August 23, 2019

Rhode Island Department of Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Re: Local Impact Analysis: YouthBuild Preparatory Academy Charter School

To Whom It May Concern:

For more than twenty years, YouthBuild Providence has worked with primarily students of color in Providence to raise their self-esteem beyond their circumstances and provide them with opportunity to succeed. Our foundational program has graduated over 700 students during this time period, and successfully graduated another class of students this past June 21st.

Recognizing our ongoing success and its critical importance, the General Assembly enacted legislation in 2016 authorizing us to open and operate a high school in Providence using the model of YouthBuild Providence. As RIDE knows, we have been unable to open the school due to a disappointing lack of a partnership with the Providence School District (“PSD”). This missed and essential opportunity can be righted through the charter school application process.

We are thus writing to supplement our proposal by submitting a local impact statement in advance of the Rhode Island Department of Education and Council for Elementary and Secondary Education’s review of our charter school proposal.¹

A. Programmatic and Educational Impact

As documented in depth by the recent John Hopkins’s report, education in Providence is fraught and challenging. This is especially true for males of color. Known racial disparities exist for students of color with regard to out-of-school suspensions, court involvement, and academic achievement. And despite recent legislation that increased the minimum age at which students are able to drop out of high school to eighteen, graduation rates in Providence (and Rhode Island) remain too low while dropout rates remain too high.

For broader context on these concerns and their consequences, consider the following: (a) 13.1% of Providence residents 25 years of age and older did not obtain a high school diploma, which is

¹“Pursuant to the Rhode Island Department of Education charter application process an applicant, school district, elected official, government entity, or research institution (including, but not limited to post-secondary institutions) may provide a written local impact analysis statement directly to RIDE by August 23, 2019. This local impact analysis statement may choose to comment on a proposal’s: a) fiscal impact on a city or town; b) programmatic impact on the sending school district; and/or, c) the educational impact on the students in the district.”
nearly double the state rate of 7.2%; (b) the median household income in Providence is $40,366, compared to $61,043 for the rest of Rhode Island; and (c) Providence’s unemployment rate is 5.1%, compared to Rhode Island’s rate of 4.1%. These numbers are troubling for Providence and its residents now and for the future.

YouthBuild Providence, and now YouthBuild Preparatory Academy Charter School (“YBPA CS”), was developed to address these issues and, specifically, the persistent opportunity and education gaps faced by boys and young men of color in Providence. Our mission is to provide a liberating educational experience to Providence students, with a focus on engaging young men of color and preparing them to be confident, civically engaged leaders.

Once opened, YBPA CS will educate youths aged 14 to 21 who reside in Providence and are achieving limited success in traditional settings. Though available to all, YBPA CS’s model is ideally designed for students who are (a) over-age or under-credited, (b) out-of-school or with poor attendance, (c) disconnected from their school, teachers, classmates, and community, as well as for students with (d) high probability of school failure due to a variety of circumstances, or (e) demonstrated struggle to excel in a traditional school setting.

Many of YBPA CS’s students will require academic and nonacademic interventions to master the content and skills required of the Common Core State Standards (“CCSS”). YBPA CS is thoughtfully designed to meet the needs of students who have either already exited the school system, or who exhibit warning signs that put them at-risk of school failure. In addition to meeting CCSS, our model purposefully integrates community development into its programming and will immediately offer workforce development and training in the education, human services and construction field. YBPA CS intends to expand its career-focused programming in the future, once student interest and workforce need is determined.

Grounded in the principles of social justice, YBPA CS will uniquely blend a rigorous curriculum, wrap around services, and caring community to transform the school experiences of our students and ensure that they have the opportunity to reach their full potential. YBPA CS’s leaders, teachers, and staff are committed to a holistic approach that will promote positive social, emotional, and academic development and benefit Providence’s students and their community.

Lowering Providence’s drop-out rate, and encouraging students who have previously done so to re-engage, is unquestionably in the best interests of not only these students but the city and Rhode Island as a whole. As detailed above, our methods are proven and not theoretical. We have successfully employed our tested model for over twenty years through YouthBuild Providence. YBPA CS is a logical, and critically necessary, next step to expand our services to Providence’s most vulnerable students.

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B. Fiscal Impact:

YBPA CS will have a positive fiscal impact on Providence, as well as the entire state. It is an error to view YBPA CS’s fiscal impact as merely the cost of the local share. This manner of analysis is myopic. Rather, any fiscal impact analysis must also incorporate the future costs savings and return on investment after a student earns their diploma from YBPA CS.

As proposed, approximately 30% of YBPA CS’s enrollment will be students who have previously dropped out, while 70% will be students at risk of dropping out. In Fiscal Year 2021, upon opening, YBPA CS’s total projected enrollment will be 135 students, with a local share of $586,845 and a state share of $1,449,400. In Fiscal Year 2022, YBPA CS’s total projected enrollment will increase to 200 students, with a local share of $869,400 and a state share of $2,147,259. In Fiscal Year 2023, YBPA CS’s total projected enrollment will max at 265 students, with a local share of $1,151,955 and a state share of $2,845,118.

Research shows that high school graduates earn higher incomes and experience lower rates of public assistance participation and criminal activity. But without the means to obtain an education or necessary skills training, students who have dropped out have limited employment opportunities and are more likely to need public assistance during their lifetime. Upon weighing the yearly per pupil cost to educate a student versus the compounding and long-lasting effects of having a diploma (especially for students who have already dropped out of traditional Providence high schools), the fiscal benefit to Providence and its residents is clear.

In addition to helping individual students earn their high school degrees, dropout recovery efforts have the potential to benefit the entire state by reducing youth unemployment. A January 2014 report from the Young Invincibles, a non-partisan, non-profit organization that advocates on behalf of young Americans, estimates the loss of state and federal taxes alone from youth unemployment as $68.39 per taxpayer in the state of Rhode Island. This report estimates Rhode Island’s total annual cost of youth unemployment as $7,722,984.

By helping students develop the skills needed to find employment, dropout recovery efforts could also increase Providence’s tax revenue, decrease its social services spending, and strengthen its future workforce in a sustainable way. Indeed, The Alliance for Excellent Education (“AEE”) has estimated that a 5% increase in the high school graduation rate in the Providence-Warwick area could mean an additional $26.5 million in home sales, $1.7 million in auto sales, $11.1 million in earnings, and $660,000 in state and local tax revenue, as well as $4.1 million in healthcare savings. AEE has additionally estimated that a 5% increase in male high school graduation rates in Rhode Island could mean $38 million in annual crime-related savings, $4.2 million in annual additional earnings, and a total benefit of $42.2 million to Rhode Island’s economy.

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5 http://impact.all4ed.org/.
In summary, YBPA CS is positioned and able to provide critical and much needed educational services to Providence’s students including a positive and far-reaching fiscal impact. By helping to close the opportunity gaps faced by its students, YBPA CS will empower its graduates to become Providence’s future leaders, bring significant financial benefit to Providence’s economy, and decrease strain on the city and state’s social service providers.

Sincerely,

Angela Romans, Board Chair

Anthony Hubbard, CEO