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My path to this hearing room began soon after graduating from Penn, when I befriended the psychologist for the Philadelphia prison system, Doctor Ed Guy. Since my childhood, I had been interested in how to find jobs for ex-convicts so they could avoid going back to jail. I learned from Dr. Guy about the significant early life challenges which the prisoners faced. He told me that most prisoners have experienced significant life challenges since their early childhood and that candidly it's very hard to reverse early childhood trauma. He told me that his experience as a psychiatrist reinforced the belief that most people are substantially formed by the age of 6. And that if you don't reach them soon after that, your chances of having a significant impact and reversing the early childhood damage are greatly diminished. I asked Ed, "Wouldn't it be smart to assess the needs of all children by age 6 and thereby provide the needed services and prevent a bad outcome?" To my surprise, Ed said, "You don't have to wait until they are 6 years old. Most of my prisoners I could assess their problem before they are born. We can assess the background of the mother and based on her life experiences come up with a pretty good predicative assessment of whether or not the child she is carrying is likely to end up in jail."

Ed then said to me, "Think of the total cost to society for each repeat offender. Cost for prison, policing, courts, probation, government benefits, and of course the disorder that they bring to others around them. Surely it's much cheaper, besides being much more humane, to help kids starting when they're young to avoid this kind of failure".

Right after college, I continued living on the Penn campus and bought turn of the century buildings which I renovated for student housing. To do this work I happened to hire people who lived in the Belmont and Mantua areas in West Philly which are only one mile from where I lived for many years. It is also the neighborhood where I started and still operate our charter schools. To help the residents of this area and also to better understand multigenerational poverty, I joined the board of YSI, the local social service agency. This board exposed me to the multiplicity of services that are being offered to the community and really opened my eyes as to the challenges for successful intervention in the lives of people who have gone astray. Most significant for me was seeing children who were born into multigenerational, poorly functioning families. Kids who never had a chance. Kids whose destiny was determined before birth. And through it all, I never forgot the words of Dr. Guy, "If we don't intercede early, it's very challenging".

When Governor Ridge signed the Charter School Law in 1997, I saw this as an amazing opportunity to help really disadvantaged children by working with them all day in school and then having the opportunity to assist them with after school programs and activities. Our original charter school was named Family Charter School because of our belief that it was important to work not just with our students, but also with their extended family: parents, siblings, anyone who is involved in caring for the child. This first school was a traditional city wide open enrollment charter school, where parents applied to send their child to the school. By the fifth year of operating the school, we noticed the students from the most supportive homes were of course our best performers. We also saw, one by one, that the students from the most challenged homes were gradually being pulled out of our school and placed back in the local public school only three blocks away. These children's parents didn't want to be called in to

school to discuss their child's behavior issues or school absences or things like sleep deprivation from staying up all night watching television.

In order to perform social and other services which are outside of the scope of what a school is legally or typically able to do and to receive 501(c)(3) tax-exempt funding and charitable contributions we created a nonprofit organization. Its mission is to provide social, medical, mental and other educational support services exclusively for our students, their families, and our immediate community. This organization is called the Community Education Alliance of West Philadelphia (CEAWP) and works in partnership with the Belmont Charter Network (BCN). It operates our two community schools offering a variety of social service and educational programs in West Philadelphia. Twenty two years ago we opened our first school with the goal of serving the most at-risk children and providing them with opportunities to obtain a high-quality education that would set them up for success in life. In 2003, Belmont Charter School (BCS) was formed as the first district converted catchment area school located in the heart of what several years ago was designated a Promise Zone by the Federal Government - one of the deepest and most persistent areas of poverty in the City. Through our work we have stabilized what once was a failing school into a community hub rich with social service programming. All of the schools within our network are far exceeding their peer schools academically.

Throughout our schools we serve over 1400 pre-school through 12th grade students residing in our neighborhood where multigenerational poverty, violence, and child abuse/neglect are prevalent, resulting in high numbers of trauma-impacted students with behavioral health needs. 97% of our student population is economically disadvantaged with an estimated 75% experiencing housing safety issues and 20% of which either are or recently were considered homeless.

