appropriate assessments, such as literacy and reading awareness assessment for grades six through nine will be administered. These assessments will provide the school with sound baseline data about students. Writing and mathematics assessments will also be administered to new students to determine their level and various learning needs. All students will take these developed standardized tests each spring, and progress will be measured from one year to the next. The school will prepare written analysis of the results of these assessments and this information will be shared with their parents. Teachers will document that they have used the analysis of the assessments to accomplish appropriate class placements and internships. The Principal and/or Assistant Principal will work with the staff to make revisions based on updated changes the state made in assessments, curriculum frameworks, and instruction.

**Measure annual student progress:** The school will assess and reassess English language speaking and listening proficiency by administering the Massachusetts English Language Assessment -Oral (MELA-O). The Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA) to assess and reassess reading and writing will also be administered to the students. Content-based standardized tests will be utilized to pinpoint the particular academic needs of students whose academic progress is erratic or belabored. For example, these tests might identify phonological, sound/symbol, or classification problems in that our students have and adversely influences reading.

Teachers will receive test results and have "grade level" meetings to categorize the scores by high, average and below average and decide the type of support needed to improve the areas of concern and/or weakness. Parents will receive the scores after the teacher's "grade level" meetings. The Parents will receive the test scores at the same time and a conference will be scheduled to discuss the child's grades, the teachers will be prepared to review the test score, and convey the options for support. Individual test results will also be provided as an on-going assessment of the children. Cumulative test results will be reported and made available to the public as part of our accountability process.

**Internally developed assessment instruments:** At the beginning of the school year, each student will take a two-part internal assessment test. The first part will test the student's mastery of the literacy and math skills which our school expects students to have prior to entering the particular grade. The second part will be a test based on the skills and content that we expect the student to learn during the upcoming school year as detailed in the comprehensive curriculum map for the year. The school will prepare written analysis of the results of these assessments and the teachers will document that they have used the analysis of the assessments as described above. In addition various types of career assessment, self scoring test will be administered to get some feedback as to the career and skill levels students may have in certain career fields.

At the end of the school year, students will take comprehensive tests to assess mastery of the skills and content upon which the daily curriculum plan was based. This test will be similar to the second part of the test given at the beginning of the school year. This test will be used to assess the performance and assess the success of the educational program. The teachers of the student entering the next grade level will use the test results in creating the instructional program for the following year.

Throughout the school year, teachers will assess whether students are mastering the curriculum goals/benchmarks, and the related learning standards for the grade. For on-going assessment of learning, the teachers will use in-class assignments, quizzes, tests, homework, service learning, projects, oral presentations, written reports, and portfolios as appropriate. The teachers will use a wide variety of assessment mechanisms to allow all children to demonstrate what they have learned across the curriculum. This allows teachers to pinpoint academic strengths and deficits, while modifying curriculum and teaching style to the needs of the individual student. Teachers will respond to deficiencies by reinforcing the curriculum for the general class, providing small group instruction, remediation for students who are unable to perform and are more than two years below their age expectancy level.

At Unique School & Academy Charter will actively include parents in our work to teach, understand and ultimately assess our students. The Family Services Director will ensure that parents have conferences with the teaching staff to review their child's assessment process. Additionally, there will be training and Adult Education programs available for parents to participate in management skills, LEP/ESL, approachable teaching strategies to assist your child and other informative classes for grandparents, parents and guardians. Home/Parent/Family support is key to building students' character and self-esteem, when the home and the school are connected students see both are on the "same page", working towards a common goal. PTA meetings, breakfast sessions, and after-school activities are some of the times of the day the parent or guardian will be at the school volunteer their services or participate in the school theme to motivate one another through teamwork.

Four times a year there will be informational sessions available to family to understand the screenings, assessments, and progress sequence of events. There will be monthly themes for families to gather and participate in with their children. Fund-raising events will highlight Nutrition and Health Awareness and Cross-Cultural Night with food, music and dance. Family and Friends Bingo Night can include grandparents and other relatives. The Massachusetts Historical Reflections Day will provide opportunities for family and friends to set up information booths and proudly display landmarks by using power point presentations and videos. The Charity Art Expo/Museum Night will consist of all students artwork displayed throughout the building student musicians can play music as a back drop to the art show. Charity Art Expo events, trips to local nursing homes, and the children's hospital are just a few of the activities parents and children can participate in. The Unique School & Academy Charter will maintain a purpose in education, and link with meaningful community services activities in the Springfield, Massachusetts neighborhood for the benefit of the students and parents.

