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School Project Application Narrative

It is the policy of the ODYSSEY COMMUNITY SCHOOL that any form of discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, alienage, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, age, disability, pregnancy, gender identity or expression, veteran status, or any other basis prohibited by state or federal law is prohibited, whether by students, school employees or third parties subject to the control of the school.

Executive Summary

History and Background of Odyssey Community School

Odyssey Community School (OCS) was founded in 1997 under the very first charter granted by the Connecticut State Department of Education to begin a public charter school. We opened with 44 sixth and seventh graders. Over the next several years, OCS experienced a slow and steady growth in grades and student census. By 2006, OCS had 180 students in Grades 4-8 with 53% of students with racially and economically diverse backgrounds, reflecting our resident community of Manchester.

As early as 2009, OCS was recognized as a high-performing Connecticut public school that was successfully addressing the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students, a recognized priority for all schools and school districts in the State of Connecticut. Noted by ConnCAN, a leading advocacy movement in the Constitution State, the mission of ConnCAN is to ensure that all Connecticut children have access to a high-quality education, regardless of their address. In 2011 we were designated by ConnCAN one of the Top Ten Schools for middle school student performance, citing a 10.9% increase in CMT statewide testing from the previous year. It was noted that as our students progressed from fourth to eighth grade they showed dramatic increases in their Connecticut Mastery Tests score and on other forms of student assessment, as well.

Given the success of OCS in the early 2000's, accompanied by the strong urging of our parent community, the Board of Trustees (BOT) and administration began planning for the addition of kindergarten through Grade 3 so as to have a fully operational k-8 school. State funding was approved in July of 2011 and in September of that year OCS opened to a full contingent of k-8 students with a noted very large waiting list. In March of 2012, OCS completed Phase I construction of an additional 6,800 square feet, which provided five new elementary classrooms and bathroom suites. In the spring of 2013 OCS began Phase II and in the fall of that year OCS opened with an additional 12,000 square feet with five additional elementary classrooms, a beautiful library, large gymnasium and a spacious learning center for children with unique learning needs. In 2020, we modified our existing long-term lease through 2035 and we modified our playgrounds with several new structures, including a spacious climbing structure and an early childhood play structure.

In the spring of 2022, OCS achieved our next important growth goal. The State Board of Education approved our additional grade(s) of two pre kindergarten early childhood classrooms, each with 18 three and four-year olds. Having a preschool program at Odyssey had long been a goal of the Board and for the first time in its history, OCS became a pre-k-grade 8 school. While the seat approval process was complex, with a short construction window before school began, the outcome was less challenging than anticipated. The manifestation of several fortuitous events during the 2021-2022 school year facilitated the process including the timely, yet surprising visit from the Commissioner of Education, Charlene Russell-Tucker, in the fall of

2021, the advocacy of a former Odyssey graduate who works for the Senate Majority Leader Jason Rojas, and the willingness and unexpected availability of our previous building contractor who was able to turn our thought exchange into a successful building plan with two brand new, fully equipped classrooms each with their own designated early childhood bathroom.

During the summer of 2022, we reopened Odyssey's lottery for the 36 available preschool seats. We received nearly 100 applicants in just 48 hours, highlighting the extreme importance and significant need for high quality early childhood learning opportunities in Hartford County and in the State of Connecticut. School began without a hitch in early September and the results of this new program were notable within months. Clearly, this learning opportunity was of great benefit to our families, but more so to our 36 students.

The importance of such need for meaningful early learning opportunities, along with our desire to ensure the continuity of Odyssey's programming, which designates 36-38 seats at each grade level, drove us to seek 18 additional seats for 3-year olds and 18 seats for four-year-olds; a balance that would now allow us to have a full Odyssey cohort of preschool students.

In the fall of 2023 and again last spring, we notified The Charter Office at the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) our desire to further the expansion with two additional combined classrooms for 3 and 4-years olds. Through a long and arduous process that included extensive parental lobbying of our legislators, the Education Commissioner, Charlene Russell Tucker, and the Office of Early Childhood, we obtained the funding and eventual approval of thirty six new pre-k seats. School ended on June 17, 2024 and the next day a new building project began Phase I of yet another building expansion project; transitioning existing middle school space into designated early learning spaces with separate new bathrooms for each room and in early 2025, the addition of 18000 square feet for our current middle school students.

Preschool Curriculum and Design at OCS

Odyssey's preschool classrooms were designed as mixed-age classrooms in order to integrate children of varying ages and developmental stages and create a rich and diverse learning environment that fosters social, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic development. Younger children learn appropriate social behaviors by observing and imitating older peers, leading to a positive influence on classroom behavior, and in turn, older children often take on leadership roles, promoting responsibility, self-esteem, and the development of organizational skills.

The preschool classrooms follow *The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool*. This is a curriculum which focuses on skill development (Social/Emotional, Physical, Cognitive and Language) by structuring the learning environment. Children are engaged in a play-based environment where they are able to learn new concepts and explore new ideas through play. Preschool teachers also use an emergent curriculum to teach and plan children's learning experiences that focus on being

responsive to their interests. The goal is to create meaningful learning experiences for all children.

