

# Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School

## Holyoke, Massachusetts

### Overview

#### **Mission Statement:**

The Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School (PFSJCS) is a new public high school preparing students for college success while inspiring them to be active and effective citizens. We achieve educational excellence and social responsibility for all our students through high expectations and a rigorous academic and social justice curriculum. Our students graduate with strong intellectual and ethical foundations necessary for future leaders of a global society.

#### **Vision Statement:**

**At Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School we believe in:**

**Equal Opportunity:** There is no greater need in public education than to give every student the opportunity and resources to succeed. This was the vision of Paulo Freire, our namesake. He identified quality education for all individuals as the primary way to create a more socially just society.

**Achievement:** Paulo Freire espoused the importance of literacy and academic achievement. We join in the belief that personal literacy becomes a path to realizing full human potential. PFSJCS graduates will be: literate, active, self-aware, prepared to succeed in higher education, able to determine and attain their personal goals, and capable in serving as inspirational leaders and positive role models.

**Diversity:** By enrolling students from communities that represent different racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds, as well as encompassing urban and rural settings, we will be able to provide an enriched educational environment for sharing a wide range of personal experiences and perspectives while modeling social justice. PFSJCS will honor and celebrate the diversity of our

students, teachers, parents, and surrounding communities, and equally value their contributions to the educational process.

**Social Justice:** At PFSJCS we model social justice values and norms, and provide information, encouragement and educational programs to build a collective awareness that fosters excellence, equity, and respect for all individuals. At PFSJCS social justice means that all students, regardless of race, culture, income, abilities, or sexual orientation, have equal access to a quality education, necessary resources, and the opportunity to live productive and successful lives.

**Full Service:** The Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School founders understand that education doesn't just occur Monday to Friday, 8 hours a day, for 180 days a year. Learning is a continuous program of growth and development for students, family members, and the entire school community. PFSJCS's full-service programming will include a preparatory summer academy; programs throughout the school year; an extended day; evening and Saturday classes for skill building and enrichment opportunities; virtual learning programs; evening adult literacy classes; and community building activities on evenings and weekends.

## Educational Philosophy:

We believe that every student is capable of personal academic excellence if provided with the right educational environment, excellent teachers, and comprehensive support systems. The following values successfully served our students and community at PVPA and are documented as key components in creating successful schools.

1-High Expectations- PFSJCS promotes a rigorous academic and social curriculum with high expectations for student performance and behavior. All students are expected to master a college preparatory curriculum so they can successfully complete college. Research has shown that student grades improve when schools establish and maintain high expectations.

2-Active Community Membership-PFSJCS intentionally brings students, parents, teachers, administrators, and board members together as a supportive community for communication, collaboration, to uphold the mission, and share a common vision of achievement. Having a shared vision has been proven to help with community development and school success.

3-Excellent Teaching-PFSJCS recognizes the importance of hiring and supporting highly qualified teachers, who are: passionate about their subject, skilled at establishing a positive and productive classroom environment, committed to differentiating instruction to meet individual needs, able to provide meaningful feedback, willing to communicate regularly with parents, and committed to student success.

4-Clear Goals and Expectations-PFSJCS provides clear standards and rubrics for academic and social performance, so that all community members know expectations and have a clear and consistent understanding of what constitutes mastery and success.

5-Specific Data and Feedback Systems-PFSJCS uses meaningful and supportive assessments systems to determine student/school needs, make appropriate adjustments, and meet or exceed student/school performance goals.

6-Individualized Support-PFSJCS will address the individual needs of each student through: identification of strengths, abilities, and areas of concern; creating and monitoring student success plans; utilizing differentiated instruction; providing classroom and afterschool support systems; and assuring college preparation and support.

The focus of our educational program, incorporating all the above values, will be centered on the following three principles: Personal Excellence, Supportive Communities, and Social Responsibility.