The purpose of our mission is to offer an educational model that provides for the unmet physical, social and emotional needs of each of our students face as a result of growing up in poverty. Our focus has been developing school environments that foster close relationships and trust with our staff, students, families and the surrounding communities that we serve. We provide trauma-informed school campuses equipped with health centers and staffed with social workers. Through the hub, we partner with over 30 different professional and community-based organizations providing a plethora of social and enrichment programs. We operate our school campuses 52 weeks a year and a few of our largest programs include:

- **Belmont Family Support Services (FSS)**—a prevention program that provides direct case management to students and families as well as coordinating behavioral health services for students. Through our FSS program we are essentially providing our own Student Assistant Program (SAP) connecting families to school-based and community services. Where needs are more extreme, we have also been providing direct case management to over 200 students each school year.
- **Belmont Health Center** – in partnership with Education Plus Health we offer a school-based pediatric health center which is also open to the community. Through this center our students receive acute care, preventive care and chronic disease management. Services include universal health screenings, sick and injury care, flu shots, vaccines, primary care or coordination with primary physicians for children and teens, reproductive care for teens, and other school-wide population health efforts.
- **Belmont Community Head Start Program** - a School District and State funded pre-kindergarten program that enrolls 110 students beginning at the age of 3 years old. Over 90% of these young students are from the Belmont community and matriculate up to our charter school.

- **Belmont Out of School Time Program** – in partnership with Philadelphia Health Management Corporation (PHMC), DHS and 21st Community Learning Centers, we offer a year round school-based program that offers a full array of academic, enrichment and athletic programming to students.
- **Belmont Community Daycare Program** – Our school campuses also function as daycare centers accepting CCIS funded students with the purpose of providing convenient, high quality daycare 52 weeks a year for over 200 children of our working families.

Executive Summary

Our 22 year history working with low income students has informed this proposal and our drive to work on a pilot child welfare program which challenges aspects of the current system that are not working for our students. We propose a community school model that would pilot providing the services of the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Behavioral Health Services (DBHIDS) directly by our school. This would involve a total integration of child welfare, mental health, and education services. Specifically, the model would fully integrate key behavioral health and social services- much like a Community Umbrella Agency (CUA) -within the school system in order to provide for the early intervention and prevention of on-going system dependency.

We have seen firsthand countless times that the system lacks the ability to produce lasting outcomes for most children and how this results in those children failing in school and later in life. Overall, we have identified the following issues within the current system: 1) it doesn't focus on prevention 2) it lacks a child centered approach 3) it underestimates the barriers that low income families experience in accessing services and 4) it fails to provide accountability for the long term success of the whole child.

Currently, social services, behavioral health services, medical care, and other vital social service programs are completely fragmented but often are serving children with overlapping needs. In our proposed model, these services would be integrated and, therefore, collaborative to amass better conditions and outcomes for our students and their families. We intend to provide a child centered model that strives for long-term outcomes such as dramatically increased graduation rates from high school and college, lower unemployment rates and a 50% reduction in incarceration rates, ensuring that our students are given every opportunity for success. The co-location of services in a highly integrated school-based model will eliminate the fragmentation, complexity and redundancy in the system. Relationships built through our school community will act as the catalyst to break down barriers. Excuses for failure to address children's behavioral and health needs would be eliminated. By integrating all of these services we hope to create a model that can eventually track preset goals and evaluate provider outcomes as opposed to the current model of fee for services.

The goal, since the inception of our school, has been to develop a replicable model program which would demonstrate how to break the poverty cycle, especially for the poorest children. We wanted to reduce incarceration rates by 50% plus. We saw that our worst behaving children were returning to the local Belmont Elementary School, which was then the lowest performing school, in the bottom 1%, along with the highest poverty rate – of 97% -- of any Philadelphia school. It was literally down the block. We went to the school district and prevailed upon them to let us take over this school and keep its existing attendance area. Five years later, the school

district decided to copy this model of turning over entire schools with their catchment areas to selected charter schools.

When we started our first school in 1997, our goal was to have a K-5 school with 20 kids in a class, two classes a grade, a behavior support person for the school and a social worker to do outreach to the parents. Our goal was to bring every child up to grade-level by the end of 5th grade, and then they could go to any public school and do well, and be launched for success in life. We soon learned how naïve we were.