Assessment in the early childhood classroom is an ongoing process. Preschool classrooms use *Teaching Strategies GOLD®*, an authentic observation-based assessment system for children. The primary purpose of this assessment system is to document children's learning over time and inform instruction. Using this information, teachers intentionally create environments and developmentally appropriate learning experiences for their students. The child's classroom teacher will provide formal documentation in a report card to families three times a year, in addition to conferences twice a year. Conferences provide an opportunity for parents/guardians to raise questions and engage in meaningful dialogue with teachers about their child's development and how our assessment practices meet the unique needs of their child. Families of students with IEPs meet for PPT meetings at least annually. At any time, a parent or guardian can request a conference. Teachers maintain state teaching certification specific to teaching and assessing young children.

Within *Teaching Strategies GOLD®*, each child is assessed on 75 different standards in the areas of: social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, science and technology, social studies, the arts, and English language acquisition. Each year, teachers build Student Learning Objective (SLOs) around these standards to measure growth. In 2022-2023 teachers focused on writing skills, particularly around students writing their own name. In the fall, an average of 48% of students were within their given color band for their age and by the spring, 93% of students met their color band expectations. In 2023-2024, teachers focused on students' knowledge of print. In the fall, an average of 50% of students scored within their color band for their age in this area, and by the spring, this number grew to 94% of students within their color band. Students continue to grow in all areas measured, and reports are reviewed by staff after each scoring to determine areas of focus. As we move forward into next year with four preschool classrooms, we will set a SMART goal to monitor that at least 80% of all preschool students will fall within their age's color band for at least 90% of all standards measured within *Teaching Strategies GOLD®* by June 2025.

Odyssey has also begun the accreditation process through the National Association for Education for Young Children (NAEYC) that promotes and supports the development of high quality preschool programs. Odyssey is an Accreditation Quality Improvement Support (AQIS) grant recipient through the Office of Early Childhood to foster in the development of the program and ensure that the NAEYC assessment items are used as the framework for growth. Through this grant, administration and/or preschool staff participate in monthly support groups, individualized, monthly site visits with our facilitator to participate in observations of classrooms as well as work on our classroom and program portfolios, and connections to resources for the overall development of the preschool program. Odyssey is currently in the self-study phase as all

staff become familiar with the standards, how to embed them into the school and classroom environments and interactions, and to ensure that NAEYC standards drive professional development. The Appendix for Executive Summary Preschool Curriculum and Design at OCS contains an example of the Site Visit Notes. These notes document an example of a meeting between OCS Principal Jessica Swann and the AQIS Accreditation Support Facilitator. These monthly meetings (9 in total), focused on the self-study requirements for our NAEYC accreditation.

Within an early childhood classroom, it is often said that the classroom is “the third teacher” in that it is set up intentionally to facilitate learning and development. As Odyssey continues to expand the preschool program, we have very intentionally used NAEYC standards to help drive our plans for our new spaces. Standard 9 centers on the physical environment to ensure optimal use and operation. As mentioned in NAEYC’s Standards and Assessment Items, “Well-organized, equipped, and maintained environments support program quality by facilitating the learning, comfort, health, and safety of those who use the program.” A key piece to ensuring all of these components are met are including bathrooms in each of the preschool classrooms. According to NAEYC recommendations, within Standard 9, toilets and handwashing facilities should be within 40 feet of the indoor areas that children use. Based on our current building set-up, the closest facilities within 40 feet would be the bathrooms in our Common Room, which are currently the only facilities available for our middle school students. Within our 2 current preschool classrooms, single user bathrooms are set-up with a half-door to ensure that NAEYC standard 3C.6 is met, stating, “If a preschooler is out of direct sight and sound supervision of all teaching staff, it is no more than one minute, and the child is in a safe environment.” With students able to remain in the classroom, it also ensures that Standard 10B.3 is met in which “program staff maintain developmentally appropriate staff-to-child ratios (1:10) in preschool classrooms and other indoor settings. Finally, while students are recommended to be potty-trained it is not required; therefore, creating a need for a space for diaper changing. Our bathrooms would provide that privacy, space away from the instructional environment, as well as a receptacle to throw away these items. Bathrooms in the classroom allow for students to independently meet their needs, does not take away from instructional staffing time, and creates a safe and efficient environment for our students.

Curricular and Learning Highlights at Odyssey

As we look to the future and these further growth opportunities, OCS continually seeks to provide impactful and meaningful learning opportunities for our students, particularly for those students who reside in the neighboring school community, but also for the children who reside in the numerous surrounding communities. We strive to offer high-quality instruction that elevates students’ opportunities to meet and reach beyond the challenging Connecticut academic standards in a school facility that enhances our programmatic offerings for students in preschool through grade 8. Through empowerment and engagement we desire to increase family and

community voices within our school and neighborhood so that there are essential partnerships, enhanced collaboration, strong advocacy and mutual support.

English Language Arts (Science of Reading)

As we turn the corner and prepare for the 2024-2025 school year, our growth in and understanding of the Science of Reading (SOR) continues. In addition to providing research-based background knowledge to teachers, we have made significant progress in implementing Amplify (CKLA), one of the Connecticut State Department of Education approved ELA curriculum. Through ongoing professional training offered by Amplify (CKLA), investments in additional supportive materials and student assessments, our foundational knowledge and skills among our staff continues to increase in scope and breadth. OCS teachers continue to augment their classroom instruction as their knowledge base and understanding of their students has grown. Without question, Odyssey teachers know “how” students learn to read and write, recognize the reasons “why” some students struggle learning to read and write, and can now determine “what” must be taught to increase student success.

