



Excel Academy Charter Schools Board Meeting
Tuesday, January 26, 2016, 7:30 am
Excel Academy Charter High School Construction Site
401 Bremen Street, East Boston, MA

AGENDA

	Agenda Items	Presenter	Time	Supporting Documents	Objectives
1	Approve 12/8/15 Board Meeting Minutes	Chris DeLorey	7:30 am	12/8/15 Meeting Minutes	Approve Meeting Minutes
2	CEO Update	Owen Stearns	7:35 am	CEO Memo	
3	Strategy Update	Owen Stearns	8:00 am		
4	Finance Update	Andrew Solomon	8:10 am		
5	Fundraising Update	Shane Dunn, Owen Stearns	8:20 am	Fundraising Update	Review fundraising plans
6	High School Tour	Owen Stearns	8:30 am		Tour of high school building

Votes Expected:

- 1) Vote to Approve Minutes from 12/8/15 Meeting

Future Meetings

Date TBD: All-Day Retreat and Annual Meeting, Location TBD

Tuesday, June 7, 2016, 6:30-8:30 pm, Excel Academy – Orient Heights, 1150 Saratoga Street, East Boston

MINUTES

Excel Academy Charter School Board of Trustees
December 8, 2015
Marsh and McLennan Agency, Boston, MA

Board Members Attending In Person: Chris DeLorey (Chair), Tom Ellis (Treasurer), Minnie Joung, Matt John Casais, Susan Passoni, Lauren Kushman
Staff Present: Owen Stearns, CEO; Shane Dunn, Managing Director of Strategic Growth and Development; Andrew Solomon, Managing Director of Finance and Operations; Rebecca Cass, Managing Director of Network Programming
Members of the Public Present: Liz Swerz (Friends of Excel Academy Board), Megan Preiner (Friends of Excel Academy Board)

Chris DeLorey, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:30 am and presided over the meeting. Shane Dunn kept the minutes of the meeting. Chris DeLorey ascertained that sufficient Trustees were present at the meeting, and that, accordingly, a quorum existed.

1. SLATE OF VOTES

The board voted to approve the following votes. Tom Ellis moved, Minnie Joung seconded. Unanimous approval.

- 1) Meeting Minutes from October 27, 2015
- 2) Renewal of the Boston Compact
- 3) Approve School Enrollment Policy

2. FINANCE AND HIGH SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

Andrew Solomon reported that our quarter one financials ended up where we expected. School operating expenses are trending on or slightly under budget, and we are pleased with the financial performance of our middle schools. The high school budget went over in Q1 which was not unexpected due to our inexperience opening a high school. The Network Team and Graduate Services are underspending on salaries, with some one-off variances relating to contractual work.

We brought in less than expected in fundraising income, mainly due to the timing of when expected pledge payments were realized.

Liam Brenner (by phone) updated the board on the high school construction project. Construction is on or slightly ahead of schedule. Including contingency money, the project is close to \$1 million under budget with the potential for more savings. These savings may go back into the project budget to increase FF&E expenses for the school. Owen reported that we will also hire a moving consultant to help move our existing high school to the new building.

3. GOVERNANCE UPDATE

Susan Passoni presented a re-launch of the Governance and Nominating Committee. The group was created to ensure the board is able to navigate the new realities of charter schools and Excel as a larger network of schools. The GNC will create a pipeline of candidates for all boards, help identify new board committees, and review by-laws on an ongoing basis.

There was a question regarding what the ideal size of the board is. The existing by-laws state a maximum of 15 members and the consensus was that the board should not grow beyond that size.

The Governance and Nominating Committee will meet in January to discuss its next steps.

4. PARCC OVERVIEW

Rebecca Cass presented the board with an overview of the middle schools' performance on the PARCC exams in Spring 2015. Overall, Excel's students performed well across the board, although not in the top 5 as we have been for many years. What is impressive is that all schools and all grades performed at a high level, which is a testament to our network alignment investments. Additionally, Excel's special education students out-performed city and state averages by a wide margin.

Rebecca highlighted that we as an organization and the board need to re-visit what's important to us from a performance perspective and how we talk about our outcomes. We used to have clear goals around performance expectations, but have moved away from that now that we have a new test and a high school.

5. CEO UPDATE

Owen reminded the board that as public state employees, there are limitations on how board members can communicate about political issues. Board members are able to communicate publicly about legislation but not ballot initiatives in their role as special state employees.

6. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 am.

List of Documents Presented at the Meeting:

- 1) October 27, 2015 Meeting Minutes
- 2) Updated Student Enrollment Policy
- 3) Boston Compact Renewal document
- 4) Finance and Fundraising Update
- 5) PARCC Performance Slide Deck

Respectfully Submitted,

Chris DeLorey, Chair

CEO Memo to Boards – Confidential

Owen Stearns
January 26, 2016

Context for Meeting:

We have a relatively light agenda this month, with two main topics and then a tour of our new HS building with our architect – Tamar Warburg.

The first topic will be around strategy, and specifically to update you on our emerging conversations with Building Excellent Schools (BES). We had a meeting with them this past Monday, attended on our end by Steve, Seth, Yutaka and me, and mutually agreed to further explore a potential deeper partnership/merger.

