



June 3, 2019

**BY EMAIL**

Dear Laura DeLima,

Thank you for submitting an application to establish a public charter school in the District of Columbia. The District of Columbia Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) has completed the Spring 2019 Application Review process and, at its public meeting held on May 20, 2019, did not approve your application to establish Evolve Public Charter School.

DC PCSB's decision was based on a thorough evaluation of the written application and information gathered from the capacity interview and the public hearing. The reasons for this decision are specified in the attached memorandum, captured in the assessment of the applicant's weaknesses and subsequent analysis.

Should you choose to file a petition again, that petition must meet the requirements of the School Reform Act, D.C. Code § 38-1802.02. Specifically, it should appropriately resolve the deficiencies cited above and meet the standards for approval in each component of the application rubric: (a) a demonstrated need for the school; (b) sufficient progress in developing the plan; (c) alignment of the entire school program with the school's mission and philosophy; (d) inclusion of and adequate support for special populations; and (e) the founding group's capability to ensure that the school can meet the educational objectives outlined in the application. If you would like, DC PCSB staff would be happy to discuss with you in more detail your application's strengths and weaknesses.

Should you want to appeal the denial of your application, you may seek review of this decision pursuant to D.C. Code § 38-1802.03(j).

We recognize the hard work and effort that went into the development of your application. Thank you for your interest in public charter schools and your commitment to improving public education in Washington, DC.

Sincerely,



Scott Pearson  
Executive Director  
DC Public Charter School Board



Rick Cruz  
Chairman  
DC Public Charter School Board

Attachment: Vote Memo

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD**

<p><b>Charter Actions Requiring a Vote</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approve / Deny a Charter Application</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approve a Charter Renewal (15 yrs.)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approve Charter Continuance (5 or 10 yrs.)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approve a Charter Amendment Request</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approve a Charter Agreement</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Give a Charter Notice of Concern</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Lift the Charter Notice of Concern</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Commence Charter Revocation Proceedings</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Revoke a Charter</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Board Action, Other_____</li></ul> <p><b>Policies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Open a New Policy or Changes to a Policy for Public Comment</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approve a New Policy</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approve an Amendment to an Existing Policy</li></ul>	<p><b>Non-Voting Board Items</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Public Hearing Item</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Item</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Read into Record</li></ul>
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**PREPARED BY: Hannah Cousino – Senior Specialist, Equity and Fidelity**

**SUBJECT: Charter Application – Evolve – Vote Memo**

**DATE: May 20, 2019**

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*The following application to open a public charter school in the District of Columbia beginning in school year 2020-21 was submitted to the DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) on March 11, 2019. It was released for public comment from March 11, 2019 through April 22, 2019, and a public hearing occurred on April 22, 2019. DC PCSB notified Advisory Neighborhood Commissions and the public via the DC Register, two newspapers, and the DC PCSB website, where the application and the hearing information were posted on March 11, 2019.*

**Board Action**

DC PCSB staff requests that the Board vote to approve or deny the Evolve charter application.

**Background**

The Evolve founding group proposes opening the first purpose-centered and Big Picture Learning-affiliated high school in DC. The Big Picture Learning Network is an affiliation of 65 schools across the United States that share 10

“Distinguishers,” two of which are advisories and internships.<sup>1</sup> Big Picture Learning has selected Evolve as a member of its third Affinity Cohort, which provides support to new Big Picture Learning schools throughout the planning year, at a minimum.

Evolve’s founder and proposed executive director is Laura DeLima, the current head of school and founder of a 1:1 private school serving 70 students in grades 6-12 in the Van Ness neighborhood. Ann-Marie Stripling, director of community and career partnerships; Andrianna Clark, director of operations; and Linda duBuclet, director of special populations, hold similar titles at the school. The Board of Trustees is comprised of four members with legal expertise and experience in non-profit organizations, private school admissions, and education policy.