We realized that most kids entering kindergarten could not sit in a chair while a teacher read a book. They could not hold a pencil to write letters. They could not pay attention to instruction. So we opened our Pre-K program with the goal that by the time children entered kindergarten they could be ready to begin real instruction at kindergarten level. Indeed our Pre-K program is strong enough that they know most of their letters, 30 sight words and know how to do some basic level of reading.

We would like to institute a pre-natal/infant and early childhood program. It would try to maximize good parenting skills by teaching and supporting appropriate behavior at the earliest years. Many young parents simply are unprepared for childbirth and raising a child. We would like to demonstrate the benefits of early and ongoing intervention with the families in our school's neighborhood.

Unfortunately, about one third of our children are not able to participate appropriately with their classmates because of an array of challenges with which they were born or with the experience in their home or their neighborhood. These children are exposed to multiple kinds of trauma which impact their ability to concentrate and learn, and to have normal relationships with their classmates and teachers. They live in a community with a pervasive culture of violence where half of our students have personally known at least one person who has been killed by a gun. We estimate that close to 50% of our children live in a home where a parent or a step parent is or has been incarcerated. About 20% of our children are currently, or have been, homeless, at various times staying in a shelter, or with grandparents, neighbors or other relatives. Often, they sleep on a couch or on the floor. Many of our children have had to move from where they lived because of parent instability or eviction. Most of our students do not want to leave our school when their parents move out of the area. They must commute as much as 1 hour each day each way from their new place of residence, at ages as young as eight years old (accompanied till age 11), to get to school.

In addition to the above challenges, many of our children live in a state of severe poverty because their parents, many of whom are high school dropouts, are earning minimum or low wages. Others struggle from endemic mental health issues, poor social and communication skills, prison records, and very notably, live in a community where there is a significant ongoing level of adults lacking employable skills as well as extreme violence, which can permeate their workplace behavior. Often, our families run out of food stamps and/or money in the last part of the month, and literally have to scrounge to find food to feed their children. This is part of the reason why the free meals we supply to our students, including a modified dinner for those who stay after school, are so critical. Their most challenging days can be when school is not in session, and this lifeline is not available.

Despite all of the myriad of challenges faced by our students and families, and despite having the highest poverty rate of any Philadelphia school at 97%, Belmont Charter was ranked by the

Philadelphia School District for the 2017-2018 school year in the top half of all publicly funded Philadelphia schools, at number 71 out of 147 schools. We ranked 5th out of 26 schools in our peer group. We are very heartened by the fact that 63% of our students met their annual yearly progress improvement, and also 63% of our Kindergarten to 2nd grade students scored at grade level.

We achieved these great results despite the fact that over 22% of our students are receiving special education services. Between our two schools, over 60 of our students have significant behavior management skill challenges, such that they have assigned to them individually a full or part-time Therapeutic Support Staffer (TSS) because of their proclivity for outbursts, anger, and other disruptive behavior.

We have learned that the single-most important aspect of our success, and the potential opportunity to mainstream the majority of our students so that they can graduate and pursue further education or employment is LOVE and EMPATHY. This is our Secret Sauce. We have created a culture where the staff understands our full dedication to embracing the students where they are, helping them to meet and surpass their challenges, all with great patience and with kindness. Our staff works as if they are a big family who continually share information and strategies with each other about the various issues which the students have. This feeds into the amazing statistic that every employee at our high school from last year returned to work again this year. Our staff really appreciates being in an environment where they can make a difference and attend to the needs not just of the relatively higher-achieving students, many of whom will go on to college and lead a clearly successful life, but they especially appreciate our commitment to help every single child succeed, even one of our young men who took a detour in the second half of ninth grade to serve prison time for a robbery. We have found that this atmosphere of compassion and dedication to helping every child clearly translates both to the atmosphere within the school and to the manner in which the students respond.