The second topic will be around our finances and fundraising. Andrew created a helpful one-page summary of our performance through Q2 (also attached), so please review that before we meet. In short, we are in good shape from an expense standpoint and still have a gap to fill on the fundraising side as the Jacobson Foundation came back to us with a significantly lower gift than we had hoped for.

Key Updates since December Board Meeting:

- All of our schools continue to be in a strong place as we start 2016. Attrition has remained low across all of our schools, including the HS. We have made a significant investment in improving the way we capture and analyze student data this year, which will reach an important milestone on January 29th as teachers learn a new software system (Illuminate). This will allow teachers to more quickly see what's happening in their classrooms, and for management to see where specific teachers may need targeted support throughout the year.
- We publicly announced Rebecca Cass's transition over the holidays and have launched a search for a new CAO. We hired the Offor Walker Group to help with that search, and we will be sending you all a finalized job description within a couple weeks.
- The new high school construction project continues to proceed slightly ahead of schedule significantly under-budget. You can really see it coming together, and we are excited for you to be able to walk through it on Tuesday.
- On the fundraising side, we received a lower grant from the Jacobson Foundation than we were expecting. We will discuss at the meeting our plans to reach our goal for the end of the year – one core idea is to host a series of "Jeffersonian Dinners" where we discuss education reform more broadly. Given there will be more attention paid to charter schools this spring thanks to the push to lift the charter cap, we may be able to pull in some new supporters. We are also continuing to steward our current donors, particularly those with capacity to increase their annual commitments.



**Excel Academy Charter Schools
Q2 FY'16 Finance Discussion – Board
January 22, 2016**

Summary

The financial performance of Excel Academy Charter Schools through Q2 FY'16 was solid. Revenues came in approximately as forecast at \$7.5MM, and spending was slightly under budget at \$7.2MM. Our four entities collectively generated a profit of roughly \$300K in the first six months of the year and are on track to pass our FY'16 debt covenant tests. Schools and Friends jointly held cash averaging about 1.6 months' worth of expenses during the period, an improvement over FY'15.

Revenue

Tuition, the single-largest component of revenue, continued to be paid by the Commonwealth at a rate slightly above our internal forecasts, and totaled \$5.5MM YTD. In addition, Grants and Contributions to Friends were robust, totaling roughly \$1.5MM YTD (of which \$1.3MM were unrestricted) and meeting our goal for the mid-point in FY'16. (On top of this, we have secured additional commitments of \$700K.) Reimbursements and Entitlements temporarily lagged budgeted numbers by \$125K.

Expense

Q2 spending tracked budgets fairly closely. The Schools & Network together were approximately \$40K (or 0.6%) under budget on a total YTD budget of \$6.95MM. Variability between the middle schools remained low, with XLC under budget by 2.5%, XLOH on budget, and XLEB over by 3.2%. Over-spending on particular line items was largely foreseen and understood. As forecast, the High School's heavier upfront spending on one-time costs did not persist beyond Q1, as they dropped from roughly 12% over budget through September to 4% over budget through December. The Network Team and Graduate Services collectively registered at 7.9% under budget through Q2.

Remainder of FY'16

Overall, we continue to be comfortable with financial performance and are not aware of major changes that would materially shift our outlook for FY'16. At the same time, we remain cautious, both as a leadership team and in our messaging to staff. The fourth quarter of the school year tends to be particularly expensive. In addition, some of the tailwinds that benefited us at the outset of the year (including a couple of unfilled Network Team positions) have abated. The Development team expects that raising the additional \$800K targeted for the rest of the year will require significant new efforts, which they will discuss at the Board meeting. We are particularly cognizant of meeting targets this year in light of our debt covenants.



