

**Strategic Plan for Pre-Kindergarten Funding and  
Sustainability/Expansion:  
Lowell Collaborative Preschool Academy (LCPA)**

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6/26/2018**

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The Lowell early childhood community has often come together to collaborate and build strong programs that meet the needs of the children and their families of the community. Since 2015, as a PEG Grantee, the Lowell Collaborative Preschool Academy (LCPA) has been able to provide 156 children with a full year/full day program with an abundance of comprehensive services for children and their families as well as links to services provided by the Lowell Public Schools (LPS) such as screening and special education services. A long wait list for a seat in LCPA is still in effect as of this report (6/18/2018) as so many families would like their children to attend LCPA. For the FY 2018-2019 school year, the LPS Early Childhood registration period identified 103 families that selected LCPA as their first choice. During June and into the summer months, families will continue to apply and/or be referred to LCPA for full day/full year preschool. Historically, LCPA is at full capacity by the middle of August. However, as we have uncovered in the past three years of the application process, there will be many families who apply who will be slightly over the income requirements and be ineligible to attend LCPA.

Presently, two entities, Little Sprouts and Community Teamwork Inc., each with its own EEC license and on-site program director, share the same building and work together through shared services to provide cohesive high quality early education and care to 156 children in 8 classrooms. Each classroom is supported by one master teacher (with at least a BA/BS degree in education or a related field), an assistant teacher, and an instructional aide. Ongoing professional development and coaching are keys to the quality of the classrooms as well as to the growth in the children's school

readiness skills. As determined by the criteria of the grant, LPS is the lead on the grant and fulfills the role of monitoring the E.L.P.s. In addition, LPS provides coaching, on-site DLL, special education, and developmental screening, and plays an active role in the implementation of LPS designed prekindergarten modules for use with the curriculum.

In keeping with the mission of running one cohesive program that meets the Lowell community's needs, the leadership and staff at LCPS work diligently to present itself to the community as LCPA (and not as 2 separate licensed programs). In some circumstances there has been some confusion on the part of families regarding the connection of LCPA to the public schools. For example, eligibility for the program (e.g., the income restrictions) is confusing since public schools do not charge tuition. In addition, parents of children with disabilities do not always understand why special education services are not offered onsite at LCPA. However, the administrators and program staff at the Collaborative understand the role of the LPS.

The three partners (Community Teamwork, Little Sprouts and LPS) spent a great deal of time and energy informing the Lowell Early Childhood Advisory Council (LECAC) and the greater early care and education community about what the PEG grant was and was not as well as about the impact the grant made on the children and their families and the larger community. The Council is administered by the LPS as part of the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grant with the goal of engaging the community in supporting all of Lowell's children prior to entering kindergarten. In the beginning, the PEG grant created a large divide in the Council as many family child care systems and centers felt left out as they were not included as a PEG grantee. This was

especially the case of the family child care systems that would have liked the opportunity to be a partner and had been included in a planning grant submitted to EEC in 2016. Much time is and was spent in trying to engage the Council members and in overcoming some misconceptions. Many discussions took place this past year during LECAC meetings with the goal of becoming united partners in supporting the PEG program as the community moves forward in planning for sustainability. One example of the Council's joint efforts this year was drafting a letter to support various funding opportunities brought forth to the Massachusetts' Legislature for additional funding for early childhood education. All this effort on the part of Community Teamwork, Little Sprouts, LPS and the LECAC was important in order to build a strong foundation to begin engaging the community in developing sustainability plans.

Due to the work of the partners in engaging the LECAC, it is the goal that several community-wide changes will occur. Professional development and coaching plans will be shared throughout the community as part of the sustainability planning efforts in Year 4 of PEG. Additionally, a strategic planning day is slated for October 11, 2018. Moreover, given the growth of the PEG children's school readiness skills, the LPS has offered to purchase the same curricula used in the LCPA (as well as used in LPS) for any 10 Lowell-based ECE programs and Family Child Care Systems that wish to use the curricula in their programs through their Year 3 PEG budget. Specific trainings have been planned for the fall of 2018 to support programs in becoming familiar with the curriculum in order to support implementation. LPS has requested in its YEAR 4 PEG budget to use funds to support professional development, coaching and CLASS feedback sessions to support community programs in effectively implementing the

curriculum. LCPA and LPS will provide a menu of professional development options to the community. These professional development options will be offered at various times building upon existing resources such as coaches or other professional development specialists employed by community programs and family child care systems.