Since the capacity interview, DC PCSB staff requested supplementary materials from the founding team, including a completed budget, revised bylaws, parent and student survey results, and a list of International Baccalaureate (IB) schools that implement Project Based Learning (PBL).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, DC PCSB visited City Neighbors High School, a Big Picture Learning school in Baltimore, Maryland, to learn more about the advisory structure and internship program.

<b>Name of Applicant Group</b>	<a href="#">Evolve Public Charter School</a> <sup>3</sup>
<b>Mission and Program</b>	The mission of Evolve is to “empower a diverse group of DC high school scholars to discover and realize their purpose through a project-based, internship-focused education that is fully customized to their unique strengths and challenges.”
<b>Grade Span</b>	9-12
<b>Proposed Enrollment</b>	Evolve plans to open in school year (SY) 2020-21 with 100 9 <sup>th</sup> grade students. It will add one grade and an additional 100 students each year until it reaches its capacity of 400 students in SY 2023-24.
<b>Target Population</b>	Evolve intends to be a diverse-by-design high school that will recruit students across every ward. Its student demographic projections mirror those of high-performing high schools located in diverse wards, such as Capital City Public Charter School

<sup>1</sup> For the complete list of the 10 Distinguishers, visit <https://bit.ly/2JWUUUx>.

<sup>2</sup> The Evolve supplement can be found at <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/fl/Xy5odQjDM1>.

<sup>3</sup> The redacted application can be found at <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/82P2DYaYrT/>.

	(PCS), Washington Latin PCS, and DC International School.
<b>Desired Location</b>	The school hopes to locate in Ward 1, but the team is also considering Wards 4, 5, and 6.
<b>Unique Elements of the Education Program</b>	<p><u>Purpose-Centered School</u>: All students will have Purposeful Learning Plans (PLP) that the student and advisor co-create with input from parents, mentors, and teachers. Students work on their PLPs daily during Advisory, and the PLPs are the basis for course and career pathway selections, internships, and college applications. PLPs are housed in the school's learning management system, LiFT.</p> <p><u>Advisory</u>: Each student is part of a daily advisory group of around 12 students, ideally with a single advisor throughout their time at the high school.</p> <p><u>Internships</u>: Evolve students in grades 10 through 12 will engage in internships with mentors, gaining exposure to real-world applications of their interests. In grade 9, students will also participate in service-learning opportunities once a week and take IB Professional Skills to prepare for their internships.</p> <p><u>IB Career Programme (IBCP)</u>: Students will graduate with a high school diploma and an IBCP certificate in one of four career pathways: finance, health, engineering, or art and design, through partnerships with National Academic Foundation and Savannah College of Art and Design.</p> <p><u>PBL</u>: All teachers will be trained in Gold Standard PBL<sup>4</sup> during school's new teacher institute, and all classes will be designed and taught using this method.</p> <p>The executive summary, which provides an overview of the program, can be found here:  <a href="https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/5dCkx6Mpnj">https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/5dCkx6Mpnj</a>.</p>
<b>Community Support</b>	DC PCSB received four public comments in support of the school – three at the public hearing and one

<sup>4</sup> To learn more about Gold Standard PBL, visit <https://bit.ly/2WuFIk8>.

	<p>letter of support from an Evolve Board member.<sup>5</sup> The applicant distributed surveys to solicit feedback on aspects of its model. The team received responses from 19 parents and 43 students across Wards 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7. The team also conducted a parent focus group in Ward 1 and Ward 6 as well as a focus group in Ward 5 with students from Washington Leadership Academy PCS.</p>
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**The applicant’s strengths include:**