**EXCEL ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOLS
FY 16 FINANCIAL RESULTS
JULY-DECEMBER 2015**

	EB	CH	OH	Total MS	HS	GS & Network	Total Schools, NT & GS	Friends	EB Realty Corp	Bremen Realty Corp	YTD Actuals	YTD Budget	Dollar Variance	Percent Variance
REVENUE														
TUITION				\$ 4,575,006	\$ 779,446		\$ 5,354,452	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	5,354,452	\$ 5,354,452	\$ -	0.0%
ENTITLEMENTS				150,578	25,654		176,232	-	-	-	176,232	314,835	(138,603)	(44.0%)
REIMBURSEMENTS				197,748	33,690		231,438	-	-	-	231,438	217,900	13,538	6.2%
GRANTS & CONTRIBUTIONS								1,305,726	-	-	1,305,726	1,500,000	(194,274)	(13.0%)
OTHER INCOME- SCHOOLS				80,225	13,668		93,893	-	-	-	93,893	-	93,893	n/a
OTHER INCOME- FRIENDS								220,993	-	-	220,993	173,953	47,040	27.0%
OTHER INCOME- EB REALTY CORP									114,518	-	114,518	77,500	37,018	147.8%
OTHER INCOME- BREMEN REALTY CORP										350	350	-	350	0.0%
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 5,003,557	\$ 852,458	\$ -	\$ 5,856,015	\$ 1,526,719	\$ 114,518	\$ 350	\$ 7,497,602	\$ 7,638,640	\$ (141,038)	(1.8%)
EXPENDITURES														
SALARIES & WAGES	\$ 1,015,449	\$ 809,741	\$ 785,112	\$ 2,610,302	\$ 555,749	\$ 695,955	\$ 3,862,006	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 3,862,006	\$ 3,866,900	\$ (4,894)	(0.1%)
TAXES & BENEFITS	93,183	70,151	60,129	223,463	60,987	69,310	353,760	-	-	-	353,760	463,710	(109,950)	(23.7%)
PROGRAMMATIC EXPENSES	107,957	103,376	145,655	356,988	199,496	-	556,484	-	-	-	556,484	634,887	(78,403)	(12.3%)
REIMBURSABLE EXPENSES	110,724	86,441	100,479	297,644	83,739	-	381,383	-	-	-	381,383	325,167	56,216	17.3%
OPERATIONAL EXPENSES	99,517	104,859	76,682	281,058	97,987	-	379,045	-	-	-	379,045	354,019	25,026	7.1%
FACILITY EXPENSES	215,822	150,338	161,258	527,418	235,740	-	763,158	-	-	-	763,158	700,527	62,631	8.9%
CONTINGENCY (INCL NETWORK)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DEPRECIATION	103,610	35,604	7,935	147,149	-	-	147,149	-	-	-	147,149	147,150	(1)	(0.0%)
EXTRAORDINARY PROGRAMMING	-	-	-	-	-	7,503	7,503	-	-	-	7,503	12,500	(4,997)	(40.0%)
NETWORK EXPENSES	-	-	-	-	-	460,638	460,638	-	-	-	460,638	447,282	13,356	3.0%
FRIENDS EXPENSES	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	153,835	-	-	153,835	158,274	(4,439)	(2.8%)
EB REALTY CORP EXPENSES	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	96,759	-	96,759	80,509	16,250	n/a
BREMEN REALTY CORP EXPENSES	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	n/a
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 1,746,262	\$ 1,360,510	\$ 1,337,250	\$ 4,444,022	\$ 1,233,698	\$ 1,233,406	\$ 6,911,126	\$ 153,835	\$ 96,759	\$ -	\$ 7,161,720	\$ 7,190,925	\$ (29,205)	(0.4%)
BUDGETED EXPENSES	\$ 1,691,434	\$ 1,395,291	\$ 1,339,200	\$ 4,425,925	\$ 1,186,533	\$ 1,339,684	\$ 6,952,142	\$ 158,274	\$ 80,509	\$ -	\$ 7,190,925			
Variance to Budget (\$)	\$ 54,828	\$ (34,781)	\$ (1,950)	\$ 18,097	\$ 47,165	\$ (106,278)	\$ (41,016)	\$ (4,439)	\$ 16,250	\$ -	\$ (29,205)			
Variance to Budget (%)	3.2%	-2.5%	-0.1%	0.4%	4.0%	-7.9%	-0.6%	-2.8%	n/a	n/a	-0.4%			
PROFIT (LOSS)	<i>Middle schools currently treated</i>			\$ 559,535	\$ (381,240)	\$ (1,233,406)	\$ (1,055,111)	\$ 1,372,884	\$ 17,759	\$ 350	\$ 335,882			
BUDGETED PROFIT (LOSS)	<i>on combined basis for revs and</i>			\$ 577,632	\$ (334,075)	\$ (1,339,684)	\$ (1,096,127)	\$ 1,515,679	\$ (3,009)	\$ -	\$ 416,543			
Variance to Budget (\$)	<i>P&L calculation (see column E)</i>			\$ (18,097)	\$ (47,165)	\$ 106,278	\$ 41,016	\$ (142,795)	\$ 20,768	\$ 350	\$ (80,661)			
Variance to Budget (%)				-3.1%	14.1%	-7.9%	-3.7%	-9.4%	-690.3%	n/a	-19.4%			
	EB	CH	OH	TOTAL MS	HS	Total Schools, NT & GS	Total Schools, NT & GS	Friends	Schools, NT, GS + Friends					
ENROLLMENT	224	224	224	672	117	789	789	789	789					
NET OPERATING REVENUE (PER PUPIL)	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$ 7,446	\$ 7,286	N/A	\$ 7,422	\$ 1,935	\$ 9,357					
NET OPERATING EXPENSE (PER PUPIL)	\$ 7,796	\$ 6,074	\$ 5,970	\$ 6,613	\$ 10,544	\$ 1,563	\$ 8,759	\$ 195	\$ 8,954					
NET PROFIT (LOSS) (PER PUPIL)	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$ 833	\$ (3,258)	N/A	\$ (1,337)	\$ 1,740	\$ 403					

**Fundraising Update for Excel Academy Boards
January 2016**

FY16 Commitments to Date: \$2,273,456

FY16 Cash In: \$1,743,876

Major Gifts in December and January:

Andrew and Melora Balson:	\$125,000 (payment one of \$500K pledge)
Annual Appeal:	\$23,527 (44 donors)
Anonymous:	\$100,000
Anonymous:	\$30,000
Anonymous:	\$5,000
Boston Gives:	\$40,000
Dell Foundation:	\$2,500
Jacobson Family Foundation:	\$25,000
Les and Joanne Rosenberg:	\$75,000
Mabel Louise Riley Foundation:	\$100,000
Mark and Evelina Taber:	\$25,000
Anonymous:	\$10,000
Parthenon EY:	\$20,000
Rick and Nonnie Burnes:	\$50,000
Sam and Rae Ann Mandell:	\$9,902
Smith Foundation:	\$250,000
Tom DiBenedetto:	\$2,000

Prospect Notes:

- **Wellington Management Foundation** approved a \$30,000 grant that we applied for in August. We should receive before the end of January.
- **John Hancock:** Owen and Shane had a productive meeting with representatives from our largest corporate funder. While their grant runs out this year, they may be willing to explore a new grant in the future that is more aligned with one of their new strategic areas.



