

# The Hudson Valley Charter School

## Key Educational Design Elements in Consideration

**"Children grow into the intellectual life that surrounds them"**

-Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky

**Our Vision:** We see hope and success for all public education institutions in meaningful collaboration and fierce competition to educate all students at maximum proficiency in a competitive charter school choice environment.

**Proposed School Mission:** To successfully inform public education through courageous professional leadership within an exceptional charter school; to measurably and sustainably nurture and support all children in a safe, progressive and inquiry stimulated learning environment to become contributing global citizens no matter their ability or educational needs.

We understand that there are different conceptions of the fundamental purpose of charter schools. We believe our charter school has the potential to serve our community as a laboratory of innovation that develops best-practices that can be embedded into the public education system.

Below is an initial proposal of **key design elements** that are currently in consideration:

**1- Evidence-Based Student-Centered Experiential Learning:** We will harness best practices from proven pedagogical models that promote constructivist student learning and growth mindsets<sup>1</sup> drawing inspiration from Montessori,<sup>2</sup> Reggio Emilia,<sup>3</sup> Waldorf<sup>4</sup> and other approaches that have been lauded worldwide. We

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/09/23/carol-dweck-revisits-the-growth-mindset.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.montessori.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.reggioalliance.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://waldorfeducation.org/>

believe in methods that incorporate personalized learning, culturally relevant pedagogy, multiple intelligences and project-based learning.<sup>5</sup>

**2- Educator-Centered Professional Development:** Comprehensive professional development will be at the core of our design. Every Friday we will spend half of the school day working with our staff, teachers and administrators to build upon their collective knowledge and expertise. We will partner with leading nonprofits, think tanks and universities to bring state of the art learning opportunities to our team that promote their personal and professional growth. Our educators will have the opportunity to enroll in online courses with cutting-edge educational centers of research and practice like Project Zero.<sup>6</sup> We will also develop a system of incentives for our professionals to continuously immerse themselves in new learning communities and bring their findings back to our school.

Professional Development for Urban Educators (P-DUE): High performing schools are inextricably linked to relentless focus on high quality teachers. Hudson Valley Charter School teachers will receive ongoing professional development specifically designed for urban educators so that they may deliver instruction to our diverse student population in ways that will optimize student learning and increase achievement. To that end, P-DUE will highlight the major tenets of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and the successful strategies embedded in the “best practices” of Culturally Responsive Teaching, both informed by teacher reflection and inquiry. P-DUE is predicated on our deep commitment to eradicating educational inequalities by ensuring that all students have wide and deep opportunities to access educational excellence.

**3- Multi-dimensional cradle-to-career collaborations:** We understand that successfully educating our students demands addressing the systemic and structural phenomena that are associated with multidimensional poverty,

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/topics>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/professional-development>

discrimination, racism, inequity and other forms of oppression in our community.<sup>7</sup> To achieve success, we will need to support students, families and our community through a cradle-to-career pipeline<sup>8</sup> that partners with government, civil society, the private sector, community-based organizations and higher education institutions to roll out programming related to public health, economic development, social inclusion and civic participation. We aspire to work collaboratively with the Poughkeepsie City School District, the Mayor’s office, County Legislators, and the City Common Council to engage leading thinkers on our community’s greatest challenges and opportunities; together we can integrate personalized education and child development systems using models that have been pioneered at centers like Harvard’s Education Redesign Lab.<sup>9</sup>

**4- Civic Empowerment:** We believe that perhaps the greatest issue of our time is educating students to be the stewards of our democracy and advance social justice issues. To do so, we must reaffirm the civic mission of our schools. We strive to integrate comprehensive civic learning across all disciplines and grade levels with a strong focus on addressing what leading scholars have identified as the “civic empowerment gap.”<sup>10</sup> It is fundamental that students are educated for cross-cultural understanding, global citizenship and equipped with the tools to dismantle the very inequities that have created a nationwide “opportunity gap”<sup>11</sup> and “educational debt.”<sup>12</sup> More specifically, we will introduce pedagogical frameworks like action civics<sup>13</sup> and service-learning to develop project-based modules that connect students, teachers and families with real community challenges and foster opportunities for civic exploration and rites of passage.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://ophi.org.uk/policy/multidimensional-poverty-index/>, <https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/five-evils-multidimensional-poverty-and-race-in-america/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.promiseneighborhoodsinstitute.org/cradle-to-career-solutions>

<sup>9</sup> <http://edredesign.org/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/8454069>

<sup>11</sup> <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/projects/373>

<sup>12</sup> <http://ed618.pbworks.com/f/From%20Achievement%20Gap%20to%20Education%20Debt.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <http://actioncivicscollaborative.org/why-action-civics/overview/>

**5-Standards-Aligned Curriculum:** We will align all of our curriculum with the New York State Next Generation English Language Arts and Mathematics Learning Standards to achieve maximum proficiency with our students.