Mathematics (Illustrative Math)

In the recent past, OCS expanded the Illustrative Mathematics curriculum to 4th grade. (Illustrative Mathematics scored an 18/18 on Edreports.org for its rigor and implementation of mathematical practices.) Our teachers have noticed a difference in our students’ ability to discuss mathematical concepts and their problem-solving skills through the use of this program. In grades 5-8, we just completed our second year of implementation. This more rigorous program is making a difference for our students, but it has also illuminated gaps in their skills and understanding. As a result, we have expanded our support and interventions in mathematics for our students. This includes providing targeted small group instruction, as well as using IXL and Khan Academy to provide additional practice and support due to the direct alignment to the Illustrative Mathematics curriculum. We are very optimistic that the transition to this more rigorous program will prove positively impactful to the long-term success of our students in mathematics. In the coming school year, we plan to expand Illustrative Mathematics to grades kindergarten-grade 3. This expansion will require us to provide professional learning to support our kindergarten-grade 3 teachers in implementing the program with fidelity. We feel that the lessons learned from our grades 4-8 implementation will support a successful transition in kindergarten-grade 3.

Next Generation Science Standards

To increase our commitment to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and enhance the quality of science education for our students, we are dedicated to equipping our teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge to navigate through a challenging curriculum successfully. Our initiative involves providing ongoing professional development opportunities for our teachers through OpenSciEd, ensuring they are well-prepared to deliver a rigorous curriculum that aligns with the NGSS standards and the Connecticut State Department of Education open source model

curriculum. In addition to professional development, we are exploring the option to invest in the purchase of curriculum materials that specifically align with the OpenSciEd curriculum.

CIRCLE Values

At Odyssey, we strive to support the development of our students into successful, well-respected members of their community by promoting academic excellence, self-confidence, and the internalization of our core “CIRCLE Values” including, Courage, Integrity, Respect, Curiosity, Leadership, and Excellence. The foundation of our caring OCS learning community is founded in the universal application of our CIRCLE words of Courage, Integrity, Respect, Curiosity, Leadership and Excellence, which are taught in CIRCLE classes and activities throughout all our grades.

Technology at Odyssey

A stated priority for OCS has always been our desire to offer a technology-enriched curriculum. For our enthusiastic and technology savvy teachers, Smart Boards (new in the last few years) are in every classroom. We also have a dedicated computer lab for formal technology instruction in addition to mobile Chromebook stations for each classroom so that all OCS students have access to their own Chromebook. We offer video production for our older students run by our technology director who is also a certified teacher of technology.

All School Exploration

All School Exploration (ASE) is another learning opportunity unique to Odyssey. Each trimester students in all grades participate in a study of one topic such as Heritage, Decades, Transportation, Oceans, Storytelling Through Time, to name a few. A tremendous amount of thought and planning is involved in creating these interdisciplinary, multiage units so that we provide meaningful opportunities for our older students to support our kindergarten students. Each unit is designed by a different group of teachers who plan activities and learning experiences and offer support throughout the implementation of the lessons.

Arts

Our music arts program at Odyssey is undergoing a significant instructional and performance transformation by providing access and engagement in the arts for all Odyssey students. With the first ever OCS chorus, the varied all school cultural programs that we are cultivating, and the enhanced immersive music classes our children are experiencing all have added a new dimension to music education. Singing, dancing, and listening to music throughout the day is the optimal way to promote music development and to provide new and varied musical experiences at Odyssey. We have expanded our available musical instruments, especially a line of Orff instruments that include xylophones, glockenspiels, marimbas and metallophones. Additionally, we currently have 5 djembes and plan to add

tubanos to our instrument collection, which will allow us to engage in a full-class World Music Drumming curriculum.. This curriculum brings the enjoyment and excitement of music participation to middle school students while building essential life skills such as communication, listening, teamwork, discipline, and respect for others. In addition, it fosters community awareness and an appreciation of cultural diversity through its focus on world music.

Ecology

Through a very generous Maine scholarship program, Odyssey Grade 8 students participate in the first-ever, 4 day overnight program offered by The Ecology School in Saco Maine. Through community engagement and collaborative living with students from different communities, our students participated in a series of daily lessons, outdoor enrichment exercises, communal meals, and teacher directed recreational time. Odyssey students were immersed in this very diverse Maine ecosystem consisting of a river, a forest, fields, and a farm, which enabled them the practical study of biology, ecology, nature, and the profound impact of human beings.

Conclusion

Beyond the academic progress evident in both our Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) scores and Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) MAP data, as well as numerous curriculum assessments, the Odyssey school team of teachers and school leaders continue to established fundamental systems and processes to ensure an ongoing trajectory of improved instructional outcomes. These include a unified understanding of effective instructional practices among teachers and administrators, an effective process for regular cycles of observation and feedback, and maximized use of data driven collaborative planning time.

The staff, administration and Board are proud of our students' achievements noted above and throughout the following narrative. Learning reaches beyond the four walls of a classroom at Odyssey, and our teachers understand that they have the opportunity and the distinct privilege to spark intellect and dreams in the minds of our OCS students, potentially setting them on a path for life and career success. This aforementioned Executive Summary, and the following required narratives and accompanying appendices tell the Odyssey story.