The violence which permeates into our school from the neighborhood and has been a major challenge for us to overcome. We have learned that over several years, students learn to see the difference between the two very different worlds in which they live every day: the neighborhood and the school. They often have a different code of conduct inside and outside of school in order to survive. They learn that when they graduate they will have to choose which world they want to live in. And quite unfortunately, some of our parents openly exhibit or encourage aggressive behavior by their children. Our security cameras captured footage of a mother beating her daughter at dismissal, in front of the school steps, because of her refusal to beat up a student in her younger sister's class. We have periodic school lock downs each year because of shootings, police chases, and finding wounded, or worse, victims within a block of our school, even right outside.

The local neighborhood is rampant with drug dealing and will typically have several killings and many more shootings each year. We would like to attempt a program which does outreach to parents to assist them with employment and the requisite training, as well as other aspects of their lives, while at the same time trying to coach them with support for their children and with strategies to reduce violence. We feel parents will respond better to our outreach when we are doing something for them, not just asking for their assistance with their children. Nonviolence will be implicit in our outreach, just as we teach and reinforce it to our students.

We have had a full time nurse practitioner for about ten years who has been hugely beneficial. She is able to examine and administer medications to our students. It permits us to proactively diagnose for asthma which is quite prevalent along with other medical issues. Doing this in-house means the students do not have to miss a day for a doctor's appointment, they are guaranteed the examination, and they will receive and take any medication as needed. The nurse is also available after school to treat residents from the community. This is part of our outreach to service the needs of the entire community. We hope to be in the vanguard of reimbursements from insurance providers including Medicare for the much lower cost treatment which we administer to their clients in our school. This is a model which can and should be done statewide. It saves money for the insurer and the schools, while significantly improving the health care of poor children. The Philadelphia School District is also working on this goal.

National statistics show that 64% of black male high school dropouts become incarcerated by the age of 34. The dropout rates of our local public high schools is approximately 40%. This means that one can predict based on precedent that over 20% of the entering 9th grade class at many Philadelphia High Schools will become incarcerated by age 34. These schools struggle to maintain daily attendance of 80%. By contrast, the typical daily attendance in our high school is 94%. It is so satisfying to see our students actually enjoying school and participating in our myriad of activities. We believe that our graduation rate will be 90% or higher. Our biggest goal is to reduce our students' incarceration rate by at least half. This in turn would reduce inmate population by half or more. And the positive nature of our program should mean that even those who go to jail are much less violent and can be good candidates for rehabilitation.

Most schools focus on trying to orient all their students to college prep courses and emphasizing the expectation that every student should go to college. By designing a high school curriculum with expectations around the predominant goal of entering college, we stigmatize the majority of students who attend a very low income school as students who are failing to fulfill expectations. Imagine sitting in multiple classes over several years which are geared to taking Keystone Exams which are above your level to really understand. This mentality of mandating a uniform educational expectation for everyone, in effect, pushes many kids to drop out of school. They know they cannot do the work. They feel that they are failures. They are easily distracted and disruptive because they don't follow the material. Our system is failing them by having a one-shoe-fits-all mentality that presumes that every student is both mentally and emotionally capable of doing grade-level work in each high school subject. We have learned that even in our school, there is a need to have differentiation in the academic requirements which are appropriate to the abilities and the challenges of each student. Simplistically, these requirements would be reflective of the realistic capabilities of the children. We want to experiment with an honors program for our highest students – hopefully 25 to 30%, and encourage them to do full college prep work. The majority of our students want preparation for careers. Teaching for success in their chosen area should be the essence of what they learn. The universal practice and statistic of measuring a school's success in serving its students by measuring the percentage who matriculate in college often will sadly give prestige to the high school while being a disservice to some or many of the students. For multigenerationally poor students, this is a recipe for them to fail.