Students' learning experiences go from the classroom environment into the community. Students will meet their own high standards of being productive citizens and active participants in the community. Teenage students will assess their own progress and respect boundaries within the school and community. Although there are no state funds currently available for general dropout reduction, the Department's "Secondary School Services" unit, manages a number of grant programs that support student commitment and success in partnership with districts, community colleges, and other organizations. The charter will be a driving force to help students to prepare for higher education, rewarding employment, and responsible residence within the community. These types of programs are a useful part of a district's comprehensive strategy to raise graduation rates and students' readiness for college and employment.

Assessments will occur in different ways over the course of their middle school experiences. Grades 6 and 7 will learn the history of Massachusetts and surrounding businesses field trips and guest speakers will help to bring more meaning to their studies. Career Day and College Fairs will be a part of every calendar year. This career day will expose students to the various types of job opportunities, organizations and companies in the Massachusetts area. Question and answers periods and an assignment will be given to all students to follow up on the day's events. In eighth and ninth grades, students will be assessed based on the aptitudes in specific skills area for a career and in

ninth grade students will make the choice to align themselves with one academy. Mid-year of ninth grade students will be selected to internship at two businesses and write a paper about the similarities and differences between their two business sights, and the way the business structure and function relate to their academic responsibilities in school.

The Unique School & Academy Charter is a vehicle to encourage students and families to work together in achieving academic success and develop character qualities that make students communicative in preparing for college, vocational interest, and athletics. Many teaching and learning strategies integrate meaningful links between school and community service. Through instruction and reflection, students learn strategies to enrich their experiences and responsibilities in their community. "Service learning" provides opportunities to have "hand-on" educational experiences in school, communities, and "faith-based" organizations. The core of "service learning" is developing educational strategies through meaningful community service with the intent to show measurable change in both the recipient and the provider of the service. The result is an effective method of teaching students the link between the purpose of education and responsibilities in the community. In return, the village that raises a child thrives because the child will become a productive educated teenager practicing his or her responsibilities in the neighborhood through businesses and volunteer commitments in the community.

## **IID. SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS**

### School Year -

The Unique School and Academy will serve middle and high school students, grades 6-12. The school year will commence in the fall of 2012 and begin as a middle school, grades 6-8, with the intention of growing into a high school. By the fifth school year the Unique School and Academy Charter will graduate its first class and be fully operating with three hundred and fifty (350) students, grades 6-12. Each year the teachers will prepare four report cards, four progress reports and eight written assessments which will also identify career interest, social and behavioral skills of the students.

The US&A will be in session 190 school days per year with extended days offering extended day and extended year programs that expand student learning opportunities. Other subjects, optional school programs, and school services will include but are not limited to; activities and clubs, college-bridge programs, tutoring, subjects approved by the school committee as part of the charter's program, driver education, extra curricular student performance groups, non academic assemblies, field trips, community service, athletic training, sports, testing, internship, co-operative education, work study, etc..

Upon student enrollment to the Unique School & Academy parents will be given a "Parental Assignment", this is a manual that outlines the parental involvement required from every parent to ensure their child's success. Parents will have four conferences a year and volunteer (a minimum) of one school event or activity. Parents will select at least one parental committee, planning organization, or event to participate on that involves the charter school and their child. Parents will meet with teachers, counselors, and advisory personnel and group meetings of several staff members can be arranged to make certain that there are lines of communications between parents, teachers and staff.

According on the organizational chart described in section III B. School Governance: the staff members at various levels (teaching, administrative, counseling staff and support) will meet periodically during the month to review and evaluate student and teacher progress and the effectiveness of the teaching methods. Departmental (math, science, ELA, etc) and grade levels will meet once a month to make sure that there is clarity across the board on matters concerning the students academic progress, curricula and strategies for teaching.