I-Personal Excellence-PFSJCS students will be encouraged and supported to reach their highest levels of achievement from enrollment to graduation and beyond, through the following programs and supports:

A- Success Plans- In order to create and implement individual success plans, students will be given a variety of assessments to determine their skills, strengths, and areas of need. Whenever possible, initial assessments will take place prior to our summer program, so that we can utilize the summer session to maximize preparation and skill building for the first day of class. Initial assessments will include: interviews of students and parents, self-assessment forms, home language survey , review of student records, multiple learning style labs, and ELA and Math assessments. The initial assessments will identify strengths, personal history and goals, language acquisition skills, and will

address immediate needs for support systems. Success plans will be reviewed and updated at least twice each school year, so that they clearly reflect the growth and development of the student.

B- Organizational Skills-During the summer orientation, all incoming students will take part in an organizational skills workshop that will help prepare them for academic success. Students will learn to: use a daily planner, organize materials and supplies, develop effective note-taking skills, learn productive study habits, and know how to be prepared for class. Teachers will consistently reinforce organization skills in their classrooms.

C- Excellence in Literacy: reading, speaking, and writing Proficiency and fluency in reading, writing and speaking are essential for success in all areas of learning. Students will have daily practice in vocabulary, reading and writing, and every subject will provide opportunities to advance literacy skills. Frequent oral presentations will strengthen communication skills and semester assessments will chart and set new individual literacy goals. Students will become fluent in reading comprehension, writing, public speaking, foreign language skills, and technological communications.

D- Clear Standards and Benchmarks- We know that student learning is enhanced when students are explicitly aware of expectations. Students and parents will be given the standards and benchmarks for each class prior to the beginning of each semester, so that there are clear expectations for each subject. Teachers identify, in each class, the standards and benchmarks that are being addressed, so that students can easily articulate the skills they are focusing on and know when they have mastered those skills.

PFSJCPS will use the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes for English Language Learners developed by the DESE to provide teachers, parents and ELL students with standards that address vocabulary, promote oral interaction in the acquisition of academic English, and the instruction of reading and writing within rigorous instruction in mathematics, science, technology/engineering, history and social science along with other content areas.

E- Formative Assessments- Teachers will utilize a variety of formative assessment tools to provide specific and immediate feedback during the learning process. Formative assessments will help direct students in their learning and help teachers adjust lessons to meet individual student needs.

F- Challenging and Energizing Classroom Activities. Teachers will provide thought-provoking and stimulating information and activities to bring focus and engagement to the learning process. Initial

information will be relevant to students' lives and interests and will bridge to other areas of knowledge. Students will find common linkages and comparisons, as well as develop understanding of historical patterns and current trends. Classes will be student centered, holistic, and collaborative.

G- High Levels of Accomplishment- PFSJCS graduation requirements will meet standard college entrance requisites, so that every graduate is prepared to attend the college of their choice. Students will be required to complete all assignments at a minimum 70%, in order to receive course credit. Students not meeting the 70% goal will need to do additional work and revise or retest to bring their grade up to the minimum standard. This will assure that all students have a solid foundation for higher levels of study. Students will be encouraged and supported in continuing with their work in order to reach higher levels of completion. Students showing mastery of grade level standards and benchmarks will be allowed to take upper grade level and dual-enrollment college courses.

H- Support Systems- PFSJCS will assure that all necessary resources are available to students. Students needing additional support will receive small group and/or individual tutoring to help with understanding, skill development, and completion of assignments. Support will be available in after school, evenings, summer, and Saturday sessions. Schedules will be developed based on individual needs and availability of tutors. PFSJCS will assure that all necessary resources are available to students.

I- College Preparation and Support- Students and parents will receive their college-planning package at their very first orientation meeting. The package outlines a program to assist students in meeting academic and extra-curricular goals, planning their courses, determining their course of study, identifying appropriate schools, preparing for PSATs and SATs, preparing materials for acceptance, applying for scholarships and grants, and college freshman year support. Starting in 9th grade, students will formulate a 4-year college plan, with specific action steps, that will be reviewed and updated at least annually.

II-Supportive Communities-PFSJCS will establish a safe, active, and responsive community that understands and practices social justice values and supports positive community membership.

