

IX.C.

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION Hartford

TO BE PROPOSED:

March 4, 2020

RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the material change to Elm City College Preparatory (ECCP) operation consolidating two schools, elementary school (Elm City College Preparatory Elementary School) and middle school (Elm City College Preparatory Middle School) to one location for the 2020-21 school year, subject to the Commissioner's March 4, 2020, memorandum to the Board, "Approval of Material Change to Elm City College Preparatory," and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Approved by a vote of _____, this fourth day of March, Two Thousand Twenty.

Signed: _____
Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Secretary
State Board of Education

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford**

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Commissioner of Education

DATE: March 4, 2020

SUBJECT: Approval of Material Change to Elm City College Preparatory

Executive Summary

Introduction

Elm City College Preparatory (ECCP) is a state charter school serving 767 students in Grades K-12. The schools charter renewal was approved by the State Board of Education on February 6, 2020, for a two year period from July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2022. ECCP consists of one elementary school (Elm City College Preparatory Elementary School K-6), one middle school (Elm City College Preparatory Middle School 7-8) and a high school operated jointly with Amistad Academy and Achievement First Bridgeport Academy (Achievement First Amistad High School) in the city of New Haven. ECCP seeks approval to move and consolidate the middle school with the elementary school for the 2020-21 school year. In accordance with Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) seeks State Board of Education (SBE) approval of the material change to the school's operation as allowed under state law.

Background/Process

Under Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) a process is established for charter school governing councils to follow when making a material change to their operations. A material change is one that fundamentally alters the school's mission, organizational structure, or educational program, including:

1. Altering the educational model in a fundamental way.
2. Opening an additional school building.
3. Contracting for or discontinuing a contract for whole school management services with a Charter Management Organization.
4. Renaming a charter school.
5. Changing the charter school's grade configurations.
6. Increasing or decreasing the total student enrollment capacity of the charter school by 20 percent or more.

To request a material change in the school's operation, the charter school's governing council must provide the SBE with a written request to amend the school's charter. On January 17, 2020, the CSDE received ECCP's written request (Attachment A) to move and consolidate the 7-8 middle school currently located at 794 Dixwell Avenue with the K-6 campus located at 403-407 James Street, New Haven. The consolidation will allow ECCP to serve all students at the James Street location together on one K-8 campus. Combining the two schools will reduce operating costs and generate revenue required for the continued operation of the school. The operational savings will be realized through reduction of facility loan debt service, custodial work and supplies, utilities, maintenance and repairs and revenue generation from the sale of the Dixwell Avenue property. The school estimates the projected financial benefit from savings and revenue to total between \$4 and \$5 million over the next 5 years. ECCP is fully committed to serving all current families at the new combined campus in 2020-21. No seats will be lost in the consolidation.

In accordance with Section 10-66ss of the C.G.S. the CSDE is required to solicit and review comments on the material change request from the local or regional board of education of the town in which the charter school is located, New Haven. On February 20, 2020, Dr. Iline Tracey, Interim Superintendent of New Haven Public Schools responded to the request (Attachment B).

Recommendation with Conditions

The CSDE recommends that the SBE, pursuant to Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, approve ECCP's written request to move and consolidate the middle school with the elementary school for the 2020-21 school year.

Prepared by: Robert E. Kelly, Charter School Program Manager
Turnaround Office

Reviewed by: Lisa Lamenzo, Bureau Chief
Turnaround Office

Approved by: Desi D. Nesmith, Deputy Commissioner



January 17, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Desi Nesmith
Chief Turnaround Officer
State Department of Education
450 Columbus Boulevard
Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Mr. Nesmith:

I write on behalf of Elm City College Preparatory ("ECCP" or the "School") to request approval of a change to the School's charter. ECCP currently consists of an elementary school (K-6), a middle school (7-8), and a high school program operated jointly with Amistad Academy and AF Bridgeport Academy at Amistad High School in New Haven. Beginning in the 2020-21 school year, ECCP seeks to move and consolidate its smaller middle school currently located at 794 Dixwell Avenue ("Dixwell campus") with the K-6 campus located at 403-407 James Street ("James Street campus"). The rationale and process used to develop this requested revision follow.

Background

ECCP operated two separate traditional Achievement First (AF) campuses – elementary K-4 and middle school 5-8 – in the James Street and Dixwell campuses through the 2014-15 school year. In August 2015, grades 5 and 6 moved from the Dixwell campus to an interim space to pilot the Greenfield program model. The following year grades 5-6 moved to join the K-4 grades at James Street campus which had also joined the Greenfield pilot. The purposes of these moves were to provide for the Greenfield program design that is built on larger classes and greater space to accommodate expanded enrichment opportunities.