Guest speakers, government, community and business representatives will frequent the school on scheduled appointments for workshops and seminars. The Directors will develop the partnership ties with the community and the Academy Coordinators will nurture these relations, plan and schedule a calendar for partnership and student activities throughout the year. These meaningful types of interaction will stimulate the learning process and also play as a catalyst to spark students' interest in school.

*Typical School Day for an 8th grader Tyler, 9th grader Terry and 10th grader Tory*

7:00AM and 7:30AM Administrators and teachers arrive. Teachers and administrators will utilize this time constructively to prepare for the day. Designated days of the month will be assigned to department and team meetings. Teachers will be a part of a team; coordinating learning strategies, providing special services for some students, discussing course content, behavioral concerns and family concerns. Team teaching will be coordinated within the grade levels and within the academies. For instance: students in Team 2A will have the same group of core teachers (Math, ELA, Science, SS) and most likely travel from class to class throughout the day. In some instances students will remain in the same room and teachers will travel to their classes. Some students may separate when attending their academy focus or when the student needs special education services.

Sample day for three students in middle and high school

Tyler is in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and has selected the Athletic Academy

Terry is in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and is in the Academic Academy

Tory is in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and she is a teenaged parent that is in the Vocational Academy

*Morning Greetings-* Students are greeted at the door every day by a Charter School staff member. This assignment rotates throughout the school year with a different staff member each day. This is a process being utilized to help students feel welcomed the moment that enter the building. It will also be utilized as an observational assessment period for which teachers can identify students' appearance, needs and behavioral patterns in the morning

### **Monday Morning:**

#### **7:15AM – 8:00AM Early Arrival – Extra Help Sessions – Breakfast**

Athletic Academy -Tyler arrives early in the morning to get breakfast and attend an extra help session. He is in the ninth grade and is an excellent athlete but is having some problems academically. After he grabs his breakfast he will report to his tutor for a 30 min session

Academic Academy – Terry reports to one of the local colleges for a morning class. One partnership program has developed into college-bridge program which allows HS students to take college courses and earn credits at a reduced rate. She and several other students report to the college campus in the morning.

Students arrive in the morning assigned to various activities, clubs, academic, vocational and athletic training. For those needing a meal in the morning they will report to the cafeteria.

Athletic Academy – Workout basketball drills, training or weights

Academic Academy- Advanced Level Learning College Bridge, SAT Prep etc

Vocational Academy - Job Skills workshops (resume writing, job search procedures)

#### **7:45AM – 8:00AM Advisory – students are scheduled to meet with their Academy Coordinators**

The Academy Coordinators will meet with all of their students individually each month or when needed. They will schedule appointments to discuss academics and the community services project, career goals, career assessment testing and other matters concerning academics and career choice.

*Morning Greetings-* Students are greeted at the door every day by a Charter School staff member.

#### **8:00AM – 8:45AM**

Vocational Academy – Tory is a teenaged parent and she has to drop her child off each morning at Day Care before arriving to school. She arrives in time for her English class with Ms. Smith.

Athletic Academy –Tyler just finished his tutoring session and will report to his math class

**8:50AM-9:05AM**

This is round up time to ask any questions, recap or receive some final assistance, clarification as to what has been taught, assignments due, and what is to come.

Vocational Academy – Tory remains in the room to get some extra assistance from Ms. Smith as she was not clear on her HW assignment.

Athletic Academy –Tyler does not have to change rooms and he remains in the class to complete an assignment he did not submit.

Academic Academy - Terry and a group of twelve other students arrive at the charter school door, they have just finished their college-bridge class and are being greeted at the door by an Administrators. Attendance is taken and the students hurry to their lockers and to their first class for the day.

**9:10AM - 9:50AM**

Vocational Academy – Tory’s next period class is Social Studies. In class today she will be given a community service project of which her Vocational Counselor has arranged for her. She will actual be volunteering at a parent workshop at the same Day Care her child attends

Athletic Academy –Tyler has math and science in the same room and the teachers of these subject area share and room and team teach on relevant lessons plans. Tyler was able to take advantage of this time and completed his assignment.