**6- 21st Century STEAM Skill Development:** Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM) education will be key components of our educational mission. We understand that given the reality of automation and rapid changes to the global economy, we must cultivate programming that responds to the needs of the “fourth industrial revolution.”<sup>14</sup> We also believe in the power of the arts and humanities to cultivate deep inquiry, critical thinking, philosophy and the whole person. We will leverage these traditions to stimulate student and community learning.

**7- Human-Centered Participatory Design:** We strongly believe that the “users” of our school should be the main protagonists in the design of their education. We will draw upon human-centered design practices pioneered by the Stanford D-La and IDEO to ask students, families, educators and community members questions such as what does their ideal education look like? How might we rethink our approaches to professional development? What do you wish you would have learned as an elementary school student? What occurs in a normal day in the life of one of our students, parents and teachers?<sup>15</sup>

**8- Restorative Justice Practices:** We believe that to successfully transform educational realities in our community, we must dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline<sup>16</sup> and generate restorative justice<sup>17</sup> approaches to school discipline and culture that seek to empower students starting in the early years to resolve conflicts, promote mutual understanding and reduce systems-wide tendencies to criminalize our students.

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://dschool.stanford.edu/programs/k12-lab-network>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline>

<sup>17</sup> [http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom\\_qa\\_with\\_larry\\_ferlazzo/2016/02/response\\_how\\_to\\_practice\\_restorative\\_justice\\_in\\_schools.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom_qa_with_larry_ferlazzo/2016/02/response_how_to_practice_restorative_justice_in_schools.html); <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2013/0331/Restorative-justice-One-high-school-s-path-to-reducing-suspensions-by-half>; [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/04/education/restorative-justice-programs-take-root-in-schools.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/04/education/restorative-justice-programs-take-root-in-schools.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

**9- Deep Parental Engagement and Community Immersion:** It will be a school-wide expectation that our teachers, administrators and staff immerse themselves in our community to ensure relationships with our parents and understand the unique cultural realities of our local context. We will require that all members of our staff visit student homes and participate in community-building activities. In addition, we will use technology to improve two-way communication between parents and teachers.

**10- Social and Emotional Learning:** Social and Emotional learning (SEL) is an emerging field in education that continues to demonstrate the importance of non-cognitive variables on student achievement, behavior, attitudes, skills and sustainable livelihoods.<sup>18</sup> We will incorporate SEL frameworks into our learning models and practice.

**11- Mentorship, Knowledge Sharing and Community Building:** We understand that one of the most overlooked opportunities in educational development is harnessing the inherent knowledge, wisdom and experience that our families, community leaders and educators already possess. We strive to bridge this social capital through models of mentorship that allow us to grow together in instruction, school leadership and community empowerment.

**12- Diverse Learning Community:** We aim to enroll a diverse student population composed of 50% special needs learners and 50% between general and advanced learners. We will implement a door-to-door recruitment strategy to enroll students and their families in our school as we aspire to strengthen the link between the home and the classroom.

**13- Supplemental Student Enrichment Activities:** Leading research has identified a national deficit for low-income students' access to extracurricular activities compared to their higher-income peers. Studies show that by the time

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<sup>18</sup><https://casel.org/impact/>

underprivileged students reach middle school they are about 6,000 hours behind their affluent classmates in terms of academic enrichment opportunities outside of the classroom.<sup>19</sup> Our students will participate in a Saturday Arts Education program to enhance their learning. We will also partner with community-based organizations to enroll students in meaningful after-school and summer enrichment programs.

**14- Reduced Classroom Size:** We are proposing a student to teacher ratio of 12:1 to facilitate individualized learning that caters to the unique abilities and realities of our students.

**15- Multi-layered Assessment:** We will deploy a compilation of formative, summative, diagnostic and portfolio assessment tools focused on both cognitive and non-cognitive student outcome growth, achievement and proficiency over time with established annual targets disaggregated by student demographic group. Our students will also participate in New York State Common Core standardized testing, where we will aim to achieve grade level and proficiency scores.

**16- Best Practices Institute:** A key component of our model will be the constant study of US-based and international best practices in areas that include pedagogy, instruction, school culture, assessment, community development and school leadership. Our goal is to be at the vanguard of educational practices that allow us to make new contributions to the field. To achieve this goal, we will establish a Best Practices Institute within our school that works to cultivate knowledge sharing and establish meaningful partnerships with innovative educational thought leaders and institutions.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.citizenschools.org/our-model>