The intentions are that by September 2019 when the PEG funding ends and the current LCPA program will cease to exist, systemic changes in the ECE community of Lowell will have been made. These changes will be based on the pilot work done in conjunction with professional development, coaching and the support of the LCPA educators in establishing high quality learning environments and instructional strategies to support effective implementation. Moreover, when LECAC reconvenes and reflects on the work of the Alignment Grant, they will have begun to move closer to the one of the goals describe in the Lowell Legacy School Readiness Strategic Plan and Lowell ECAC Framework(see Attachment A).

In order to complete this report, two planning sessions (May 7, 2018 with 43 attendees and June 6, 2018 with 22 attendees) were held with input from stakeholders (Community Teamwork, Little Sprouts and LPS) and community members (parents, teachers, PEG leaders, LPS staff and those affiliated with other community-based ECE programs) attending both days. Attachment B includes the sign in sheets and agendas). These meetings provided PEG partners with the opportunity to clarify misconceptions, highlight the benefits of the PEG program on school readiness, and describe PEG program elements to the community. After learning more about the PEG program elements, (full day/full year, 3-teacher model, onsite screening, comprehensive

services for children and families, transportation, family engagement opportunities, curriculum, professional development and coaching, comparable pay for teaching staff, and shared services) the groups favored sustaining PEG and hoped to maintain the following elements: the 3-teacher model, full day/full year program, the family supports, the professional development and coaching, the curriculum, and the elements provided by LPS including screening and special education supports. To expand the program, all of the same elements were endorsed along with the necessary funding for the community partners (Little Sprouts, Community Teamwork and LPS) to maintain programming for 156 children.

In addition, results of a family survey and focus groups conducted by Early Childhood Associates were shared with the group at the second session providing context for the need for PEG and other programming for young children and their families in Lowell (see Attachment C). At the conclusion of the second meeting, PEG partners met (Community Teamwork, Little Sprouts, and LPS) to help synthesize the community's response to PEG and its suggestions to aid in the development of the strategic plans to maintain the PEG program and programming in Lowell.

Three potential plans were developed for this report as a result of the small group's meeting. Over the course of the year, and with more time to meet and greater insight, the depth of each plan will be broadened. For example, on July 19, 2018, Melissa King (formerly of DESE's School Finance and District Support division) will meet with the PEG partners to discuss how to leverage Chapter 70 funding. The plans are the following:

1. Expanded Plan (Plan 1) – Many of the present elements will remain but it will be enhanced or expanded in that there will be slots to serve special needs children onsite in two inclusion classrooms, This plan would bring more special education resources to the program as LPS would be a partner. In addition, the inclusion classrooms would bring about greater alignment between EEC and DESE as both would need to provide joint oversight. Also, eligibility requirements would change in order to have supportive spots to serve children with differing needs (e.g. homeless children), and serve children from families of differing incomes including private-pay families. Hence, the SES makeup of the children would be more diverse than that of the current LCPA. In addition, allowing private-pay families into the program may help to alleviate the problem of families who sometimes only make a little too much to be eligible for Head Start or a voucher but not enough to afford the cost of preschool. This group is currently the least served in Lowell. The distribution of who will fill which slots and how the slots would be funded would need to be further explored. ABT Associates is currently conducting a Cost Analysis of the PEG programs for EEC and when the data is available it will help inform the PEG partners' decisions relative to cost.
2. Reduced Plan (Plan 2) – Many of the present elements will remain but with a reduced scope and cost. Like the Expanded Plan, eligibility requirements would change and include supportive spots to serve children with differing needs, and serve children from families of differing incomes. LPS could play a role in the programming if funding was provided to continue on-site screening, support in

identification of DLLs and children with potential disabilities and coaching on-site through a contract with the partners.