- Need for Innovative High School Programs: The applicant uses waitlist data from innovative, diverse high schools, such as Washington Latin PCS (classical model), Capital City PCS (Expeditionary Learning Education), and DC International School (IB), to show a need for similar programs, which Evolve intends to offer through its diverse-by-design model and PBL and IBCP curricula. The parent and student feedback gathered from surveys and focus groups reinforces the need for an innovative high school with features like PLPs, IBCP, internships, and a creative arts career pathway; however, it is unclear how many stakeholders surveyed expressed interest in attending the school.
- Big Picture Learning Network Support: Big Picture Learning schools enroll diverse student bodies that reflect DC’s student demographics from diverse wards, and the applicant cites some studies that show these schools produce positive post-secondary outcomes like increased graduation and college entrance rates.<sup>6</sup> As a member of Big Picture Learning Network’s Affinity Cohort, Evolve will have access to services like program design support, principal coaching, staff training materials, staff selection support, and the “imBlaze” Internship Management System license and training. Because Big Picture Learning is not a charter management organization, Evolve will have the flexibility to implement its uniquely designed program while maintaining the network’s support.

**The applicant’s weaknesses include:**

- Founding Team Ability: Although members of the founding team work at a 1:1 private school serving 70 students in grades 6-12, they lack public school leadership experience recruiting and educating Evolve’s target population. No one on the team has experience with real estate or

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<sup>5</sup> Public comment can be found at <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/fl/Fl3FlcaZTr>.

<sup>6</sup> To review research on post-secondary outcomes of Big Picture Learning students, visit <https://bit.ly/2ImULIA>.

overseeing an IBCP program, an integral component of the school's model. These concerns were reflected in the team's lack of in-depth answers provided at the capacity interview and the public hearing. Only one member of the founding team, Ms. DeLima, was able to consistently demonstrate detailed knowledge of the proposed program's multiple elements.

- Community Engagement: The applicant identifies parents, siblings, churches, community centers, neighborhoods, and internship sites as key stakeholders; nonetheless, outreach to these groups to date has been minimal. The founding group gathered feedback to inform the school design process, but fewer than 20 parents completed a survey. While Evolve has received four positive public comments, it has yet to show evidence of established relationships with families, churches, community centers, middle schools, or neighborhood groups. The absence of these important indicators suggests a lack of broad community support for Evolve's specific program. Moreover, the plan to recruit a diverse-by-design student body requires substantial effort from the director for community and career partnerships and the director of operations, yet these positions are less than half-time employees in the current planning year budget.
- Development of the Internship Program: The current plan does not support the launch of a successful internship program. Besides making initial contact with the Urban Alliance, no official internship site partnerships have been established to provide placements for Evolve's 300 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders; service-learning sites for the 100 9<sup>th</sup> graders have also not been clarified. The director of community and career partnerships shares some of the responsibilities of establishing the internship program, but the main point of contact, the learning through internships (LTI) coordinator, will not be hired until year 2. At that point, the first class of Evolve students will be starting their internships. For reference, City Neighbors High School, a Big Picture Learning-affiliated school in Baltimore, Maryland, worked over a two-year period to establish relationships with nearly 150 sites and solidify 92 student-mentor partnerships before its first class began participating in internships.
- Inclusiveness: Although the founding team includes a member with special education and English learner (EL) expertise, the application does not present a school program that will accommodate all students, including those with disabilities, ELs, and those who struggle academically. During the capacity interview, the director of special populations was unable to explain how a full continuum of services would

function within in the school's model and how students with disabilities, transfer students, and those who struggle academically can achieve IB certification, a hallmark of Evolve's program. Additionally, no job description is provided for the EL teacher.

- Development of the Academic Program: The curriculum presented in the application is not clearly interrelated between its PBL and IBCP components, and PBL-aligned curriculum maps for all subjects and grade levels have yet to be developed. The team proposes that the dean of instruction will work with the IB coordinator to align the IB curriculum with Gold Standard PBL; however, the IB coordinator is not hired until year 3 (and then only as a half-time position), even though 11<sup>th</sup> graders will be taking IB courses at this time. Given the rigorous demands of the planning year – including solidifying internship and service-learning site partnerships, recruiting a diverse student body, hiring teachers with three or more years of experience teaching adolescents and PBL knowledge, and securing a facility located in a diverse ward – it is unclear if the founding team has the capacity to map existing curriculum to the Gold Standard PBL framework.
- Alignment of the Planning Year Budget to the Mission: In the original application, the planning year and first year financial projections were incomplete. Responding to a request from DC PCSB staff, the applicant submitted a revised budget that includes all necessary elements but proposes a surplus of only \$3,000. The applicant would need to make substantive revisions to the budget in response to the concerns listed above, especially as it pertains to hiring the prerequisite staff needed to establish the school program.

