



# Social Justice School

Application for a Public Charter School to the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board  
March 7, 2019

## Applicant Information Sheet

Name of Proposed Charter School: Social Justice School

If applicable, affiliated **School Management Organization**: \_\_\_\_

Affiliated SMO is: ☒ Non-profit ☐ For-profit

**Designated Representative:** Myron Long

**Telephone:** 202-714-8498 **Email:** Myron@thesocialjusticeschool.org

Please list the names of all members of the founding group and, when applicable, their role in the proposed school. At a minimum, the school must identify founding group members to fill the roles listed below for the application review process, and, if approved, the planning year. One person may be identified for two more roles, if needed. Eventually, founding team members may be incorporated into the school's charter agreement as key personnel. Founding group members may choose to stay in their respective roles once the school is operational or transition to different roles prior to the charter agreement being executed.

Founding Group Member Names	Proposed Role
Myron Long	Executive Director
Brandon Johnson	Principal
Rael Nelson James	Board Chair
Carylye Shruter	Board Treasurer
Samantha Abrams	Board Member
Justin Jones	Board Member
Tammy Tuck	Board Member
Lorraine Ramos	Board Member
Maia Shanklin-Roberts	Board Member
Aaron Stallworth	Board Member
Tiffany Clemens	Board Member
Erica Ahlgren	Advisory Council
Allegra Brown	Advisory Council
David Clifford	Advisory Council
Monica Green	Advisory Council
Derrick Johnson	Advisory Council
Michelle Molitor	Advisory Council
Asheligh Rose	Advisory Council
Nicole Smith	Advisory Council
Allison Waddy	Advisory Council

Stephanie Spangler	Advisory Council
Michelle Rush	Advisory Council
Meena Nankani	Advisory Council
Erin Vaughn	Advisory Council

Type of Application:

☒ New School

☐ Conversion of Existing School: ☐ Public

☐ Private

Proposed First Year of Academic Operation: 2020-2021

Relationship between the school and its employees:

☐ Contract

☒ At-will

Requested Enrollment Ceiling

	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR	Add columns until reaching capacity.
PK3					
PK4					
K					
1					
2					
3					
4					
5	75	75	75	75	
6		75	75	75	
7			75	75	
8				75	
9					
10					
11					
12					
Adult					
TOTAL	75	150	225	300	

Proposed Location of School, if known (address or area(s) of city): 5450 Third Street, NE



# Executive Summary

## Core Beliefs

The mission of the Social Justice School (SJS) is to catalyze an integrated community of middle-school learners to be scholar-activists who are designers of a more just world. In order to design a more just world, our students require an education that embraces and lives out a set of core beliefs about what it means to be human. Our school is rooted in our three Core Beliefs:

### **Core Belief #1: We believe that students, staff, and families are F.R.E.E.**

At SJS, we believe that a more just world requires that well-informed, caring, and activated individuals are:

Fearless—in the face of injustice;

Relentless—in the pursuit of justice;

Empathetic—to the feelings, thoughts and experiences of others; and

Engaged—with heart and mind.

### **Core Belief #2: We believe in providing every student with an inclusive learning environment.**

SJS is an inclusive educational space where students build deep relationships across differences. The culture of the students, families, and teachers are reflected in the curriculum of our school—cultural differences are celebrated, and we are intentionally integrated. A key structure that we use to cultivate these community bonds is Crew, the advisory program at the core of the EL Education model. Crews are diverse teams of students and teachers who work together during daily sessions to build and sustain the relationships and habits that are the strong foundation of a social-emotional learning environment. Crew creates an intentional culture where every student is known, and where every member of the community is a vital part of the whole—EL Education describes this interconnected support by saying that “there are no passengers, only crew.”

### **Core Belief #3: We believe that effective educational systems are design-oriented and iterative.**

SJS believes that students should engage in work that is meaningful, active, and rooted in problem-solving that contributes to a better world. Students engage with the world as active learners. They see the world as a process and not a product. As such, they feel more empowered to change their reality. To do this, the process through which students learn must be centered around problem-solving.

## Design Anchors

In order to fulfill our mission and achieve our vision, we have designed our school around a set of key Design Anchors. These anchors define our approach to curriculum and instruction, and guide our decisions about the fundamental structures and practices that make our Core Beliefs live throughout each day.

### **Design Anchor #1: Our work is anchored by the pursuit of social justice.**

Social Justice is a designed response to systems of inequity and aims to create an inclusive and equitable world. SJS places social justice at the center of our educational program.

We will nurture young people who work across differences to engage critically with the world, interrupt systems of inequality, and work toward designing equitable systems with equal outcomes. We will equip students with a toolkit of equity skills and empower them to apply their academic knowledge to real-world issues of inequity and exclusion. We will accomplish this by engaging students in learning expeditions focused on social justice issues.