Charter Public Schools – All are welcome!

Any child can be entered into a lottery for a seat at a charter public school. No exams. No tuition. No exceptions.

Students With Disabilities

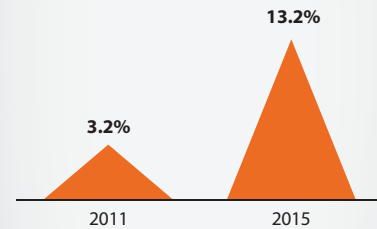
The percent of children with special needs enrolled in charter schools in Boston and Gateway Cities has steadily increased. In Boston, 15.9% of charter students have special needs as compared to 19% of BPS students; and in Gateway Cities, 13% of charter students have special needs as compared to 17.4% from sending districts.

(DESE December 2015)

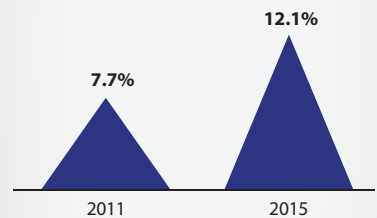
More English Language Learners

When compared to sending districts, the percent of ELLs enrolled in charters in Boston and Gateway Cities is catching up, and the enrollment of new ELLs in charters has increased faster than in districts.

BOSTON CHARTERS
New charter student enrollment surges among ELL students since 2011



GATEWAY CITY CHARTERS
New charter student enrollment surges among ELL students since 2011



Among new charter students enrolled in Boston in 2015, 22.6% were ELLs. (DESE December 2015)

Urban Charters Successfully Retain Students Year to Year

The attrition rate of charter schools in Boston and Gateway Cities has remained lower than the attrition rates for their sending district schools.

According to a November 2015 report from MIT, Boston public charter schools are producing dramatic academic gains among children with special needs and English language learners, and are attracting them in similar numbers as Boston district schools.

Bang for the Buck in Boston!

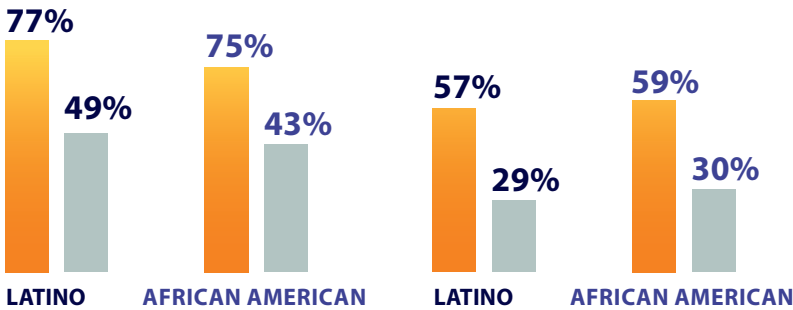
When it comes to test scores, high school and college graduation rates, Boston's Charter public school students are beating the odds!

Boston Children Proficient or Advanced

MATH
2014 MCAS



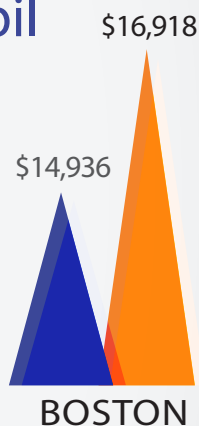
ENGLISH
2014 MCAS



● Charters ● District

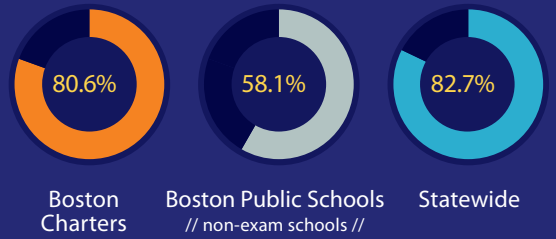
Spending per Pupil

Charters –
Where high academic
impact meets high
taxpayer value

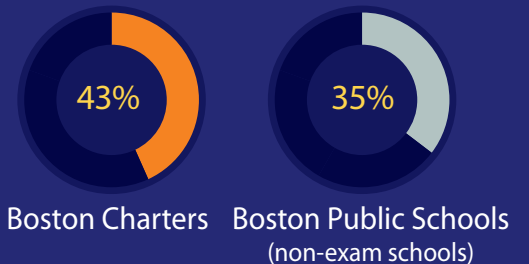


● Charters
● District

High School Graduates // within five years //



College Graduates // high school graduates //



With results like these, it's easy to understand why there are 13,000 children on waiting lists for a charter seat in Boston. For many families, charter public schools are the preferred choice.