Academic Academy - Terry enters his first class of the day at the charter school. He is in an elective class, Art, and it allows him to kind of wind down and relax after his college level class.

**9:55AM – 10:35AM**

Vocational Academy – Tory goes to Math

Athletic Academy –Tyler goes to English

Academic Academy – Terry goes to Social Studies

The students follow their academic schedule throughout the day and have the opportunity to catch up on assignments and receive assistance in between classes. The 15 minute review and recap session and with the team teaching concept gives more time to the subject area and a chance to offer additional academic assistance to the students. Core academic courses, PE, electives, advisory and lunch are prescribed in each students schedule. They will follow that schedule accordingly throughout the day.

Rules and regulations for all aspects of operating a school and pertaining to student academic and behavioral standards will be carefully addressed and documented in writing. This information will be reviewed with the parents and students agreed upon and acknowledged with a signature and reiterated throughout the school year.

**2:40PM – 3:25PM**

The school day has ended for some, but depending upon your Academy and schedule two afternoons per week will be spent after school in the Academy workshop

Vocational Academy – Tory’s Vocational Academy group/team will meet this afternoon for a workshop on “How to Prepare a Resume”.

Athletic Academy –Tyler has a work-out session with an athletic training. The team will meet this evening for a scrimmage at the local community center.

Academic Academy – Terry has no Academy workshops this afternoon but takes part in the student government club after school hosted by a local State Representative and career mentor.

Sample schedule for a student in the US&A

6:50-7:30	7:15-8:00	7:45-8:00	8:05-8:45	8:50-9:05	9:10-9:50	9:55-10:35	10:40-10:55	11:00-11:40	11:45-12:20
Staff Arrival • Team Mtgs • Agendas	Staff Greeter Student Early Arrival Extra Help Breakfast	Advisory Appts w/Counselors • Academy • Academic Social Worker	ELA LEP	Team Teach ELA/SS • Review-Recap • Q&A • Tutor • LEP • Advisory	S.S.	Math	Team Teach Math/Science • Recap - Review • Q&A • Tutor • Advisory	Science	L U N C H

Sample schedule for a student in the US&A (con't)

12:25-1:05	1:10-1:50	1:55-2:35	2:40-3:25	3:30-5:00 (6:00 Depending on Age)
Requirements & Electives	Academy Advisory	Electives & Requirements • LOTE - Language Other Than English • P.E. • Community Service	Academy 2-3x per week Vocational • Mon.-Thurs. Academic • Wed.-Fri Athletic • Tues.-Off site	After School Partnerships • Work Study • Internship • Job • Tutoring • Clubs • Sports • Community • College Bridge

**After school/Evening Programs**

\* ESOL classes will be held in the afternoon from 5:00PM-6:30PM

\* Parent Workshop at 6:30PM Topic –Mental Health/Counseling and Support – refreshments served children are welcome to use the library to do homework assignments. An aide will be available.

*Typical day for a Social Studies Teacher – Ms. Smith*

Today is Tuesday Morning and Ms. Smith is on assignment to meet and greet the students. She greets all students with a smile and warm welcome. Teachers and Administrators are asked to respond to every child in a positive manner at first point of greeting. Ms. Smith compliments Tyler because he has been consistent in arriving to school on time and early, she helps him adjust his uniform tie. Tyler has arrived early for breakfast and extra help, she reminds Tyler to change his sneakers into the perscribed loafers (uniform shoes) before he enters into his first period class. Tyler acknowledges her statement and assures her he will do the same.

8:05AM First class

After greeting all the students she arrives to her class a little late only to find that her team teacher Mr. Johnson, an English Teacher, is reviewing yesterdays reading materials with the class.

Ms. Smith lesson plan begins with students analyzing the United States history during the Revolutionary and Constitutional eras. Students study the basic framework of American democracy and the basic concepts of America government. They have a trip planned to the Mayors Office and Ms. Smith wants to ensure that the students will formulate the basic concepts and apply them to the government system that is in place today.

### **8:50AM**

It is review and recap time and Ms. Smith takes the time to go over any concerns the students might have.