**Design Anchor #2: Our work is anchored by the principles of deeper learning.**

In order to prepare students for a 21st-century, globalized, and ever-changing world, we must teach them 21st-century skills. SJS embraces the Deeper Learning Practices framework, which encompasses six broad sets of competencies necessary for success in new and complex situations.<sup>1</sup> These include content mastery, effective communication, critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, self-directed learning, and academic mindsets. SJS is committed to designing and implementing a deeper instructional program that empowers students with effective communication and collaboration skills, engages them in compelling real-world issues, and challenges them to apply content knowledge and critical thinking to designing solutions.

**EL Education**

SJS has selected EL Education as the overarching model for our school because it is a clear and coherent expression of deeper learning. EL Education (formerly Expeditionary Learning) is a comprehensive school reform and school development model for elementary, middle, and high schools. EL Education is a deeper learning model, and the tenets of EL Education align well with our Core Beliefs. The model will provide SJS with ongoing support designing, refining, and implementing our program. EL Education serves almost 50,000 students at more than 150 K-12 campuses in over 30 states. A recent study by Mathematica policy Research found that after three years, students at EL Education schools were more than ten months ahead in math and seven months ahead in reading versus their peers at non-EL Education schools. Equally importantly, EL Education understands that success cannot be measured by test scores alone. EL Education has redefined student achievement to include the quality of student work and character development in addition to academic learning.<sup>2</sup>

Learning expeditions are the signature curricular structure of EL Education and are a clear expression of deeper learning. By our fourth year of operation, learning expeditions will be the central structure for organizing interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction at SJS. These expeditions, along with the skills students will learn in our unique Liberatory Design Lab class, will be the primary vehicle for engaging students in social justice activism.

Learning expeditions support all students. Lessons, activities, and projects can be differentiated through topic, text, task, and role. Students who are struggling can engage with additional texts at their independent reading level and receive scaffolds and supports for project completion. Within an expedition, educators can assign students materials on related topics in which they have great interest and can create roles within work groups that help all learners contribute successfully. Students requiring more challenge can be provided with higher-level texts, can be assigned additional tasks to extend the project, and can take leadership roles to facilitate group work.<sup>3</sup> For all these reasons, the SJS founders see learning expeditions as a strategy for educational equity.

**Design Anchor #3: Our work is anchored by Liberatory Design Thinking**

Design Thinking is a process for creative problem-solving. The Liberatory Design Thinking framework and mindsets combined are a complexity-centered approach to design for equity co-created from a collaboration with the National Equity Project and the Stanford d.school K12 Lab. It builds on the creative "design thinking" tools used across industries to build human-centered products, processes, and solutions. It is an equity-based design process with the goal of creating positive change in communities. The

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<sup>1</sup> <https://deeperlearning4all.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://eleducation.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://eleducation.org/>



Liberatory Design thinking process ensures that designers reflect on their identity as well as the identity of others when tackling complex problems.

Unfortunately, most middle schools in Washington, D.C. are not preparing learners for college and career. Families not only want rigorous schools where learners master academic content, they want diverse schools. The handful of expeditionary learning schools that exist today in the District are in high demand because they provide both of these opportunities. The Social Justice School meets this demand and need.

The founding team has designed the operational systems to support the development of teachers and staff in this model and to ensure effective management and oversight by the board that aligns with the core values and ensures that all students have access to our core curriculum and have a full continuum of supports. In addition, our school systems and education plan will support diverse learners as a matter of social justice.

Together, these elements will ensure that our students become scholar-activists, prepared for success in college or career, and who have the problem-solving skills that are needed to make the world a more just place.

## **Section A: Establishing the Need**

### **1. Mission and Philosophy**

#### Mission

The Social Justice School (SJS), will catalyze an integrated community of middle school students, 5th-8th grade, to be scholar-activists who are designers of a more just world.

#### **What is social justice?**

Social Justice is a designed response to systems of inequity that aims to create an inclusive and equitable world.

#### Vision

The SJS is a proof point of a true American community—racially and socioeconomically diverse, integrated, democratic, and problem-solving. In this community, students, teachers and parents develop a passion for social justice and are empowered to identify needs and enact change in their school, community, and the world.

#### **Why the SJS is Needed**

As a deeper learning institution, the Social Justice School meets a critical need in Washington D.C.—many middle schools are failing to prepare students for high school, college, and career. Moreover, many families do not simply desire for their children to go on to college and career—they want learning environments where students work collaboratively, communicate effectively, and solve complex problems, hence the long waitlists at the handful of Expeditionary Learning schools that focused on these deeper learning competencies. Finally, the Social Justice School meets the needs of a diversifying District where most schools remain highly segregated. We will pursue educational justice as an intentionally integrated community.