Section 1: Board Capacity and Governance Structure

The Odyssey Community School (OCS) Board of Trustees (Board) qualifications, roles, responsibility, makeup, authority, as well as Code of Conduct are clearly documented in the ***Amended and Restated Bylaws*** approved by the Board on August 23, 2023. These Bylaws located in Appendix 1 were amended after an extensive review of other schools' bylaws with considerable assistance from one of the Board's attorneys from *Shipman and Goodwin* in Hartford, Connecticut. These Bylaws include the election/selection process and expertise and experience of interested potential Board members. Appendix 1 includes a recruiting document that was posted at various establishments throughout our students' resident communities. Appendix 1 also includes documents that describe the election processes for our parent, teacher & non certified staff representatives to the Board including examples of the ballots used in our most recent election. During the spring of 2024, OCS conducted elections for our staff and teacher Board openings and our parent representatives on the Board also. All races were conducted in line with the Board's bylaws and each was competitive with multiple candidates for each available opening. Elections were conducted using separate electronic ballots, which were given to each school parent or guardian and each member of our faculty and staff. As required by State of Connecticut statute, we continue to seek the participation of a member or designee of our host town municipal Board of Education (See Appendix 1). Additionally, our recruitment efforts for new community representatives proved successful this past spring as we have a new community representative joining us in the fall.

Article III of our ***Amended and Restated Bylaws*** describes in significant detail the Board's responsibility in meeting all Open Records laws and other meeting requirements. Appendix 1 also includes copies of an Board agenda and approved minutes from one of the numerous meetings held during the 2023-2024 school year.

The Board also repealed all existing Board policies during the 2022-2023 school year and replaced them with the adoption of a new manual with policies created from *Shipman and Goodwin* Model Policy Service. All Board Policies and Bylaws are located on our website.

During the 2023-2024 school year, the Board attended several online training modules offered by the Connecticut Charter School Association. These included topics of leadership, governance, and school and special education finance.

Section 2: School Leadership and Management

The leadership and administrative roles at OCS are described in our most recent organizational chart located in Appendix 2, which contains links to internal job descriptions. Our two co-principals are evaluated annually by the Executive Director, using the Connecticut Leader Evaluation and Support Rubric and the Connecticut School Leadership Standards, both of which were developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). Additionally,

Appendix 2 also contains the process by which the Board evaluates the Executive director, which is done annually using a process outlined, and an example of the Executive Director's annual goals and evaluation.

In the spring of 2022, OCS sought a second co-principal to replace the existing sole principal who decided to return to teaching. The existing assistant principal was appointed to principal and the Board approved the Executive Director's request for a co-principal model. An extensive search process involving all constituencies was drafted by the Executive Director who then sought the engagement of teachers and staff. This process was then further detailed with staff/teacher recommendations and shared with the larger school community. Appendix 2 contains numerous representations of the community's involvement in this extensive collaborative process. As mentioned above, Appendix 2 also contains the organizational chart that was created with the co-principal model change and finalized after a second principal was successfully hired.

Section 3: Student Demand and Community/Local/Family Support

In the fall of 2022 Odyssey added two preschool classrooms each with 18 students with an equal number of three and four-year olds. Our first lottery for these 36 open seats (see community notification letter in Appendix 3) yielded more than 120 preschool applications(only), all within 48 hours of our notifying the parent community of this significant programmatic change. In each of the subsequent enrollment lotteries that we conducted (23-24 & 24-25), we experienced endless inquiries about preschool openings at our lottery informational session held each spring. Subsequently, we have had hundreds of preschool parents enter the lottery with only a very few available seats. This is why we began a community wide campaign to seek 36 additional seats for the 24-25 school year in late spring after the CSDE notified us that they would not permit us to acquire the seats. Numerous documents were sent out to our families, our legislators, the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, and the Connecticut Commissioner of Education urging reconsideration of the original position of CSDE, which are Included in Appendix 3. We also invited our area legislators to our annual Heritage Night community meal event, where we, once again, informed attendees of our efforts to sway the Connecticut Legislature to grant us modest funding for these additional 36 preschool seats. Note that Appendix 3 also contains a copy of a letter from the Executive Director announcing to the parent community the legislative funding approval for those seats.

Since the legislative approval process and subsequent lottery acceptance notifications that went out to 36 of our 150 waitlisted preschool families, we have undergone a building modification effort to create two completely new furnished, equipped preschool classrooms with much needed and required bathrooms. This herculean effort to create these two new learning spaces that meet all National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) criteria early childhood learning is driven by our commitment to equitable learning opportunities. At OCS, we ascribe to

the NAEYC's articulated position that “all children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that help them achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. Thus, all early childhood educators have a professional obligation to advance equity. They can do this best when they are effectively supported by the early learning settings in which they work and when they and their wider communities embrace diversity and full inclusion as strengths, uphold fundamental principles of fairness and justice, and work to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable learning opportunities.” As we continue to advance our knowledge and understanding of early childhood education, we are actively involved in efforts to become NAEYC accredited by 2026.

The Appendix for Section 3 also provides documentation of various ways OCS integrates with the larger community of our host community, Manchester. As noted in Section 7 we collaborate with the Town of Manchester for a before and after school care program that is run daily at OCS. The Manchester Early Learning Center has numerous sites throughout the community. OCS provides numerous large meeting areas, classrooms and outdoor recreational spaces for this Town run program. Currently, we are collaborating with Manchester Town officials to expand our before and aftercare programs for our 3 and 4-year olds.