### **9:10AM**

Ms. Smith teaches another class and then she has a break with her team teacher. She reviews the student's participation and grades and begins to decide if certain students need warning calls made to their parents. After a thorough discussion Mr. Johnson decides make the calls on behalf of both teachers. Ms. Smith has time before lunch and her next class.

She continues throughout the day in the same manner team teaching with Mr. Johnson. At the end of the day, Ms Smith is supervising the student government club. Students in this club are running for office and Ms Smith will go over campaigning techniques.

A clear plan for the school culture will be established well before the first day of school. Precise, written materials describing procedures, laws, code of conduct, grading, teaching staff schedule, school calendar, fiscal management, building operations, Parental Assignments and all aspects needed for successful operation will be put into writing and other formats. Brochures, manuals, phone messages, emails, newsletters, flyers etc. are just a few of the formats to be used to ensure that all concerned parties know and understand our procedures. These various types of information and literature will be reviewed with the parents and students periodically so that our policies and school culture are clear and reiterated throughout the year.

The Family Services/Parent Coordinator will be responsible for building a rapport with all the parents, organizing and hosting parent workshops and teacher conferences. The US&A will also to generate funds to assist with the parental services we plan to provide.

## **E. Special Student Populations and Student Services**

The Unique School & Academy Charter will provide educational services for students at various abilities, skills, and levels. Appreciation of different learning styles for Limited English Proficient students (LED)/English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) provide an inclusive educational environment. Instruction arises out of ongoing determining assessments for LEP/ESL students. Instruction includes cultural differences in learning styles, cross-cultural learning-styles, and ESL Communication activities. Student-created visual representation is an example of promoting language development in the classrooms. Multi-sensory-learning, expanding student learning styles through various literary genres, development of cross-cultural awareness among students of English and English as a Second Language will address code switching and integrate content.

Our educational philosophy remains the same for all students, including LEP/ESL except for some slightly different approaches based on informal and formal assessments. Certified English Language Learners (ELL) teachers will instruct students and provide appropriate support in the classroom, in order to meet an array of performance levels. Instructional styles and levels are based on English language status (done with the MELA-O and MEPA, identified in the assessment section), and teacher assessments and observations. The ELL teachers focus on appropriate assessments for LEP/ESL students, which is in accordance with the English-immersion law. LEP/ESL students are integrated into general education classes on a daily basis and have instructional support programs to teach them the parallel structures and how to "code switch" between languages. Pull-out services is also an instructional option provided during Special Area Studies, and will be considered when other instructional methods are not appropriate or meeting the needs of the student.

The development and progress of academic and communication skills will afford our students the opportunity to prepare them for the business world and community services. Leadership qualities will be fostered through the external curricular activities students will be engaged in each day. When students are organized and focused they have the discipline to execute their ideas clearly to others, their vision becomes a reality. Characteristics of a leader

will begin to appear in our young students as they begin to identify their goals, share them with parents and responsible adults, have success in school and academics and become volunteers in the community or within a business organization. This interchange for our students will help to build self esteem and character and begin to mold young people who have the potential to become productive members of our society. Student must maintain good pragmatic and academic qualities in order to achieve recommendations for employment and meet the social and cognitive requirements needed for functioning in their everyday life.

The least restrictive environment will be used to instruct students. When a teacher, parent, or school psychologist refers a student (written referral), an Interdisciplinary Support Team (IST) of teachers, special education instructor, counselor, Family/Parent Coordinator, and an administrator will meet to report the strengths and weaknesses of the student's performance. Based on the recommendations, of the IST, the student will have building level support services (e.g., remedial reading and math support) or teachers will be advised of appropriate modifications to implement (over a 3-6 week period) and provide a written summary of the student's progress or limitations. It is important to distinguish the following learning levels: delayed (3 months to 1.5 years), environmental deprivation (history of no support outside of school), fragmentation of basic reading, writing, and math skills, and deficient skills (three or more years below a student's chronological age level). These levels will be assessed and clearly noted so that all working with the child will be knowledgeable of the student's limitations.