For these reasons, we wish to customize the school program to accommodate the realistic needs and interests of each child individually and move away from the requirement that they must take the keystone math and other tests. In 1927, Bucyrus Foundry and Manufacturing

merged with the Erie Steam Shovel Company to form Bucyrus-Erie. That same year my parents attended East High School in Erie, Pa. along with their classmate and close friend, the Honorable Sam Roberts our former Pa. Supreme Court Chief Justice. All three of them took algebra, trigonometry, geometry and advanced algebra. Today, close to 100 years since the Bucyrus Erie merger and the high school graduation of the Honorable Justice Roberts. These same math topics have been taught for over 100 years in US schools. It is long overdue to experiment with changing the rigid requirements for our most disadvantaged students. Today, none of our Belmont students who are not in our honors classes will ever use or benefit from the old high school math. Many do not understand it or have any desire to learn it. It is counterproductive to keep them coming to class and avoid being disruptive. They feel bored and that they are wasting their time. I agree with them. So we would like to teach them a reinforced basic computational math along with consumer math as their actual accredited courses. And we also want to teach our students how to use computers in the workforce. Depending on their competency and interest, we would like to teach as much proficiency as possible with computers. Much of their Future of Work will depend on computer literacy, and for some programming or related skills.

Our approach at Belmont is to meet the needs of our students where they are. We especially focus on what happens after high school. Will it be further education? Will it be career training? Or will it be a job? We are achieving great success by having a full time career counselor dedicated to every 75 students. Currently, our career counselor has been starting with 9th grade students and then is staying with those same students as they advance each year. The counselor gives them career aptitude testing, exposure, site visits, and other orientation into the possible jobs or further education in which they express an interest or for which they appear to exhibit the capacity. The career counselor will assist them with the entire application, preparation, and interview process to identify and obtain jobs, career training, or college admission.

We currently offer all students the option of one afternoon a week in the JEVS Program to give them hands on orientation around potential mechanical job options such as HVAC, electrician, etc. We would like to offer our non-honors students, starting in 9th grade, the option of having a split week, which is in part an academic and in part a vocational exposure or training program. Many of our students don't yet really know the kind of job that they want, therefore we would like the option of a program with more than one vocational offering.

For students who are interested in pursuing college, we take them on school visits, discuss candidly the work expectations, assist with SAT preparation, and explore possible career options. We also pay for any student who wishes to take summer school classes at Philadelphia Community College, starting at the end of 9th grade so they can both build college-readiness and sample what it is like to study independently in a college setting.

Our career counselor also helps coordinate other summer experiences for our students, preferably with some aspect of part-time work so that they can both earn money and understand the expectations of how to obtain and maintain gainful employment.

Because we are dealing with so many students from multigenerationally poor families where there is a history of incarceration, we are determined to minimize the number of our students who become incarcerated. We are cognizant that even if you graduate from high school, if you cannot get a job, in order to survive you will likely break the law and go to jail. We feel that the

years immediately after high school are critical to make sure that we support students from families who are unable to assist them in their transition from high school out into a world of self-sufficiency and full accountability. We have committed that the same career counselor, who will have been with the students through 12th grade, will remain with them for the 4 years following graduation. For those attending college, the counselor will be a resource to help them with course selection and the significant adjustment to independent living and study skills. They would help with appropriate clothes and supplies and help with the transition from Belmont to being a first-generation college student. For those pursuing jobs, or job training, the counselor will be available for whatever challenges come up in their work life or whatever career changes they wish to make. We will encourage students to be in regular contact with their career counselors and we will maintain an open door policy to encourage our graduates to drop by or call us as frequently as they wish. We plan to facilitate dinners or get-together events on a monthly basis, as well as possibly a yearly retreat. Our counselors, as appropriate, will check in with employers to be able to proactively assist with any workplace adjustments or challenges.

The current indication is that about 25% of our students will enroll in some college degree program. A major challenge is to make sure that they are properly prepared for this experience. There is currently a real disconnect in their understanding of academic rigor and it is critical to instill a strong work ethic. We would like to initiate an honors track in every grade starting in 5th grade, where there is a requirement of doing homework, maintaining good behavior, and cultivating an interest or curiosity in learning. In order to broaden the net to include students who have the aptitude for such a program but lack the discipline or home support, our plan is to have our social work team responsible for working proactively with the students and especially the parents on an individual basis. They need to understand the importance of academic attainment and its relevance to future success. We hope to as much as double the number of students that can complete a strong academic program by providing this parallel support.

We have determined the need to have a full time job outreach counselor who can develop both the knowledge base and personal relationships with potential summer internship employers for all students. We also need early identification of employers who will hire or pre-hire our students and provide them summer internships and job opportunities. We believe that truly nothing is more important than making sure our students are able to obtain and retain a job that will initially or eventually provide them with an adequate income.

