

*SouthCoastToday.com*

## **Boston charter school looks to expand in New Bedford**

by Brian Boyd

[bboyd@s-t.com](mailto:bboyd@s-t.com)

May 10, 2012 12:00 AM

### **A Boston charter school that helps prepare struggling teenagers for college is looking to open a similar high school in New Bedford.**

City on a Hill, which opened in 1995 as one of the state's original charter schools, is planning to apply to the state for permission to expand with a new charter school in the Whaling City, said Erica Brown, the school's executive director.

"We can really change the game for 280 students at a time," she said, referring to enrollment at the existing school and the expected size of a New Bedford location.

The first deadline in the application process is July 1, and the state would make a decision in February. If approved, the school is expected to open in August 2014 for freshmen.

The existing City on a Hill high school, which is located in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston and accepts students through a lottery process, educates students who arrive with skills below their grade level.

Entering ninth-graders typically reading at fifth- or sixth-grade level, and their math abilities can be as low as third-grade level. A quarter of the freshmen are special-needs students, and more than 25 percent of students speak a language other than English at home, Brown said. The school aims to prepare all students for college, rather than placing them on different tracks, she said.

"We think anyone can be college material," she said. "We can help you become college material."

Brown has met with community leaders in New Bedford and members of Mayor Jon Mitchell's staff.

"It is a five-star school," said Thomas Davis, a local education advocate who runs the New Bedford Business Park.

Davis, who is chairman of Global Learning Charter Public School, said he does not see City on a Hill as competition but as another strong option for students.

The charter for Global Learning, which serves grades 5 through 12, was renewed, state education officials announced this week.

Davis also said almost all students at City on a Hill in Boston score in the advanced or proficient categories on MCAS standardized tests, and more than 90 percent go onto college.

"Boston's City on a Hill charter school demonstrates that it is possible to educate all children, regardless of background," said former Mayor John Bullard, another education advocate, in an e-mail message. "Their results speak for themselves."

Brown said supporters of City on a Hill have been encouraging the school to take their successful approach to the next level. So it decided to work on increasing enrollment in Boston while also expanding to another community. School leaders decided New Bedford had the demographics they wanted to serve, and the city has community leaders eager to improve educational opportunities, Brown said.

"We had gone through the process of studying a number of communities and really fell in love with the prospect of New Bedford," she said.

In addition to its emphasis on college preparation, the school's model includes longer school days and years — the length of the year varies depending on a student's grade level and needs. Its approach also includes intensive tutoring and an emphasis on teacher training, she said.