Despite the above moves, ECCP had no intention to decommission the Dixwell campus. Indeed, the School continued to invest in the campus by acquiring adjacent properties for a possible building expansion when the lower grades rejoined the 7th and 8th graders.

Throughout these physical moves, ECCP students continued to thrive, and the charter has posted strong academic performance relative to the district and the state. For example, on the

achievementfirst.org

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203 773 3223

2018-19 school year SBAC, the Elm City charter’s combined (ELA and Math) proficiency of 58% exceeded the state by 6 percentage points, and the New Haven district by 30 percentage points, a testament to the schools’ success in preparing students and closing the achievement gap.

Elm City College Prep	CT State	New Haven
58% (60% ELA, 55% Math)	52% (ELA 56%, Math 48%)	28% (ELA 34%, Math 22%)

ECCP schools provide New Haven families with a quality schooling option, a track record of helping students matriculate to and succeed in competitive colleges, and the drive to return to New Haven as leaders of their communities. Notwithstanding the above successes, there are challenges present that make clear that a consolidation to K-8 campus is the appropriate next step.

Rationale for Consolidating to a K-8 campus

Like many districts and schools across the country, ECCP is facing significant funding challenges. It is especially hard for ECCP since, as you know, Connecticut public charter school students receive more than \$4,000 less in per pupil state funding compared to their district school peers. Historically, AF schools have filled this gap with philanthropy, however, after 20 years of operation, our donors' focus has shifted from filling the shortfalls in public funding to support for growth, innovation, and new initiatives, Moreover, there is concern about the risks of a potential economic downturn in the form of a recession, something that may further strain the school’s ability to secure private funding. Relying significantly on private philanthropy is no longer a prudent approach to sustainability, so AF began looking for ways to reduce non-instructional costs.

While ECCP will identify other ways to incrementally decrease costs, including some staff reductions, we believe that merging these two schools at one campus enables the charter to combine some services to lower costs (custodial, utilities, maintenance) and ultimately to sell the building at the Dixwell campus, generating revenue and maintenance savings. Currently, the Dixwell campus is Achievement First’s most expensive to operate on a per pupil basis, even when it contained a full four (4) grade complement of students.

Projected Financial Impact

The projected cost savings and revenue are required for the continued operation of existing schools and programming. There are two contributions:

1. Operational expense savings that come largely from a) facility loan debt service; b) custodial and custodial Supplies; c) utilities (gas, electricity, and water); and d) maintenance and repairs.
2. Revenue / income generation that results from the sale of the building and property at Dixwell campus.

The projected financial benefit from savings and revenue is estimated to total between \$4 million to \$5 million over the next five years. This represents a significant change in the financial position of the charter on an annual basis, and represents a necessary reduction in AF's reliance on philanthropy.

For clarity, financial assumptions include the fact that we have received State grants for the improvement of the property that may be reimbursable as described in [Conn. Gen. Stat. Section 10-66hh\(b\)](#). However, our broker has been directed to target non-profit and government entities constituting a public use, and we would expect to subsequently request forgiveness of any such refund. In either scenario, the savings and income are significant and required.

Programmatic Benefits

Although funding is a driving factor, the ECCP Board of Directors would not make this decision if it did not also believe that it was also in the best interest of students and staff. During multiple feedback sessions with staff and families, one of the items that came up was the opportunity to build greater community between the elementary and middle schools, and finding ways for older scholars to develop leadership skills among their younger peers.

First, there are currently 39 students attending school at the Dixwell campus that are siblings of current K-6 students. Consolidating the two schools to the same building will simplify the drop-off / pick-up for these families and strengthen the feeling of community that a smaller school like ECCP should promote.

Second, because the K-6 campus has implemented the Greenfield model and its corresponding expanded enrichment activities, consolidating the facilities will also allow us to extend some of the popular enrichment activities in grades 3-6 to grades 7-8.

Finally, we can re-unify our K-8 community in one space, and recreate the more traditional K-4 and 5-8 academies that ensure strong coaching and grade level alignment across the charter.

Based on the foregoing, we are confident that bringing these two strong schools together is beneficial for students, families and staff alike.

Enrollment

ECCP has always operated on a smaller 2-section enrollment model with approximately 65 students per grade, versus the more common 93 student grades at other AF schools. This lower enrollment model is a contributing factor to our ability to propose this facility consolidation. The school intends to maintain its current enrollment plans and to maximize student retention between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. There is a full commitment to serve all current families at the new combined campus in 2020-21.