We typically hold our annual graduation ceremony in one of two Manchester high schools. Also included is an example of our community outreach process when OCS considered the purchase and occupancy of a closed Manchester public school. There was extensive community outreach and municipal collaboration with that effort, including neighborhood meetings, Town of Manchester Government Meetings and door-to-door meetings with families.

Section 4: Instructional Practices, Student Academic Achievement

Key Design Elements

Our focus is on ensuring our teachers are able to effectively instruct students using research based best practices and not simply be able to implement a program. As a result, we have spent a great deal of time and financial resources on supporting our teachers with their understanding of the Science of Reading (SOR) and their ability to implement effective literacy teaching practices with fidelity. Every K-3 teacher engaged in Lexia LETRS training over the past two school years. For this upcoming school year, teachers in grades 4-8 will receive Lexia Aspire training, which is professional learning designed to train educators on how to weave literacy skills and strategies into their instruction so they can support learners to read, comprehend, and articulate ideas across various subjects. In addition, Odyssey participated in the State of Connecticut SOR Masterclass. Our literacy team which was composed of administration, specialists, and classroom teachers engaged in enriching professional learning experiences to further develop a systemic understanding of Science of Reading.

Similarly to our ELA/SOR focus, our focus in mathematics has been on developing teacher knowledge mathematics instruction best practices. For example, our grade 4-8 teachers have focused on developing their understanding of mathematical practices, how mathematical concepts spiral and develop overtime, and how to develop a strong classroom community that engages in mathematical discourse, rigorous problem solving, and productive struggle.

Lastly, our focus areas in science continue the trend on focusing on teacher development over the focus on a specific curriculum. Teachers in grades 5-8 engaged in professional learning regarding best practices for NGSS and understanding of how to implement 3-dimensional teaching practices. Utilizing resources from OpenSciEd and the State of Connecticut open resources ensured that we were using research based curriculum as a foundation for our teachers. As a next step, we will be working with our elementary teachers to increase their capacity of implementing authentic science instruction in alignment with NGSS. Our CKLA curriculum does cover many science and social studies topics, so the scope of our work will be aligning ELA units to new and existing science units so students get an authentic experience, and are prepared to engage in high level science courses as they enter middle school and high school.

Below, more detail is provided regarding our curriculum materials and curriculum development. Our curriculum programs have been chosen (with significant teacher input) based on their alignment to our professional learning focus areas and their research-based backing.

English Language Arts Curriculum

Our growth in and understanding of the Science of Reading (SOR) supports our mission that all of our students are able to read at or above grade level, and receive appropriate support. In addition to providing research-based background knowledge to teachers, we have made significant progress in implementing Amplify (CKLA), one of the Connecticut State Department of Education approved ELA Curriculums. Through ongoing professional training offered by Amplify (CKLA), investments in additional supportive materials and student assessments, our foundational knowledge and skills among our staff continues to increase in scope and breadth. Throughout the year, Odyssey Community School teachers continue to augment their classroom instruction as their knowledge base and understanding of their students has grown.

Without question, Odyssey teachers know “how” students learn to read and write, recognize the reasons “why” some students struggle learning to read and write, and can now determine “what” must be taught to increase student success. As a result of our focus on teacher professional learning and curriculum implementation we have seen improvements on standardized assessments:

2023-2024 mCLASS Data (Literacy K-4)

% of Students At or Above Benchmark

Grade	Fall	Winter	Spring
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K	55%	64%	69%
1	54%	63%	71%
2	71%	84%	83%
3	59%	62%	60%
4	62%	63%	61%

SBA Data: In grades 3-8 our SBA average increased from 48% to 58% and was historically our highest percentage as a school.

	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
School Average:	50%	47%	56%	42%	52%	48%	58%

Mathematics Curriculum

During the 2023-2024 school year, Odyssey expanded the Illustrative Mathematics curriculum to 4th grade. (Illustrative Mathematics scored an 18/18 on Edreports.org for its rigor and implementation of mathematical practices.) Our teachers have noticed a difference in our students' ability to discuss mathematical concepts and their problem-solving skills through the use of this program. In grades 5-8, we are in our second year of implementation. The more rigorous program is making a difference for our students, but it has also illuminated gaps in their skills and understanding. As a result, we have expanded our support and interventions in mathematics for our students. This includes providing targeted small group instruction, as well as using IXL and Khan Academy to provide additional practice and support due to the direct alignment to the Illustrative Mathematics curriculum. We are very optimistic that the transition to this more rigorous program will prove positively impactful to the long-term success of our students in mathematics. In the coming school year, we plan to expand Illustrative Mathematics to grades K-3. This expansion will require us to provide professional learning to support our K-3 teachers in implementing the program with fidelity. We feel that the lessons learned from our 4-8 implementation will support a successful transition in K-3. As a result of our focus on teacher professional learning and curriculum implementation we have seen improvements on standardized assessments:

SBA Data: In grades 3-8 our SBA average increased from 48% to 54% and was historically our highest percentage as a school.