Among our non-Honors Track students, there is a particular challenge with understanding future orientation and the importance of a consistent & goal-oriented work ethic. There is also an aversion to studying, independent reading, to intellectual curiosity and to an interest in learning. We need to explore a program of individualized and sustained parent-student outreach to propagate the relevance and the importance of academic performance to future outcomes. This will require a multi-pronged approach of re-education and support coming from our social and mental health workers, positive psychology, teachers and their school assistants, and school culture officers (nurture rather than discipline). We would like to lengthen the school day and the school year. This would enable us to do both in-school homework and make-up learning. We also need to broaden our students' knowledge and experiences from outside their local community so there is much more context and meaning to the materials which we teach them. It would also broaden their aspirations of who they can be and what they can do when they grow up.

We currently have a staffer who meets periodically with teachers and students to discuss aspects of positive psychology, including peer counseling. We teach them how to analyze their actions and in doing so, help redirect anger, disappointment and misunderstandings with other people. We plan to expand this program because of its very positive benefits, especially for students who have been quick to anger and are prone to physical confrontation.

Even though we do not yet have the delegated responsibility for cases of child abuse and foster care, our social workers nonetheless are actively involved with our families who are included in these categories. Every grade in our school has approximately 5 or more families who are at significant risk of a major family crisis. They need ongoing counseling to protect both the welfare and the learning capacity of our students. Because of our high risk population, we believe that our school currently needs 12+ full time social workers. Eventually, we want to provide all the social, child abuse, foster care and mental health services which our students require. We know these families quite well and have their trust and respect. As such, we are uniquely positioned to provide day to day monitoring of our students and be proactive to avert many problems before they arise. We actively work to employ personnel from the community as they know best what is really happening and how to handle the challenges. Future plans include allocating discretionary funds which our social workers can use to avert disruptions to the lives of our students, and opening a food and clothing pantry so that we can focus on meeting urgent food or clothing needs for our families.

Ideally, our social workers and teachers should be assisted by people from the community who can support learning and positive behavior on an individual student basis. Their work would also include helping to support individualized classroom learning and being active in our after school and summer programs.

Because of the extensive trauma and numerous challenges which the students face in their lives, and to also assist parents in crisis, we need a school-based team of psychologists, therapists or mobile therapists. As well as the approval to provide therapeutic sessions for parents and children within our school buildings. We have also found that residents of our community are often unwilling to participate in the standard therapy regimen and uncomfortable revealing adverse home and personal circumstances. We know they are also unlikely to travel to treatment locations out of the area. The therapist should be part of the school team, so that students and families can develop familiarity with them over time. Our social workers or others with knowledge of the family circumstances would, with the individual's approval, accompany parents initially to these sessions to create a level of trust. We believe that this would have a dramatically different therapeutic outcome.

There is a significant challenge of having caregivers schedule and travel to needed therapy sessions. Traveling out of the area is a major obstacle along with lack of trust to deal with unknown professionals. Because of the urgency of treatment for many of our families, we'd like to institute a program utilizing a combination of mobile and school-based therapists. Rather than only having scheduled, formal appointments in an office, we would offer the flexibility to have therapists who can visit families in their homes as well as meet in casual settings with students and parents. We want to avoid the stigma of people feeling they are being treated for a problem, and use more of the social work model, where we are simply conversing with them in an unstructured, as-needed basis, and regularly "checking in" just to talk. We feel it would be incredibly productive to teach parents and students how to analyze their behavior and to set

goals from an advisory perspective by a school professional rather than going to be “treated” because they have a “medical condition.”

Today we have such a rare opportunity to hopefully dramatically reduce incarceration and poverty for a significant population of people for whom the trillions of dollars spend on the war on poverty has been a failure. We have been continually working for 22 years at finding how to succeed in helping the children from the most challenged families enter the mainstream and become self-sufficient. It would be such a missed opportunity to prevent our model, experience and existing team of 200 people from going to the next level. We are shovel-ready with a blueprint for success based on our extensive experience and track record. We need your support to move this effort forward.