### **Analysis**

Using the standard for approval laid out in [DC PCSB's 2019 Charter Application Guidelines](#),<sup>7</sup> DC PCSB staff has completed an analysis based on the school's written application, capacity interview, and public hearing. A more detailed breakdown of this assessment can be found below.

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<sup>7</sup> 2019 Charter Application Guidelines, pages 14-15: <https://www.dcpsb.org/2019-charter-application-guideline>.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Met/Not Met<sup>8</sup></b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Demonstrated Need for the School</b>	Substantially Met	While the applicant makes a compelling case for its proposed diverse-by-design, PBL-aligned, and IBCP program by using waitlist data from comparable high schools, it has yet to demonstrate sufficient demand from families and community organizations.
<b>Sufficient Progress in Developing the Plan</b>	Not Met	The applicant has not made significant progress in designing a high-quality school as evidenced by the underdevelopment of the internship program, PBL-aligned curricula, special populations plan, and community engagement to date. The applicant does not realistically assess the challenges of establishing a diverse-by-design school with numerous programmatic elements and transitioning from the private to public school sector.
<b>Alignment with the Mission and Philosophy</b>	Substantially Met	The essential elements of the school's mission and philosophy – including the PLPs, internships, and PBL components – are woven throughout the application, and the applicant presents evidence in support of its program design. However, the applicant has yet to demonstrate how its PBL philosophy will be infused in its IB courses.
<b>Inclusiveness</b>	Not Met	Each element of the school program is not deliberately designed to be inclusive of all students. The application offers broad strategies for supporting special populations,

<sup>8</sup> This analysis evaluates whether each applicant group met, substantially met, or did not meet the standard for approval. When an applicant has substantially met the standard for approval, staff has concluded that they have met approximately 75% or more of the standard included in DC PCSB's guidelines.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Met/Not Met<sup>8</sup></b>	<b>Notes</b>
		such as all-staff trainings on Individualized Education Program (IEP) development and hiring additional staff to lead resource and self-contained classes. But when asked during the capacity interview, the director of special populations was unable to describe in detail how a full continuum of services would function within the school's model and how students who struggle academically, transfer into Evolve, or have IEPs can achieve IB certification, a hallmark of the program. Additionally, no job description is provided for the EL teacher.
<b>Founding Group Ability</b>	Not Met	The applicant team does not collectively have all areas of knowledge and expertise necessary to operate a successful charter school. The team lacks experience in public school leadership, real estate, and IB program management. During the capacity interview and public hearing, only one member of the founding team, Ms. DeLima, was able to consistently demonstrate detailed knowledge of the proposed program.

**Resources**

Evolve Spring 2019 Charter Application, found here:

<https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/82P2DYaYrT/>.

Evolve Spring 2019 Charter Application Public Hearing Transcript, found here:

<https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/7umDjFFO0M>.

Evolve Spring 2019 Charter Application Public Comment, found here:

<https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/fl/FI3FlcaZTr>.

Evolve Spring 2019 Charter Application Capacity Interview Transcript, found here:  
<https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/wCbon8Somo>.

Evolve Spring 2019 Charter Application Executive Summary, found here:  
<https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/fGdKDRV5nz>.

Evolve Spring 2019 Charter Application Additional Submission, found here:  
<https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/fl/Xy5odQjDM1>

Date: 5/20/19

PCSB Action:  Approved  Approved with Changes  Rejected

Changes to the Original Proposal:

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