The CSE meeting will provide the communication forum of information to classify students and provide appropriate long and short-term goals and objects on the Individualized Educational Program (IEP). A procedure and process will be established for each new student who was previously identified with a disability. In making this determination, the Disabled Students' Program (DSP) Specialists conduct a comprehensive assessment and evaluation process that is consistent with established practices. The assessment and evaluation process includes interviews with the student and review of documentation provided by physicians and other clinicians (e.g., clinical psychologists, speech pathologist, audiologists, and optometrists). The process requires the DSP specialist and staff to request copies of documents and IEP's on the student's previous school. After discussion and input from the parents, the team will determine whether to re-evaluate the student immediately. At the end of this process, a team, including, DSP specialists, teachers, and outside specialists as needed, will meet with the parents/guardian to review the IEP.

At the Unique School & Academy Charter, *all* students will be encouraged to achieve academic excellence, become responsible citizens, and appreciate their community and its resources. Our learning goals will comply with state and federal special education laws and regulations to ensure services for *all* children. A continuous assessment process will help to meet the student's academic needs so that they will benefit from early and intensive intervention to learning strategies.

The Unique School & Academy Charter will facilitate each student's achievement of our learning goals by providing instruction, equipment and other supplementary aides, as well as the services of outside specialists such as speech or physical therapists, if called for in the IEP. Consistent with our goals of excellent academics, civic participation, and community, we will integrate disabled students into a co-teaching model with one regular and special education teacher in the classroom. Our special education staff will maintain a resource room with the capability to coordinate and provide in-class support, out-of-class services support, specialty services, supplementary aides (such as tape recorders, books on tape, and large print books). Pertaining to the needs of the special education student, professional development seminars for classroom teachers and aides will be made available.

Special education staffing will consist of two full-time, certified Disabled Students' Program (DSP) Specialists, one with expertise in phonological awareness, eclectic reading techniques and the other with expertise in language and vast knowledge in computer-based technological programs. The internet and technological knowledge provides a multitude of interactive language and reading programs, voice activated reading and writing curriculum-based materials. Technological knowledge will serve as a communication vehicle to write, email and communicate with constituents and parents about IEP goals, progress reports, and evaluations. Teaching staff will be versed with iTouch and iPad applications appropriate for students with disabilities, to improve their quality of life and

communication abilities. DSP Specialists have the responsibility for determining whether the students have disabilities impeding the educational access. The DSP Specialist review academic accommodations and program modifications, (e.g., extra set of notes, large print, books online reading with voice, keyboarding, voice activated writing program and other means of assistive technology) and coordinates with teachers. Students with disabilities may take longer to complete assignments, therefore a detailed syllabus will be provided to each student at the beginning of the class. The syllabus will list all assignments and due-dates, keeping consistent with addressing the students' needs. The appropriate accommodations and modifications are not intended to give disabled students an unfair edge, but to remove barriers that prevent students with disabilities from learning and demonstrating their knowledge of a given subject. For the small number of students with significant disabilities, who are unable to participate in the MCAS tests the Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt) will be administered. This Alternate Assessment consists of a portfolio of specific materials collected annually by the teacher and student it may include work samples, instructional data, videotapes, and other supporting information.

Professional and Advisory Development sessions will be attended by the US&A staff which will allow them to coordinate, share, apply, and modify new techniques to appropriately meet the needs of each student. Instruction in the classroom should remain vibrant, interactive, and purposeful through the style of delivery from all teachers. In order to maintain enthusiasm, innovative thinking, awareness of best practices, current and up to date with standards and regulations, all teachers will participate in at least two (2) Professional Development and/or related training workshops each year. This strategy is intended to help our teaching staff remain current with instructional methods, assessment, testing, State Education Department laws and regulations and to reinforce that we value and support the teaching staff. The counselor, DSP specialist, and school psychologist, will collaborate in meeting students' needs for special services, social integration, and community service. An after school social skills program, "circle of friends" will allow students with and without disabilities an opportunity to participate in communication, social skills and peer/career mentoring activities.