	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
School Average:	40%	35%	47%	27%	41%	48%	54%

Science Curriculum

During the 2023-2024 school year, Odyssey expanded the use of OpenSciEd curriculum and utilized the State of Connecticut open resources for science education. As a result of our focus on teacher professional learning and curriculum implementation we have seen improvements on standardized assessments:

Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Data: In grades 5 & 8 our NGSS average increased from 54% to 60% and was historically our highest percentage as a school.

	2021	2022	2023	2024
School Average:	45%	35%	54%	60%

Instructional Methods and High Quality Teaching and Learning

In addition to our ongoing professional learning support, and our curriculum implementation, we will be implementing new systems to support effective instruction and high quality teaching and learning. One of the systems is a walkthrough and teacher peer observation protocol. We will be working with our team to develop a set of “look-fors” that we expect to see in ELA, math, and science classrooms at various grade levels. This will ensure that our professional learning is having an impact on actual instruction. Additionally, we are supporting our new math and reading specialists with training in student centered coaching. Our specialists will be utilizing student data and classroom observations to provide targeted student centered coaching. Our specialists will also be heavily involved in the creation of our professional learning schedule to ensure what we are working on is actually what we need to work on and is supported by student data. Lastly, we will continue with our weekly collaborative meeting structure, and monthly grade level and MTSS team meetings. These meetings will ensure that there is always a clear instructional focus that is monitored and adjusted based on student performance data.

Monitoring and Assessment

As described above, we will continue our weekly collaborative meetings, monthly grade level and MTSS team meetings with a focus on student data. Additionally, we will be utilizing IXL to collect ongoing diagnostic data for individual students and grade levels. Additionally, we will continue to use MClass for grades K-4 and MAP data (fall and winter) in grades 5-8 to assess progress in ELA. We will utilize MAP data (fall and winter) in grades K-8 to assess progress in Math. We will utilize MAP data (fall and winter) in grades 5 & 8 to assess progress in Science. Additionally, we will continue to use Smarter Balanced Assessment and NGSS data as a summative standardized measure. Overall, the most important aspect of our work will be ensuring that we utilize student data continuously and make instructional and support decisions based on student data.

Differentiated Instruction and Support

As described above, our plan for monitoring and assessment encompasses a wide range of classroom based and standardized based student data. We have worked on our systems to ensure that something is actually done with all of the student data. One major development has been a redesign of our MTSS team structures and responsibilities. Our team now consists of a math specialist/MTSS coordinator, a certified reading specialist, and two experienced interventionists. Students receive targeted tiered intervention based on observations and data. Students not only receive interventions within the MTSS team, but also with their classroom teacher. Our teachers and MTSS team meet collaboratively to ensure that students receive a consistent experience and targeted interventions and progress monitoring. Additionally, our teachers work collaboratively with our special education team to ensure that student accommodations and modifications are implemented with fidelity, and that our students are continuing to progress in their development. We monitor the data of special education students closely to ensure that they are making growth and having consistent access to rigorous grade level curriculum. Lastly, we use the same practices for our advanced students that need a challenge. We have utilized IXL, Khan Academy, and embedded differentiation tools within our Amplify CKLA curriculum to meet the needs of our students performing above grade level. Overall, our focus is on ensuring that our teachers are prepared to provide high quality instruction to every student.

Section 5: Financial Management & Monitoring

OCS has sustained financial stability throughout its 27 years of operation. Careful stewardship, sustained and planned programming growth, increased enrollment, and Board oversight/monitoring has led to secure financials each year. The Board has a long-standing member who is a Certified Public Accountant who operates her own business in the Town of Manchester and provides informed oversight regarding all business matters, and who scrutinizes the monthly financial report given at each monthly meeting.

A five-year projected budget for Odyssey has been uploaded to the GSCT-CSP Application Portal. Of note, this projected budget does not assume any revenue from a potential GSCT-CSP yet it does include all the associated costs for addition two brand new classrooms. All hard costs associated with the addition of two new preschool classrooms are included in the FY 2025 column, including **52000 Salaries** (52300 Teacher), and (52500 Para Educators) and **53000 Benefits, Operations** (65020 Building Lease), **Instructional Programs** (68390-Preschool), and **68400 Capital Improvements** (Capitol Improvements-Other). This projected five-year plan certainly demonstrates a strong sustainability position in FY 2025 when the two classrooms (and all associated costs) are included in this budget projection and then also throughout the next four years. Surplus margins in FY 2026 are greater than 6% and in the remaining three years these

margins are 5.3% or higher. Again, these margins do not include any revenue resources from a potential GSCT-CSP award.

All State of Connecticut allocation grants (Title IA, Title IIA, Title III, & Title IV) are written annually by the Executive Director to coincide with instructional priorities that provide services for students with Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention needs. These are approved annually by CSDE, and monthly allocation drawdowns completed by Odyssey are scrutinized to ensure programming accountability and compliance with funding requirements. Additionally, this past year OCS was awarded \$83,000 as part of the Connecticut Right to Read Initiative. This, too, has been a welcome allocation due to the new curriculum mandates from CSDE that require all school districts to purchase one of the five approved Science of Reading curriculum approved by the CSDE. Our work in the Science of Reading has garnered numerous achievement recognitions. We are the only Connecticut Charter School who participated in the State sponsored Science of Reading Masterclass. The Science of Reading Masterclass is a statewide professional learning and coaching model developed and completely funded by CSDE and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) to develop local capacity for the science of reading and components of comprehensive K-3 literacy instruction. This has resulted in significant new learning opportunities for all our teachers, completely underwritten by CSDE. OCS was chosen to present at the fall meeting of the Board of Directors of the The Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation (PCLB). Several of our Masterclass participants presented the significant instructional shifts that we have made in the teaching of reading. We have also been recently selected by CSDE to record a webinar for their ["Infinite Possibilities Webinar Series"](#) on our Science of Reading curriculum.