A 2013 Stanford University report

said students in Boston public charter schools are **learning at double the rate** of Boston district students, making two years worth of academic progress in English and math for every year they're enrolled in a charter.

Stanford University



Charter School Accountability Cycle

By design, public charter schools are independent of the local school system. Instead, they are directly accountable to the state Department and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Independent national studies have ranked Massachusetts' application, performance, and oversight practices as the toughest in the nation. Charters must be renewed every five years and are subject to annual inspections by the state. **If they don't succeed, they can be closed.**

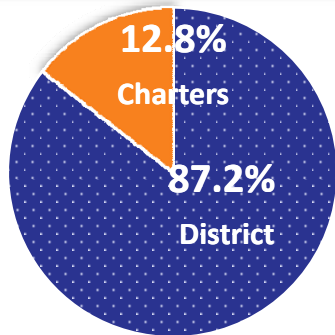


School Funding Comparison

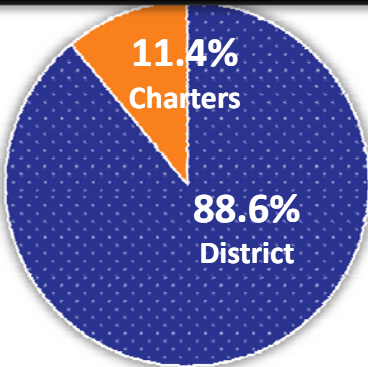
Boston District and Boston Public Charter FY 2015

Boston public charter schools serve 12.8% of the students but receive 11.4% of the funds

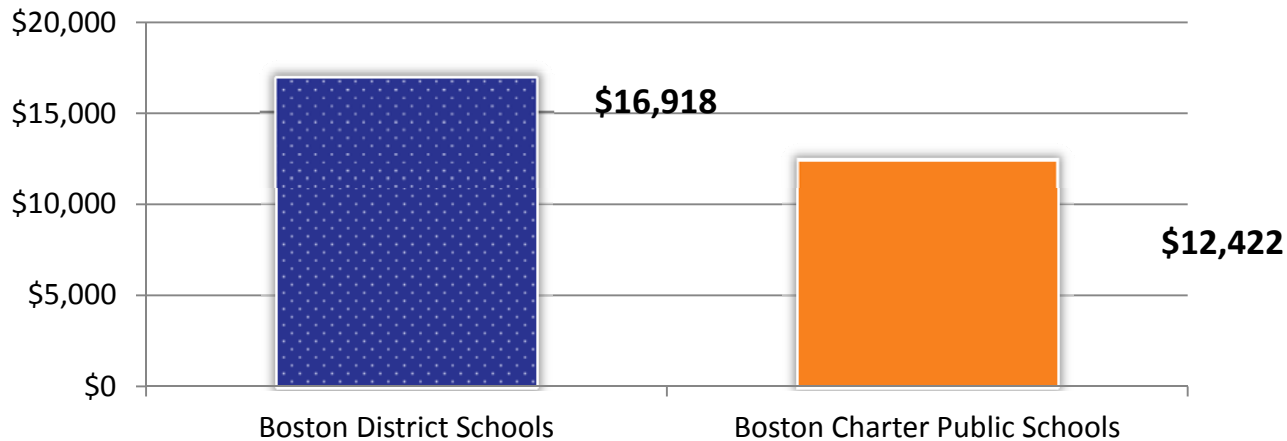
Percent of Public School Pupils: BPS & Boston Public Charter Schools



General Budget Spending: BPS & Boston Public Charters



BPS Spending Per Pupil & Net Charter Cost to BPS Per Student



■ Boston District Schools

■ Boston Charter Public Schools

Spending data reflects General Fund spending from city and state sources.

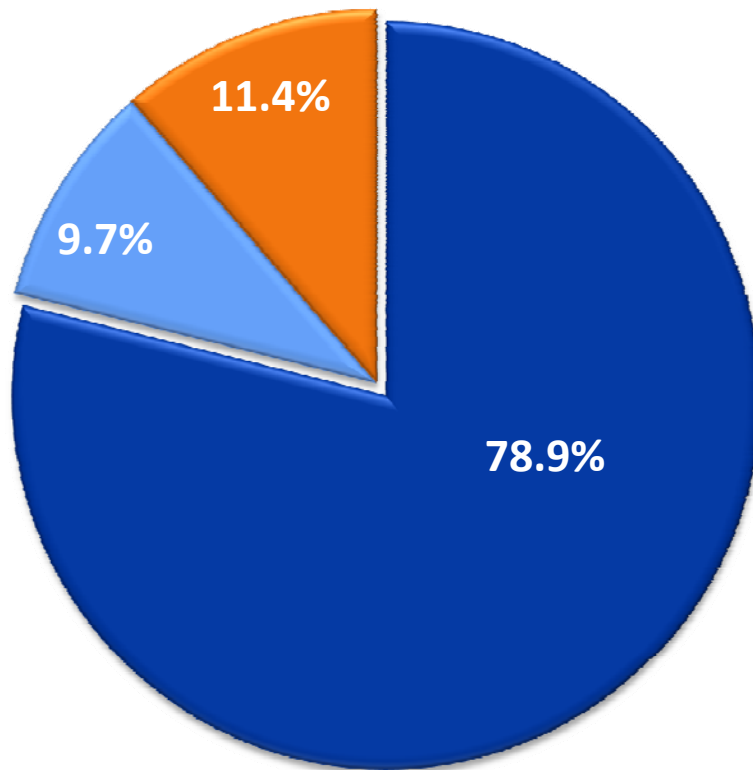
Source: Boston Municipal Research Bureau

The Local Aid Myth

The vast majority of state and city public education dollars go to the Boston Public Schools (BPS) – 89% v. 11% for Boston public charters.