3. Non-PEG Plan (Plan 3) – The 156 slots would be filled by children recruited by the present PEG partners of Little Sprouts and Community Teamwork. Very few of the current elements would remain. For example, instead of the 3-teacher plan, classrooms would include a teacher and assistant without an aide. Like the other two plans, a mix of supportive slots and private-pay families would be included. Community Teamwork would use some of their existing state subsidized slots for some children and would apply for more. Moreover, the Plan may use Head Start monies to help support the needed wrap around care. If additional contracted slots would not be awarded, then the 156 slots would no longer present as an increase in Lowell’s preschool slots but instead, Community Teamwork and Little Sprouts could move children from their other sites into the 156 slots and “free” up space for other purposes. For example, both programs have a need for additional infant and toddler classroom space.

This report outlines three strategic plans to expand/reduce/end the present PEG program. Often, the details of each plan will be given plan by plan. Other times, the explanation will apply to all three plans.

## **1. Leadership and Governance**

- a. Expanded Plan and Reduced Plan. Both plans will continue to use a community-level collaborative governance structure. The current structure is a private and public partnership with the tasks of leadership, management and accountability provided by the LPS as the LEA (and the Steering Committee and School



Board). The three levels of leadership will continue: (1) the PEG Advisory Board would provide feedback to the Steering Committee which would make recommendations regarding program decisions and inform the PEG Advisory Board on policy-related issues for decision making. It currently meets 4 times each year; (2) the Steering Committee meets monthly and regularly interfaces with the Comprehensive Services and the Professional Development Committees; and, (3) the Professional Development and Comprehensive Services Committee would meet monthly and include Steering Committee members, EEC representatives, and coaches, teachers, family support specialists and the program directors from LCPA. One key difference in leadership and governance is that with the Expanded Plan due to the addition of two inclusion classrooms, LPS would be a true and equal partner with Little Sprouts and Community Teamwork.

- b. Non-PEG Plan: The leadership/governance structure and the leadership composition would be decided upon by the leadership of Little Sprouts and Community Teamwork and follow all rules and regulations as set forth by EEC.
- c. Leadership Composition. Presently, the PEG Advisory Board leadership is headed by Jeannine Durkin, Deputy Superintendent of LPS, Michael Collins the Business Manager of Community Teamwork, Karen Frederick, Executive Director of Community Teamwork, and Mark Anderegg, the Executive Director of Little Sprouts. The Steering Committee acts as the driver and works with the PEG Advisory Board to make any decisions.

## 2. Needs Assessment

Much of the information for this section applies to all three plans. Based on the most current needs assessments conducted, (Coleman, LaCroix & Van Thiel, 2018, <https://www.lowell.k12.ma.us/Page/269>), there are 2405 three-year-olds and 2290 four-year-olds in Lowell. If all these children required early care and education slots, there would be an extreme shortage of preschool slots. For this reason and others, over half of these children (53%) enter kindergarten with no preschool experience. The recently completed Lowell Family Survey (ECA, 2018), pointed out that 49% of the surveyed families did not have their young children enrolled in an early education and care program of any type. Furthermore, 67% of all respondents wanted full day care for their children (and 42% of these respondents wanted full year care). The number of preschoolers currently served by family child care providers is 150 and the number of preschoolers currently served by center-based programs is 1482. The capacity for preschoolers in family child care ranges from 66% to 115% and for center based programs, the capacity for most programs ranges from 50% to 111%. We also need to learn more about the quality of care found in these centers and family child care homes.

In addition, the needs assessment assumes that from the data collected to date, 90% of all child care tuition comes from child care vouchers or other federal, state or local funds. This has led to the decision that as with LCPA, family income will be one determinant for eligibility for all three plans. The non-PEG plan will most likely be dependent upon subsidized slots. But all three plans are also considering offering slots to private-paying families as there is anecdotal evidence that families wanted to attend LCPA but their incomes were too high.

The present income eligibility criterion for the PEG program is that a family's income can't be above 200% of the poverty guidelines. In Plan 3, the slots would become subsidized and use the more stringent cutoff of not allowing families with incomes above 100% of the poverty guidelines for Head Start and not above 50% of the state median income for the state subsidized slots (and not exceed 85% of the state medium income at reassessment). All three plans would consider private-pay families. Plans 1 and 2 will continue to use the present income cutoff of PEG as well as consider private-pay families. However, if in Plan 1, the LPS can't leverage Chapter 70 monies for the inclusion classrooms, then a sliding scale fee system may be implemented.