Additionally, OCS continues to seek competitive funds from various funding sources, including school security money from the State of Connecticut Department of Emergency Services & Homeland Security. This past year, our security proposal was approved in the amount of \$54,542.00 with State funding 69% (\$37399.45) of the school security project. This security project for three emergency lockdown stations in three large setting instructional areas (library, gymnasium and our "Common Room" was completed in early 2024.

As part of our financial stability efforts, we have established numerous collaborative community and state based programs aimed at assisting us with many of our teaching and learning priorities. Charter schools operational challenges require them to look outward to form partnerships with outside organizations so as to thrive and these mutually beneficial partnerships assist us in significant ways. The State of Connecticut has articulated a strong commitment to increasing educator diversity in all public schools requiring all school districts to create a diversity plan. OCS remains committed to this critically important pursuit. With our continued participation and partnership with the ***Connecticut Teacher Residency Program*** (Connecticut TRP) and the ***RESC Alliance Minority Recruitment Fair***, we will continue to increase the racial, ethnic, and

linguistic diversity of a talented and diverse educator workforce. We have had significant success in this effort. All of our current and newly hired preschool teachers as well as two of our para educators came to us after we participated in ***RESC Alliance Minority Recruitment Fair*** the last three years.

The Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation (PCLB) provides us with annual operation support as well as targeted financial support. PCLB was formed in 1999, by Dr. Peter Buck and Carmen Lucia Buck, as a private family foundation to manage their philanthropy in a thoughtful and strategic manner. PCLB's work is anchored by its mission statement, "giving motivated people the tools they need to help themselves." These tools are about more than grants and include guidance, connections, convening, information, and other forms of assistance that the foundation and its grantees can provide. PCLB looks to support the highest quality organizations that show initiative, leadership, and innovation in solving issues that are meaningful to the family and the communities where family members live. PCLB's work, across all portfolios, is guided by the following values: Self-Reliance, Fairness, Honesty, Humility, Trust, Excellence, Patience & Adaptability. Each year, PCLB offers a Request for Proposals from various New York and Connecticut charter schools. Odyssey has submitted grant proposals that have been generously awarded. OCS has received this annual general operating support since 2019. In each of the last two years, Odyssey has been awarded \$350,000.00, which we have targeted toward instructional priorities and various teacher initiatives. We have also received financial backing from PCLB for three years of funding for our work alongside SCHOOLWORKS®, a national education consulting provider and certified Women's Business Enterprise (WBE), to further build capacity among our school's leadership team and our teachers in assessing instructional practices in the classroom in order to achieve greater student success. During these three full years of collaboration SCHOOLWORKS facilitated leadership coaching, ongoing professional learning, and individualized support and feedback to our leadership team. As an improvement partner, SCHOOLWORKS® was tasked with the objective of demonstrating measurable improvement in our student outcomes at Odyssey Community School within the defined 3-year period of time. Odyssey was distinguished as one of only four charter schools in Connecticut to outperform the state average in both ELA and Math on the 2021–22 state assessment. Significant instructional gains were also exhibited in NWEA MAP Growth assessment data from fall 2021 to spring 2022. That post COVID student growth continues as noted in the aforementioned Section 4.

Finally, OCS currently operates as a site for ***Community Health Center, Inc.*** (CHC) behavioral health services, which are offered to all our students and their families. We have an additional 1.0 FTE licensed behavioral health clinician who is fully funded by CHC and who is a partner in the 3-person OCS team who collaboratively provide counseling and school support services to our students and families. We recently extended our relationship with CHC and signed a three-year contract for full time/full year behavioral health services fully funded by CHC. (See Appendix 5.)

Our future goals include the extension of these school-based services to include health care providers and dental services to all OCS students.

In closing, we at OCS understand that the aforementioned mutually beneficial partnerships are paramount as we seek the financial services to adequately and equitably provide services to our students and their families.

Section 6 Grant Priority Goals

SMART Goal #1

During this grant, OCS will meet its expansion enrollment target of 36 seats.

Odyssey Community School will fill 100% of the available seats for preschool three and four-years old students throughout the 2004-2025 school year.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expansion Enrollment Target (September 2024)</i>	<i>Expansion Enrollment Target (June 2025)</i>
2024-25	36	36

Rationale for SMART Goal One - The funding for this CSP expansion opportunity relies on 36 students filling the seats. The purchases requested from CSP reflect a full set of seats whereby students are fully benefiting from this valued investment of federal CSP funds. If our enrollment of these 36 seats falls short, the investment of CSP funds will not be as impactful, resulting in an excessively high per-student CSP ratio. To keep that ratio lower and maximize CSP, we will use existing demand and a long waiting list to continuously fill these 36 seats.