The following are the preliminarily requested enrollment levels from the most recent annual report:

School Year:	2020-2022 Two Year Enrollment Requests:													
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
2020-21	66	66	64	72	66	65	65	64	64	50	50	50	45	787
2021-22	66	66	66	64	72	66	65	64	64	50	50	50	50	793

Process

A school facility consolidation on this scale is complicated and not without significant challenges, but with the input of staff and families and the experience of our CT-based Senior Director of Facilities, we are confident that we have identified and addressed the concerns fully. In addition to the general feedback sessions, a staff subcommittee worked directly with Team Facilities to raise and address concerns. By way of example, some of the issues raised and addressed include:

- Ensuring that older, larger middle school students are placed in appropriately sized classrooms (bigger students need more space!);
- Addition of a dedicated space/room for STEM/Robotics. We have developed a short- and long-term plans to accommodate this requirement;
- Ensuring that there are enough pull-out spaces;

- Expanding off-street parking options by negotiating with local businesses and landlords to lease spaces for staff parking; and
- Adding restroom facilities.

Additionally, there are plans for staff and leadership to begin 2020-21 readiness planning even earlier than normal in 2020 to ensure that transition related issues are incorporated into the plan.

Administratively, the following formal steps have been taken or are in process to ensure a smooth transition for the school community:

- **ECCP verbally notified CSDE staff on or about October 15th, 2019** of the discussions around a potential move of the middle school to James Street.
- In the spirit of our core values, a **series of communications were sent and information sessions held** among the school staff and family communities.
 - October 19, 2019 -- Dacia Toll, Victor De La Paz and Amy D'Angelo met with ECCP ES and MS staff
 - October 29, 2019 -- Dacia Toll met with ECCP ES and MS families
 - November 1, 2019 -- School leaders provided discussion feedback time in staff professional development session
 - November 20, 2019 -- Dacia Toll met with ECCP ES and MS families

Each of these sessions yielded meaningful feedback from the communities that was incorporated into the plan, including specific recommendations for Team Facilities in its design of renovations at the James Street campus.

- The plan to consolidate the campuses was **approved by the ECCP Board during its regular meeting on December 18, 2019**, directing Achievement First and the schools to carry out any required actions, including the request of CSDE for this charter revision. (See minutes, attached as Exhibit A)
- With the submission of this request for revision, **ECCP now awaits final approval from CSDE and/or the State Board of Education (SBOE)**, as required.

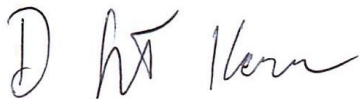
Conclusion

As a mission driven organization committed to the education of every student we are authorized to serve, AF embarked on a thoughtful process to identify the best option that would balance the immediate need to reduce structural costs with minimizing any adverse impact of our most important stakeholders--students and families. To that end, AF leadership considered a wide variety of cost cutting alternatives, some of which we are not *currently* willing to act on. We name them as possibilities here if we're not successful in implementing alternatives like the facilities consolidation proposed in this revision request. Some of the currently sacrosanct options include:

1. **School closures.** Our plan remains to serve all current and future AF scholars to and through college as our mission charges us to.
2. **Discontinuing transportation of Bridgeport scholars to Amistad High School.** Although Bridgeport Public Schools has never contributed to the costs of transporting our high school students to New Haven, a cost of roughly \$450,000 per year.
3. **Significant reductions in our staffing model across the region.** We intend to continue support for our co-taught classrooms, specials, college counselors, and other extra supports that our students and families require and deserve.

As described above, school and network leadership took a deliberate approach to considering all options, communicated proactively with stakeholders, and now make our formal request to CSDE to approach our plan to consolidate these two schools. We appreciate the support and counsel of the Department as our schools adjust to the reality of our financial constraints. Please let me know if you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "D Kerr".

Scot Kerr
Director/External Reporting

cc: Richard Ferguson, Board Chair
Andrew Poole, Charter Director
Melika Forbes, VP/General Counsel
Lisa Lamenzo, CSDE
Robert Kelly, CSDE

- Draft -

**Elm City College Preparatory
Board of Directors**

Wednesday, December 18, 2019

370 James Street, New Haven

5:00 pm

I. Call to Order and Attendance

The Elm City College Preparatory Board meeting was called to order at 5:02 pm. The following board members, constituting a quorum, and Achievement First staff were in attendance:

Richard Ferguson - Yes

Laura Saverin - Yes

Genevive Walker - Yes

Patricia Pierce - No

Stephanie Ma - Yes

Patric Gregory - No

Melinda Hamilton - Yes

Julia Halberstam - Yes

Dacia Toll, AF Network Support - Yes

Victor De La Paz, AF Network Support - yes

Ken Paul, AF Network Support - Yes

Sarah Blanton, AF Network Support - Yes

Scot Kerr, AF Network Support - Yes

Jonathan Pagan, AF Network Support - Yes

Public: Chris Peak

II. Open Session for Public Comment

There was no public comment.