The Unique School & Academy Charter will provide an early morning healthy breakfast menu for all students needing this service. Our students will receive a healthy lunch plan and snacks during the school day to sustain their ability to concentrate. The US&A will participate in the federal school lunch program, including free and reduced-price lunch, purchased from the appropriate food services management company. Criteria in choosing the company will include nutrition, federal dietary guidelines, past performance by the company, and competitive bidding. A lunch menu calendar will highlight special events or meals such as "Nutrition Week" and "Health Awareness". There are five options from which schools can choose to plan a menu. The five Menu Planning systems are NuMenus, Assisted NuMenus, traditional meal pattern, enhanced meal pattern, and other "reasonable approaches." Both the NuMenus and Assisted NuMenus systems are based on a computerized nutritional analysis of the week's menu. The traditional and enhanced meal pattern options base their menu planning on minimum component quantities of meat or meat alternate; vegetables and fruits; grains and breads; and milk. The US&A will assess and then utilize the best plan that addresses our student dietary needs. Any meal plan used, variations or reasonable approaches will be within the Dietary menu planning guidelines from the USDA.

Under the School Meals Initiative, the USDA will provide the school's dietician and food staff with technical training and support to help prepare healthy meals and information on nutrition education (e.g., provide options, implement nutrition week, health awareness and other good eating themes and activities) to assist students with understanding the link between diet and health. The learning climate influences the performance of all students, from what we take into their months and minds. All students particularly those who are at risk and have special needs have many aspects to their character profile and need support from school staff and faculty, families, businesses, and community members. The US&A will have collaborating teams of students, inherent motivational team leaders, performance and group exercises to maintain their interests and success. The purpose of education is to stimulate the minds, improve academic skills, and apply them to business world, community services projects and volunteer programs. Students will know and understand that their educational experiences and character development skills are purposeful, relevant, and productive in the classroom and in the community.

### **III. HOW WILL THE SCHOOL DEMONSTRATE ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY?**

#### **IIIA. CAPACITY**

The founding group represents a diverse team with ties to the community and a common passion about the educational needs of disadvantaged, at-risk youth. This common bond has brought us together to further explore our aspirations for developing a charter school in Springfield. The founding group came together as colleagues who have worked together in some capacity, in poor urban school systems that lacked organization and true accountability. Most everyone within the founding group knows all too well the frustrations of working in a community and educational systems entrenched in bad habits and unable to change. It was within this group that we were able to pull together the requirements for a Charter School Developer grant. This founding group became the nucleus of this initiative and selected Lisa M. Harris to be the lead founder of the charter.

The founding group has met monthly for the past several months. For those residing in New York several trips were made to Springfield to establish partnership relations, the prospectus, community survey and charter site advancements. The founding board members each bring to this charter plan some aspect of governance and oversight to provide the most effective design, curriculum plan and implementation strategies for the school.

Members of the Board and the Founding team have been instrumental in the design, community outreach, and the educational plan. Experts in the field relating to evaluation, literacy, math, special populations, English language learners, partnerships, community, parental strategies and other aspects of the charter development have been sought and utilized on a consultant bases. We will continue to seek out the best resources and representatives to develop the board's capacity to effectively manage and govern the project plans for the Unique School and Academy.

Lester Branch – (proposed board member) Business owner, entrepreneur, construction residential and business, notary, veteran/V SOP member, community service advocate, youth worker, and mentor

Agnes F. Gary – (proposed board member) Consumer banking officer, bank manager, financial and investment consultant, customer service advisor, loans and investment consultant, foster parent, volunteer, religious education instructor, family and education advocate

Lisa M. Harris – (proposed school leader) Director of NYSED Career Schools Bureau of Proprietary Schools (BPSS), Director of Training Abilities, Inc., nonprofit and educational organizational management, grant/proposal development and writer, foundation and cooperate fundraiser, school/business partnership development, education and non profit administrative supervision, teacher

Torrel Harris – (proposed board member) business owner , entrepreneur, apparel designer/manufacturer, sports agent, marketing, director of youth AAU-Amateur Athletic Union basketball, basketball coach, sponsor, real estate developer, owner of proposed charter school site, camp organizer/manager, professional sports advisor

Delfima Hennep - (prospectus advisory) Speech and language therapist, phonological consultant, special education specialist, research and development, program coordinator, tutor, educator, community volunteer