BPS' \$975 million general fund budget is funded through a combination of city and state resources. By law, ALL public charter school funding comes from Ch. 70 state aid.

The criticism that charters receive an unfair share of funding is simply not true.



■ City Resources to BPS = \$868.6 Million (78.9%)

■ Chapter 70 State Aid to BPS = \$106.4 Million (9.7%)

■ Chapter 70 State Aid to Boston Public Charter Schools = \$125.8 Million (11.4%) (paid directly from state to schools)



HOW TO PLAN A

*Jeffersonian
Dinner*

HOW TO PLAN A JEFFERSONIAN DINNER

The Jeffersonian Dinner can be a great way to launch the creation of a new cause-centered community. It can also help you to expand the network of individuals connected with an existing community. And although money is not the central focus of the evening, it's likely that, in the end, a Jeffersonian Dinner can activate far more resources than such traditional fundraising events as the annual gala.

So what is a Jeffersonian Dinner? To introduce the concept, we invite you step into a time machine . . .

Imagine being invited to a dinner in 1819 at Monticello, the elegant Virginia home of Thomas Jefferson—president, scientist, farmer, connoisseur, scholar, and author of the Declaration of Independence. Around his table, you'd encounter some of the leading spirits of the age—men and women steeped in politics, literature, the arts, the sciences, theology, history, mores, and manners—people that Mr. Jefferson invited because he found them, intriguing and delightful to spend a stimulating evening with. And an evening like this was also a prime source of education both for Mr. Jefferson himself and for the guests around the table, all of whom were engaged citizens, eager to share and debate the varied ideas that would shape the fortunes and spur the development of their rapidly-growing young nation.

This was the original Jeffersonian Dinner. Starting with dinners held for years in Monticello itself during the years when Jeff served as chairman of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, we've turned Jeffersonian

Dinners into opportunities to connect people and foment discussions about many different topics. As a result, vibrant networks and a host of passionate connections have been created around a host of important causes.

A Dinner Party—With a Twist

For a Jeffersonian Dinner, approximately twelve individuals, some of whom may already know one another but others of whom do not, gather in a home, a private dining room, or other quiet location for an evening of food and shared conversation with a purpose. The dinner is often organized under the auspices of a particular nonprofit organization, and the attendees may include one or more individuals who are somehow associated with that organization—as staffers, board members, donors, or partners. However, the dinner is usually hosted by someone not directly affiliated with the nonprofit group—for example, a friend of a friend who may have access to a suitable dining room and is willing to provide the appropriate hospitality.

The attendees generally include people with no past link to the group, chosen because they are likely to be interested in the group's mission, have supported other related causes, or have background knowledge and connections that will enable them to contribute to an interesting dialogue about the work. Thus, the guests at a dinner organized by a nonprofit dedicated to education reform might include a professor of education from a local college, a veteran high school teacher, a producer of educational videos, a parent who is an active member of her local school board, the education reporter from the local newspaper, and the founder of a nearby charter school. There should be no dominant in-

dividual who will serve as the focal point or “star” of the evening. The dinner invitation includes a request for a brief written biography of the attendee. These bios are emailed to the participants a day or two before the dinner, so those who’ve never met before will have a least a general sense of the identities and interests of their dinner companions.

Unlike a fundraising event, there’s no formal presentation about a cause, an organization, or a social problem, nor is there a pitch for contributions or memberships. The purpose of the Jeffersonian Dinner is to build a sense of community and partnership around a shared interest or theme. (As you might imagine, the theme is generally related to the work of the nonprofit organization on whose behalf the gathering is being held.)

Most important, the dinner should be held in a setting where everyone in attendance can easily participate in a single conversation. Unlike the typical dinner party, guests are **not** encouraged to engage in one-on-one dialogues with their partners on either side. Instead, everything that is said should be directed to the entire group, just as Thomas Jefferson himself ordained.

To launch the conversation at a Jeffersonian Dinner, a pre-announced question is used to elicit personal feelings, stories, and experiences relevant to the evening’s theme. Some samples:

- For a dinner focused on the life-changing potential of philanthropy: “Describe a gift you made that produced a real difference.”
- For a dinner about education reform: “Who is your favorite teacher of all time?”

- For a dinner related to plans for a new film center: “What movie is your favorite guilty pleasure, and why?”
- For a dinner related to technology: “What technology innovation in the last ten years has most changed your life?”
- For dinner about bringing music to school kids in New Orleans: “What’s the first record you ever owned?”
- For a dinner about collaborative philanthropy: “Give an example of a time when you worked collaboratively with others successfully to have an impact.”
- For a dinner about non-profit leadership: “Who do you know who is a good role model for non-profit leaders, and why are they?”