Given the continued need for high quality seats as shown by the surveys as well as by the current waitlist at LCPA, the current number of 156 slots would be available in all three plans with one exception in the Expanded Plan. The number of special education children in two proposed inclusion classrooms could reduce the total slots by ten if it is decided that the ratio of special education children to typical developing children is 6/7 of 15 children rather than 10 of 20 children.

### **3. Program Design and Development**

The PEG partners will continue to work on determining the program design, funding options and ways to share elements of the PEG model during Year 4 as a PEG grantee. As a PEG grantee, we will continue to work as an existing partnership as well as with the community to move forward in sharing elements to provide high quality early care and education across the community while working to sustain the elements of programming that have contributed to the success of the LCPA. The PEG partners look forward to being able to count on stronger involvement of the LECAC.

a. Essential Quality Requirements. As with the current design, all three plans will continue with the same essential quality requirements with full day/full year programming and with teacher-child ratios of a maximum of 1:10 and 20 children per classroom. All will serve children with diverse needs and those in high-risk groups, include family engagement supports and provide comprehensive services for families (although LPS involvement in Plan 2 depends upon funding, and will act a site for special education referrals in Plan 3). The lead teacher (known as the Master Teacher in LCPA) will have at least a BA/BS degree in education or a related field. In addition, all three plans will continue with the same salary structure with one exception. The Non-PEG program is determining whether it will be able to apply the same salary structure to all its staff. All 3 plans will continue to use formal curricula and formative assessment systems. In addition, the same ratios will be maintained with 8 classrooms and 156 children. The expanded plan may reduce the number to 146 if the inclusion classrooms limit the number of total children in each of the two rooms to 15 rather than 20.

b. Multiple Models. For each of the proposed plans, the current model will be used with the following exceptions: the Non-PEG plan will not continue the 3-teacher model and would reduce the input from LPS. All three plans may be open to three-year old children and will also maintain supportive slots for children that are designated as homeless, refugee status, or have teen parents. In addition, the expanded plan will also include children with IEPs in inclusion classrooms.

b. Elements that will be Discontinued, Sustained. The Non-Peg plan provides early care and education to 156 children and will operate as other Little Sprouts and Community Teamwork programs are run and will depend on subsidized child care slots and hence,

the income eligibility requirements will be more restrictive. It will still be able to refer children to LPS for special education services but will not be able to access LPS's use of the pre-LAS or WIDA assessments or developmental screening tools on-site. The Reduced Plan would reduce the number of family support specialists from two to five, cut in half the funding for professional development and coaching, eliminate funding for course reimbursement and may tighten the criteria around eligibility for transportation services. All other elements would be sustained. The Expanded Plan sustains all elements and includes classrooms for children with IEPs.

c. New Elements Added. All three plans will include supportive slots for children from other "at risk groups" such as the homeless, refugee status or children of teen parents. The new plans may also include children from private paying families. In addition, three year old children may be included. The expanded program will include two inclusion classrooms that will be operated by the LPS which will make the school district a full partner. Other new elements will be immediate as LPS has utilized part of their PEG funding to support the goal of sharing resources in the community by purchasing the curricula for 10 community programs that wish to use them. Moreover, the LECAC will focus on sharing lessons learned from the PEG program and will encourage increased community collaboration. There will be October meeting to address the strategic plans and shared goals which may include sharing professional development and coaching throughout the Lowell early care and education community.

d. Program Type and Classroom Staffing. The current PEG program is a public and private partnership. All plans will continue the original PEG program's full day and full year education and care program. The 156 slots will all be preschool slots. The Non-

PEG Plan allows for a not-for-profit organization, Community Teamwork, and a for-profit organization, Little Sprouts to continue to work together in operating 4 classrooms each in the same building with two directors. The Reduced Plan will use the same program type as well as have input and some support services (screenings, collaborative PD, and possibly coaching) from LPS. The Expanded Plan will include two inclusion classrooms that will be under the auspices of LPS and DESE. The staffing will be the three-teacher model in the Reduced and Expanded Plans and a two-teacher model in the Non-PEG Plan per licensing regulations.

e. Infrastructure Needed to Accomplish Programming.