#### **Philosophy of Teaching and Learning**

At the Social Justice School, we believe that students need to develop specific skills in order to live and thrive as change agents in their communities. Those skills are collaboration, problem solving, communication, relationship building, application of content knowledge and critical thinking. To do this, we believe that learning should be challenging, engaging, and empowering.<sup>4</sup>

SJS will uphold the same rigorous academic and behavioral expectations for every student, regardless of ability, disability, or personal history, and will implement research-based instructional programs and strategies to meet the specific needs of our students. We believe that this differentiated but rigorous approach is itself a matter of social justice, given the history of schools in the city failing to support diverse learners. We are committed to the success of our students with disabilities, and students whose native language is not English and supports will be offered both within academic classes and in supplemental settings for students who need additional support. We will implement a full continuum of services in order to meet the needs of our students and ensure that all students produce high-quality work. Students with disabilities will receive the same rigorous instruction as all other students, with explicit supports through our full continuum of services. We have intentionally designed our model with the most marginalized students in mind and as a result our model will meet the needs of all students who are enrolled at SJS.

Moreover, the Social Justice School is committed to effectively serving children who are English Learners through a comprehensive approach to language instruction. We will uphold the same rigorous academic and behavioral expectations for every student, regardless of native language, and will implement research-based instructional programs and strategies to meet the specific needs of our ELL students. We are committed to the success of our ELL population and supports will be offered both within academic classes and in supplemental settings for students who need additional support for English language learning.

### **Key Pillars of Our Instructional Model**

**Rigorous Academic Instruction:** The cornerstone of our instructional model is the adoption of standards-aligned curricula that is evidence-based and focuses on problem solving, application of learning, and the production of high-quality work. We begin with the adoption of Common Core standards and craft instruction that explicitly teaches students the skills needed to become successful graduates, disruptors of inequity, and social change agents. In this learning environment, students are supported to do far more than they think they can. Teachers expect and demand excellence and teach in ways that enable students to learn deeply, surpass standards, grow intellectually and produce high-quality work. Students and teachers model habits of scholarship and character. We provide scaffolds, group students heterogeneously, and explicitly teach vocabulary and background knowledge to ensure that all students can access our curriculum.

**Learning Expeditions focused on Social Justice:** Expeditionary learning is an “approach to teaching and learning in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge. These EL projects result in high-quality products or performances for audiences that extend well beyond the classroom.”<sup>5</sup> Learning Expeditions focused on social justice allow an approach to teaching and learning in which students investigate and respond to questions, problems, and challenges that are based on social justice

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<sup>4</sup> The Deeper Instruction Framework: From Learning That Lasts: Challenging, Engaging, and Empowering Students with Deeper Instruction. Copyright 2016 by John Wiley & Sons)

<sup>5</sup> <https://eleducation.org/resources/topic/project-based-learning>



issues of significance to their communities.<sup>6</sup> The sustained, interdisciplinary exploration of a complex problem that is the hallmark of expeditionary learning is an ideal vehicle for understanding social justice, as it allows students to examine real social problems through multiple lenses and develop open-ended solutions that meet the needs of real people.

**Liberatory Design Thinking:** Design Thinking is a process for creative problem-solving.<sup>7</sup> The liberatory design thinking process ensures that designers reflect on their identity as well as the identity of others when tackling complex problems.<sup>8</sup> In a unique class, students at the Social Justice Schools will focus on problem-based tasks that are centered on local community issues. These will catalyze the designer in all students to engage with complex problems through systems design and collaboration.

**Crew:** Crew, sometimes known as advisory, is a key component of our model. In order to provide support and choice, every Social Justice School family will be paired with an educator who will stay with the family throughout their years at the school. Students who share the same Crew Leader will be part of a “crew.” This partnership will ensure that in our school, every student is known.

#### Validating our Model

In the summer of 2018, Myron Long, founder of the Social Justice School, assembled a team of three experienced educators to pilot the educational tenants and approach of the SJS. After the four-week program, students and parents raved about the experience and could not wait for the Social Justice School to open as a public school option in DC.<sup>9</sup> Fully 90% of families who attended our pilot indicated that they would enroll in our school in the future. This first cohort of “Freedom Academy” participants reaffirmed the desire for a school like the SJS and will help us to recruit founding students and families. In addition, 85% of students indicated that they would enroll in our school in the future. One student said they would attend our school, *“because we get to talk about race and justice and the future is in our hands.”*

Also, the EL education model is in high demand in D.C. and has proven to increase student achievement. Multiple factors drive that demand. First, EL schools are more diverse than most schools. The experiential approach appeals to many families, especially to more affluent families, who seek out this kind of model. This contributes to the fact that EL programs in DC and nationally tend to be more diverse—which in turn makes them appealing to families who value diverse school environments. As well, students at EL schools and schools that closely follow the EL model tend to outperform their peers who are not enrolled in EL schools. Lastly, students who are enrolled and stay in EL schools tend to make more academic growth over time than their peers.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.edutopia.org/practice/place-based-learning-connecting-kids-their-community>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ideo.com/pages/design-thinking>

<sup>8</sup> <https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources/equity-centered-design-framework>

<sup>9</sup> Funder Impact Report, August 2018. Appendix 6: Funder Impact

<sup>10</sup> <https://eleducation.org/impact/by-the-numbers>