III. Board Business

RESOLVED, the Elm City College Preparatory Board of Directors hereby approves the meeting minutes from November 13, 2019.

Motion by Dick Ferguson

Seconded by Laura Saverin

All in favor

RESOLVED, the Elm City College Preparatory Board of Directors hereby elects Jai'mice Toney, Parent Representative, to the Board of Directors with a three year term beginning December 19, 2019 and ending June 30, 2022 and does, effective December 19, 2019, set the number of members of the Board of Directors at nine (9).

Motion by Dick Ferguson

Seconded by Genevive Walker

All in favor

IV. Discussion

Victor De La Paz reviewed the financial landscape for AF's Connecticut schools and the mandate from the Achievement First Network Support board to reduce the reliance on philanthropy - specifically \$1MM in two years. The primary drivers for accomplishing this include the proposed Elm City campus consolidation, advocacy and multi-year philanthropy.

Dacia Toll shared that among several hard choices, this proposed facility consolidation is the least bad option. AF has taken the proposal to staff and families to engage in a series of discussions about the plan over the past month and a half. The ECCP community asked good, tough questions and immediately moved to working towards solutions. At the conclusion of each meeting, they took a vote and ended with 60% of staff agreeing this is the right path forward, one third were neutral and two individuals did not support the plan to consolidate.

One of the concerns raised by both families and staff was around arrival and dismissal. AF has started those conversations with the City.

The board discussed play space and parking options both of which involve partnering with local businesses. Ketki Harale, Senior Director of Facilities, was confident that the required construction can be done during the summer.

Genevive Walker raised the topic of busing. Ms. Toll articulated a need to make bus culture a priority and leadership on the bus, either a paid bus monitor or parents/guardians who offered to volunteer, student leadership or some combination therein.

Victor De La Paz shared that initial conversations around the sale of the building have been positive, but the building has not yet been put on the market.

Ms. Toll shared that ECCP student ambassadors surveyed their peers and communicated back overwhelmingly positive reactions from the student body about the proposed consolidation.

Having no other questions, the board reviewed the resolution.

WHEREAS the Elm City College Preparatory Board of Directors has reviewed, considered and vetted the relevant facts and circumstances concerning the subject of these Resolutions;

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Elm City College Preparatory Board of Directors approves the

plan to consolidate the facilities of Elm City College Preparatory Elementary School (grades K-6) with Elm City College Preparatory Middle School (grades 7-8) (the "schools") into one building at 403/407 James St to house both schools beginning in the 2020-21 school year, pending approval by CSDE;

RESOLVED FURTHER, that the Elm City College Preparatory Board of Directors hereby authorizes and directs Achievement First Network Support and the schools to take and carry out such action as required in connection with the foregoing Resolution.

Motion by Genevive Walker

Seconded by Laura Saverin

All in favor

V. Executive Session - Personnel Discussion with Principal Candidate

The board entered into Executive Session at 5:42 pm to interview a principal candidate. Motion by Melinda Hamilton. Second by Laura Saverin. The board exited executive session at 6:08 pm.

VI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 pm by Dick Ferguson.

Motion by Melinda Hamilton

Second by Laura Saverin

All in favor

Dr. Iline Tracey
Interim Superintendent



P: (475) 220-1003

February 20, 2020

Dear Lisa and Felicia,

As the representative of New Haven Board of Education, the material change of reconfiguring and merging of schools for Achievement First Prep and the Middle School, along with change of location, was duly reviewed. As the Local Education Agency, we are not seeing anything detrimental to such a move. From our understanding, this move is being made due to financial reasons. Their model will reflect the K-8 model that we currently have in New Haven Public Schools. So long as there is no financial ask from NHPS.

We have also checked into the transportation cost and realized that due to sibling preferences, this would eliminate some buses. A concern we do have, is that they are requesting for their school day to end at 3:15 p.m., which would not be feasible, due to the fact that our Tier 3 schools end at 3:30 pm to accommodate our out of district routes for our inter-district magnet schools. We would not have sufficient buses to accommodate this ask.

Sincerely,

Iline Tracey, Ed.D.
Interim Superintendent