A- Excellent Communication- PFSJCS will create and maintain dependable communication systems to assure that all community members have current and accurate information on school policies and

expectations, health concerns, schedules, events, class descriptions and expectations, student assignments and progress reports, and available support systems. All written communication will be translated into native languages for non-English speaking family members.

B- Active Participation- All PFSJCS school community members will be encouraged to take an active role in the school. Monthly evening meetings will be held to present information, review the monthly Board agenda, and address issues and concerns. Evening and weekend programs and activities will bring our school community together, and formal and informal feedback systems, including discussion groups, surveys, evaluations, and a suggestion box will identify and address needs and concerns. The Principal and Executive Director will post regularly scheduled open hours for any community member to sign up and meet.

C- Appreciation of Diversity-PFSJCS will honor and celebrate the diversity of the entire school community, equally valuing the contributions of all to the educational process. Native languages, customs, and cultures will be represented throughout the curriculum, demonstrating and enumerating the valuable contributions each culture has made to our society.

D- Social Emotional Curriculum- PFSJCS will provide educational standards and activities that help students to: build positive community relationships, appropriately address their individual needs, make good personal decisions, and successfully handle social situations. Teachers, administrators, and school personnel will model standards, and parents will receive materials and training to incorporate this learning at home.

E- Code of Conduct- Students, teachers, school personnel and administrators will develop, sign, and implement a code of conduct that will focus on individual rights and responsibilities, respect, and cooperation. Working in partnership with PFSJCS, parents/guardians will review and sign the Code of Conduct to affirm our Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, support clear consequences for all violations, and assure that our school is a safe and respectful environment for all community members.

F- Community Partnerships-At PFSJCS we believe community extends beyond our school. We will assure that all possible opportunities and resources are available to our students and that the school actively partners with community organizations. The following are several of the partnerships we have identified:

1- PVPA will be a supportive partner joining us in sharing resources, curriculum development, best practices, teacher trainings, and student support groups.

2- UMASS Boston will provide a long-term research project, advise us on literacy and social justice curriculum, and help with identifying scholarships.

3- Springfield College and Amherst College will work with us on the placement of both undergraduate and graduate students at PFSJCS as tutors, teaching aides and research assistants.

### III-Social Responsibility

A- Social Justice Awareness – During summer orientation and throughout the school year, students will be instructed in philosophical, historical, and cultural social justice values. They will build an understanding of oppression and privilege as well as a respect for diversity. They will learn about non-violence and conflict resolution. Linkages will be made throughout the year in every subject and class.

Students will examine and discuss local, national, and global issues of social justice. Students will use site visits, interviews, internships, and work experiences to gain first-hand knowledge of social justice issues. Students will present findings through written and oral reports, web pages, blogs, podcasts, articles, radio and video presentations, to the school community, the surrounding communities, and to a global audience.

B- Democratic Process – Students, parents, teachers, administrators and Board Members of PFSJCS will work collectively. Representatives from each constituent group will serve as members on: The Board of Trustees, Board Committees, School Council, Special Education Parent Advisory Council, Hiring Committees, and Strategic Planning Committees, so that representative voices are heard and considered.

C- Student Leadership- Students will have many opportunities to take a leadership role. Students will learn mediation, self-governance, and will work collaboratively to create and uphold a safe and supportive school culture. Students will participate in peer mediation and a restorative justice council (International Institute for Restorative Practices 2009). Students will be given on-going opportunities to both teach and lead. Older students will become mentors for incoming students and will share their understandings and values.

D- Social Justice Themes- PFSJCS will incorporate social justice themes to explore historical, social, and political issues, examine and debate opposing viewpoints, generate lively and meaningful discussions, and integrate a variety of information and perspectives into classroom assignments, project-based learning, interdisciplinary programs, and all school events.

E- Participation and Action- The curriculum will be designed to help students see themselves as integral and active members of their surrounding community and will guide students to form relationships and participate in community development projects (a graduate requirement), internships, leadership initiatives, and community dialogues and interactions. Along the way, students will learn social change strategies for impacting local, regional, national and global arenas.

**BOB BRICK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
**LJUBA MARSH, PRINCIPAL**

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