Crafting the right initial question for a Jeffersonian Dinner is important. It must be designed to elicit stories (rather than, for example, canned opinions, theoretical discussions, or examples drawn from the media). Avoid a question that can be answered with a Yes or No, while also choosing a question that can be answered in around two minutes. The goal is to enhance the potential for personal connections among the guests, as well as a personal connection with the evening’s theme.

Moderating a Jeffersonian Dinner is an art in itself. The exact nature of the follow-up questions you ask may vary depending on the specific goal of the dinner. One effective approach is for the moderator to gently guide participants along the pathway of the public narrative as described by Marshall Ganz. That is, after each attendee has had a chance to

describe one or more personal experiences related to the theme of the evening (a story of self), the moderator can ask how these experiences are connected with the interests of the entire group (a story of us) and then with the work of the nonprofit organization that has sponsored the dinner (a story of now). It's an effective structure because it works!

Finally, as the time for concluding the dinner approaches, everyone in attendance is asked how they plan to follow up on the evening's discussion. There's no pressure to respond in a particular way. (And there's certainly no intention to elicit donations or pledges in support of the nonprofit organization.) One participant may offer a response as simple as "I intend to learn and think more about the topics we've discussed." Another may make a specific commitment growing out of the evening's conversation: "I'll be calling Susan, whom I met for the first time this evening, to find out more about her work and to learn whether my company might be able to support her in some way." And occasionally, the follow-up promises include the birth of a major new philanthropic commitment. Every response, from the most modest to the most ambitious, is entirely acceptable.

In any case, virtually every Jeffersonian Dinner we've hosted or heard about has generated a host of informal connections, networking opportunities, and follow-up conversations among dinner attendees, with long-term benefits that may take months or years to explore and develop.

Why Hold a Jeffersonian Dinner?

As we've seen, a Jeffersonian Dinner is not a fundraising event. No pitch or presentation is made, no brochures are distributed, no checks

or pledges are solicited or accepted. So why are more and more nonprofit organizations choosing to use Jeffersonian Dinners as part of their community-building programs? What purposes do they serve?

Jeffersonian Dinners can help you achieve a number of important goals:

- ***A Jeffersonian Dinner enlists new allies.*** The list of attendees at the dinner should include a number of people who are new to you and your organization. The unusual nature of the evening will make your organization stand out as a place that is focused on collaboration, feedback, and community building.
- ***A Jeffersonian Dinner helps to create and disseminate ideas.*** Conversations around the table at Jeffersonian Dinners often help to spark fresh thinking about important topics. The interesting, partly-random assortment of attendees is likely to generate interesting insights that may provoke worthwhile new initiatives: "The story you just told reminds me of something we did in my community. What if the two ideas were combined somehow? . . ."
- ***A Jeffersonian Dinner expands attendees' networks.*** Almost every Jeffersonian Dinner we've attended has led to valuable new connections among people. We wish we had a dollar for every time we've heard an attendee say, "It was so great to have a chance to speak with so-and-so! We have so many interests in common, I can't imagine how it is that we never met before!"
- ***A Jeffersonian Dinner spreads knowledge about and interest in your organization.*** Organize a Jeffersonian Dinner

around the topic of your work helps to position your organization as a “thought leader” in the community. It will also greatly increase the visibility of your organization as a leader in thinking about the topic, perhaps even the “go-to” group whenever related issues are mentioned.

Fledgling organizations have used Jeffersonian Dinners to recruit partners, brainstorm solutions to policy problems, and spread the word about their team among those doing parallel work. Established organizations have used Jeffersonian Dinners to stay in touch with old friends, to meet new ones, and to get feedback and advice about potential new programs or changes in direction. Organizations that are about to embark on major fundraising initiatives or expansion programs have used Jeffersonian dinners to energize the community and get the word out about their exciting new plans.

Most important, Jeffersonian Dinners are **fun**. Participants almost invariably find them far more stimulating, thought-provoking, and engaging than either the typical purposeless dinner party (dominated by small talk and chitchat) or the traditional fundraising event (in which speakers “talk at” the audience rather than engaging in true, open-ended dialog). For nonprofit partners who have become weary of the ritual—and the expense—of the annual gala, the informality, openness, and intimacy of the Jeffersonian Dinner can be a breath of fresh air. And the simplicity of organizing a Jefferson Dinner—or even a series of dinners held throughout the year—is in stark contrast to the complexity of planning, funding, publicizing, preparing, and pulling off a star-studded gala. Most people, including nonprofit leaders themselves, regard the usual social activities in the nonprofit space as boring and enervating; they’re a major cause of burnout among nonprofit managers and fundraisers. By contrast, people who’ve attended a Jeffersonian Dinner love to talk about the

experience with friends; they’re thrilled when an invitation to a second such dinner arrives, and many of them get turned on to the concept of hosting a Jeffersonian Dinner of their own. Rather than producing burn-out, Jeffersonian Dinners create energy.