Summary of SMART Goal One - CSP reimbursed expenses associated with improving the overall classroom and outdoor environment will assist OCS in creating developmentally appropriate learning spaces for our three and four-year old learners. Expenses such as storage shed for preschool equipment, as well as playground and classroom furnishings will assist us in creating a developmentally appropriate learning environment grounded in what we know about how young children learn at their various ages and stages of learning and development.

We know that children learn best when adults recognize their individual needs and interests and that children are encouraged to explore what excites their curiosity. Unlocking that curiosity is key to learning and OCS will create such an environment to enhance learning through a combination of explanation and experience. Such an environment will allow us to maintain our enrollment goal throughout the school year.

SMART Goal #2:

During this grant, OCS will use CSP funds to increase achievement outcomes for expanded students.

80% of OCS preschool three and four-year old students will fall within their age's color band for at least 90% of all standards measured within *Teaching Strategies GOLD®* by June 2025.

Rationale for SMART Goal Two - Quality early childhood instruction and serving OCS students earlier in their lives provide the impetus for our seats expansion initiative. Based on year one (2022-2023) and two (2023-2024) of our early childhood population attending OCS, we are confident that students in this expansion cohort will demonstrate significantly higher skills after one year of attending OCS. Furthermore, we have acquired student data from the initial cohort of prek-3 and prek-4 learners which will serve as learning benchmarks for our expansion cohort in each of our three reporting trimesters.

Summary of SMART Goal Two - As noted on page 3 of the Executive Summary, learning and assessment in the early childhood classroom is an ongoing process. Preschool classrooms use *Teaching Strategies GOLD®*, an authentic observation-based assessment system for children. The primary purpose of this assessment system is to document children's learning over time and inform instruction. Using this information, teachers intentionally create environments and developmentally appropriate learning experiences for their students. The child's classroom teacher will provide formal documentation in a report card to families three times a year, in addition to conferences twice a year. Conferences provide an opportunity for parents/guardians to raise questions and engage in meaningful dialogue with teachers about their child's development and how our assessment practices meet the unique needs of their child. Families of students with IEPs meet for PPT meetings at least annually. At any time, a parent or guardian can request a conference. Teachers maintain state teaching certification specific to teaching and assessing young children.

SMART Goal #3:

OCS students in grades 3-8 will improve their 2025-2026 *Next Generation Accountability Index* score from 72.7 to 73.7% as reported on the 2025-2026 CT Accountability Index.

Rationale for SMART Goal Three - Increasing achievement outcomes for all students at OCS remains our number one priority.. Each year, all students in grades three through eight participate in **SMARTER BALANCED** assessments, a national set of standards aligned national assessments. **SMARTER BALANCED** is part of **Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System**, which is a broad set of 12 indicators, including scores in ELA, Math and Science, that help tell the story of how well schools are performing. This accountability system moves beyond test scores and graduation rates and instead provides a more holistic, multifactor perspective of the district and school performance (including children with high needs) and incorporates student growth over time. Investment in our school community through the addition of early childhood learning opportunities for more students provides meaningful and impactful learning intervention. At OCS, we believe that early intervention mitigates the

expense of subsequent remedial action in primary and secondary schooling and results in academic productivity and social growth.

Summary of SMART Goal Three

Continued investment in early learning opportunities, provides all members of the OCS school community the motivation and impetus for school community growth and continued school improvement.

Section 7 Priority Points

Operational challenges associated with charter schools require us to look outward to form partnerships with outside organizations, particularly our 14 sending communities, which include the three rural communities of Marlborough, Hebron and Portland Connecticut. Our existing and successful partnerships with our 14 serving towns, including the host Town of Manchester, exist with the interest of our students and their learning needs always a priority. OCS partners with the Manchester Public Schools for all resident student transportation services including outside field trip experiences for all students. We also collaborate with Manchester in the running of the successful and fully operational breakfast and school lunch program that are run at our school including the implementation of the Federal National School Lunch program for which 53% of our students qualify. Our nurse collaborates regularly with the Manchester nurse supervisor, we collaborate with the Town of Manchester for a before and after school care program (MELC) that is run daily at OCS, and we share our school gymnasium with several community youth organizations.

This collaboration is most critical when addressing the needs of our growing population of students with moderate and, in several cases, more unique and specialized learning needs. Our Student Services Department, staffed by four talented teachers, work closely with parents and with personnel from the sending school districts to ensure that all our students with disabilities are provided access to the general education curriculum and extra-curricular activities in the regular education setting to the maximum extent possible. This means that we work diligently OCS to ensure the full participation of all our students with disabilities in state, school system, or alternative assessments. We ensure compliance with all state and federal regulations regarding students' annual IEP reviews, re-evaluation procedures, and periodic program updates. We maintain timely procedures for the identification processes for students suspected of having disabilities. We promote collaborative practices across educational settings between general education staff, special educators and related service providers that come from the sending districts. We include all of our special services staff in all schoolwide professional learning opportunities and work diligently to support the meaningful involvement/participation of our students' parents and guardians in the understanding of the special education process.

This collaborative relationship with our sending school districts promotes collaborative interagency planning of programs for students with disabilities and allows us to secure all reasonable per pupil cost reimbursements associated with the outstanding services that we provide. More importantly, our focus on our students' unique learning and social emotional

needs establishes a learning environment that celebrates our students' learning differences and promotes an inclusive learning environment. Evidence of our success is measured by the recent yearly increase in the number of students with disabilities who enroll at OCS.