Garret J. McCarthy – (advisory committee, partner in athletic and parent education) Executive Director of the Boys and Girls Club, Springfield Public School advisory board, non profit organizational management, Springfield resident

Terry Morris – (board member, prospectus advisory) Business owner, entrepreneur, employee relations manager, human resources, diversity manager, human service/relations, recruiting coordinator, parent advocate

Doreen Sneed – (proposed board member) Specialist Public Health Early Intervention, professional educator and administrator, specialist for developmental disabilities, Massachusetts DOE certified teacher, co chair youth mentoring, family and children advocate, Springfield resident

Tim Sneed – (partner in vocational education, advisory committee) Executive Director MCDI, fiscal management, non profit organizational management, financial and cost analyst, public and community service, employment training management and administrative organization, Springfield resident

Rep. Benjamin Swan - (proposed board member, advisory) State representative for Hampden District, US army veteran, non/partisan politics, advocate for civil and human rights, continuous support for legislation regarding youth development, education and economic development, Springfield resident

Sue Thompson – (advisory member proposed board member) District Coordinator for Alternative and Adult Education, ESOL program organizer coordinator, educational governance, development, assessment, regulation and compliance standards maintenance, professional membership in school district administrator, community and youth advocate

JoJo White – (proposed board member) Former professional basketball player, NBA Boston Celtics, Olympic Gold medalist, director and representative for the Boston Celtics Special Projects and Community Relations, motivational speaker and sponsor for MA community programs

Deborah White – (proposed board member) Social worker, youth coordinator, parent, family advocate

## **B. SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

As entities of the state, public charter schools must meet a number of legal requirements set forth by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. These guidelines are clearly defined in the in the Massachusetts Department of Education Charter School Administrative and Governance Guide and this will be used as the bases from which our board will govern the school.

The board of trustees will hold the responsibility of the charter for the Unique School and Academy Charter. The Board will have the legal, fiscal, and moral responsibility for the school. The board will consist of the chair, vice chair, treasurer, and secretary. The board will establish other committee active permanent and ad hoc committees including, executive, finance, governance, funding development and human resources. Initially the board will consist of 7-9 members and gradually building to 11-15 members.

The current board has a committed team of leaders with the qualifications suited for the governance of this charter. The board will look forward to:

1. Recruiting new board members from Springfield with a passion and desire to serve the youth, can strengthen the current board status and a person who can generate additional revenue for the charter
2. Assist and director the Head of School, advise, support, aide evaluate and hold accountable the progress of the school and students.
3. maintain compliance standards, conformity to the charter mission and all legal requirements
4. Review and approve the annual budget, fundraise, and ensure financial stability of the charter
5. Review schools progress, provide vision, policy and strategic plans
6. Representing the US&A to the public.

The *Founder/President* will have the overall responsibility of carrying out the charter's mission and philosophy and assist with grant writing and obtaining the financial resources for the school. The Fonder/President will report to the board and all other levels of the school will report to the Founder. The *Principal* will work closely with the *Business Manger* and *Grants and Contributions Manger* to ensure daily operational and fiscal management of the school. The Assistant Principal will work with the Family Services Director and the Director of School Business partnership to have general oversight of the daily student and parent operations. The *Coordinators of the Athletic, Academic and Vocational Academies* are part-time positions that can eventually become full time depending on the student case load. The Coordinators will coordinate all extra curricula activities and community service for the students as well as assist students on and jobs (job coach) that may be unfamiliar to them. The Coordinators are the liaisons for the school and the community. The *Counselors* will report to the *Assistant principal* and the *Principal*. They will oversee the students scheduling, career paths, and coordinate the work and community service activities appropriate to the students learning ability and career interest. The Curriculum Specialist will work closely with the Teachers and Special education Coordinator to ensure that teaching methods are current and effective. The *Coordinators, Counselors, Teachers, Curriculum Specialist and Special Education Coordinators* are the team of educators and service providers that will all meet to coordinate and plan for the benefit of the student body.

Committed and dynamic leaders and teachers will be selected for positions within the Unique Charter. People with a passion and those who are devoted to helping all children in the educational process and those that will be accountable to the children, parents and the board they serve will be selected for employment.