How To Host a Jeffersonian Dinner, in Three Simple Steps

Step 1: Planning (Beginning Four Weeks in Advance)

- Invite between 8 and 15 people who have a common interest (e.g. music and kids, innovation in education, women’s health care).
- It’s usually best to invite a mix of people, some of whom know one another while others do no.
- Avoid inviting a “big kahuna”—a celebrity, powerful business executive, or political leader whose power or charisma are likely to lead others at the dinner to defer to him or her. Everyone at the dinner should feel equally free to contribute.
- If the dinner is to be focused on an objective, such as spreading knowledge of and interest in a nonprofit group, then work with the CEO of the group to tailor a topic that will interest the dinner participants.
- Choose a quiet location where the conversation can com-

fortably be heard, possibly a home or private room in a restaurant.

- Select an opening question that is related to the dinner theme and encourages each person at the table to tell a personal story (e.g., “Who was your favorite teacher of all time?”).
- Solicit brief written biographies (100-150 words) from each participant in the dinner.
- Send out the opening question and biographies ahead of time so people will be ready to carry on the conversation.
- Select a dinner moderator—someone with a light style but who can move the conversation around and stimulate discussion.

Step 2: During the Dinner

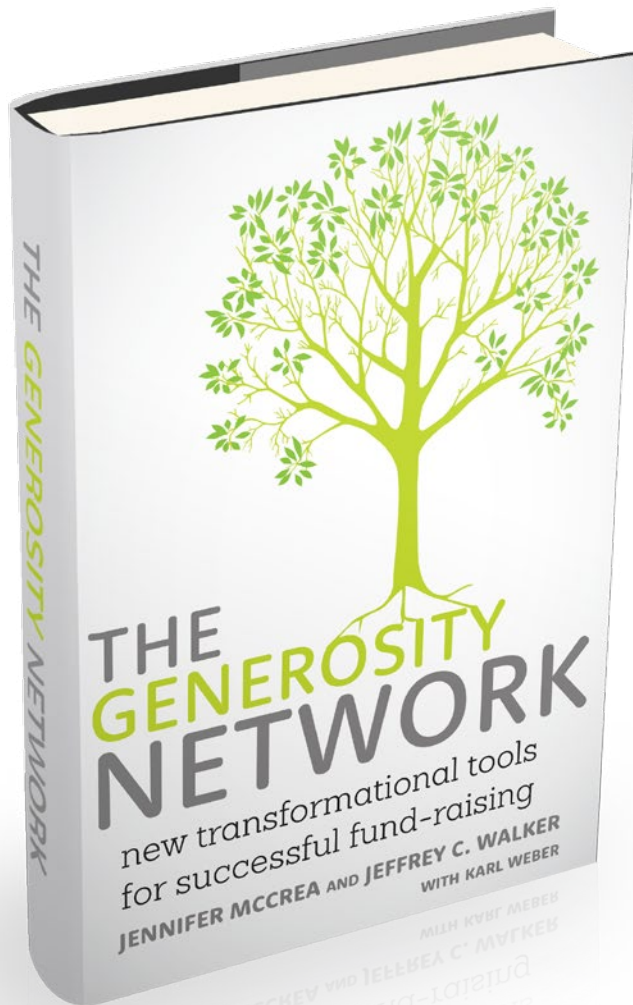
- 7 p.m.: Cocktails, light conversation before seating.
- 7:30 p.m.: Moderator opens by explaining the ground rules. Most important: No talking to your neighbor; we are having a whole-table conversation.
- Ask each person at the table to respond to the opening question.
- Moderator introduces a follow-up question to link the opening answers to the general theme of the evening. This

may propose a problem related to it that those at the table can address together. The question could be directly related to the work of the nonprofit organization, e.g., “How can we reduce teacher turnover in schools?”

- Let the discussion begin! Moderator should keep the conversation relevant, prevent side discussions from breaking up the table, and ensure that no one or two people are overly dominant.
- 9:15 p.m.: Moderator asks each person at the table to describe any ideas or thoughts they had during the discussion that they would like to follow up on or work with someone on . . . or just think about more.
- 9:30 p.m.: End dinner. Informal one-on-one conversations usually continue.

Step 3: After the Dinner (Within Two Weeks)

- Moderator or nonprofit CEO sends out a note giving the dinner participants’ contact information and summarizing the follow-up points listed at the dinner’s end.
- Follow up over the next few weeks, helping people connect with one another and with the nonprofit organization if desired. Nonprofit leaders may choose to set up one-on-one meetings with the dinner attendees they thought were interested in following up.
- If you are in the midst of an ongoing campaign of some kind—or in the process of launching one—invite some of



*“For decades, Jennifer McCrea and Jeff Walker have been guiding and advising the leaders of many of today’s most effective nonprofit organizations (including mine), in fields ranging from poverty relief and education reform to healthcare, the arts, and the environment—with truly impressive results. What a blessing that they’re now making that same wealth of insight available to all of us through **The Generosity Network**”*

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“Of the many important insights this book brings to fund-raising, the most important is that networks undergird all social undertakings, and along networks flow talent, connections, wisdom – and funds. This book is about successful organizations, and the different forms of success, including fund-raising, reinforce one another.”

- **Teresa A. Sullivan** President, University of Virginia

*“In today’s troubled world, the work of nonprofit organizations is more urgent than ever. That’s why the ideas in **The Generosity Network** are so important. Whether your mission is to save the planet—or just make your little corner of it a whole lot better—you can’t afford to ignore this marvelous new book.”*

- **Goldie Hawn** Academy Award winning actress and producer,
Founder of the Hawn Foundation

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