*-Leadership and governance.* The original PEG governance structure's goal was to improve system alignment and resulted in the implementation of new supports for teachers and families as well as improved communications across sectors. Due to these results, the structure will remain the same for Plans 1 and 2. In Plan 3, (the Non-PEG Plan), the leadership will keep Community Teamwork and Little Sprouts as the governing bodies without oversight from LPS. Conversely, in the Expanded Plan (Plan 1) the leadership will be expanded as LPS will be taking on a more equal role as a partner. Please see above (#1) for more information.

*-Key personnel.* Currently, key personnel represent the LPS, Little Sprouts and Community Teamwork. These same key personnel will be used in Plans 1 and 2. In Plan 3, the LPS would not be involved. In Plan 1, due to the inclusion of two inclusion classrooms, LPS would become an equal as a partner in the collaboration.

*-Monitoring.* In Plan 1 (Expanded Plan), LPS would be in an equal partnership with Community Teamwork and Little Sprouts and all three would create a monitoring

structure that is agreed upon by all 3 agencies. In addition, in Plan 1, EEC and DESE would also provide oversight due to the two inclusion classrooms. In Plan 2 (Reduced Plan), LPS would continue to serve as the monitor. In Plan 3 (Non-Peg Plan), EEC would monitor the program as it would any other licensed program. In all plans, each partner would be accountable to its own “parent agency” (LPS, Community Teamwork and Little Sprouts).

*-Support for Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).* All three plans are committed to improving their QRIS ratings as well as demonstrating quality through accreditation, documented action plans and quarterly reporting. They have all benefited from the knowledge gained by the PEG grant and have the continued commitment and follow-through that will lead to on-going evaluation and planning for continued paths to improved quality in the classroom and improved child outcomes.

*-Education and workforce supports (training, coaching).* It is a goal that Lowell’s workforce will be strengthened and maintained at all levels. The LPS has already decided to buy the curricula used in the existing PEG program for early care and education programs in the community as part of its Year 3 PEG budget. As mentioned, a facilitated meeting hosted by LECAC will plan for coordinating community-wide professional development training and coaching. Any additional expenses will need to come from Community Teamwork and Little Sprouts for the Non-PEG Plan (Plan 3). The Reduced Plan will need to cut its budget for professional development, coaching and course reimbursement as that is necessary for the program to be sustained. The Expanded Plan will be able to carry out training, professional development and coaching as the LPCA is currently doing.

*-Program space.* The current program is housed in a building owned by Community Teamwork and the grant covers the cost of all utilities and the mortgage and leasehold improvements. In Plan 3, Community Teamwork and Little Sprouts would have to come to an agreement about each group's contribution. In Plans 1 and 2, the costs incurred would continue as is done with the current PEG program with each partner paying equally for the shared space in the form of rental agreements.

*-Transportation.* Presently, 42 of 156 children receive transportation to the PEG program and the cost per child is almost 20% of the total cost. In the Non-Peg Plan, transportation will be the responsibility of Community Teamwork and the criteria for who receives transportation may change. In the Reduced Plan, the criteria will become more stringent as the reduced plan aims at lowering the overall cost per child. In the Expanded Plan, the cost of transportation would be increased if it is built into the IEP plans of any of the special education children in the program.

*-Program evaluation and responding to community needs.* The LECAC has been charged to create a community needs assessment again for next year. Moreover, an evaluation based on LECAC's goals is being planned. With each Plan, the program and classrooms will continue to be evaluated using the same measures of quality: the ECERS and CLASS for overall classroom quality and Teaching Strategies Gold (TS Gold) and the curricula's standards for child assessment. It should be noted that LPS is no longer able to maintain TS Gold in its classrooms and hence, will not be able to use TS Gold for use in the two inclusion classrooms in the Expanded Plan. Instead, LPS has developed its own report card for children using the curricula's standards and will seek approval from the Lowell School Committee due to lacking the funds to support the



costs associated with TS Gold. All three plans are committed to improving their QRIS ratings as well as demonstrating quality through accreditation, documented action plans and quarterly reporting.

*-Recruitment and enrollment systems.* Similar to other PEG sites in Massachusetts, extensive outreach was needed to recruit children into the program. In addition, systems had to be created to determine eligibility. The Family Service Specialists helped to recruit families with eligible children (as well as help families access needed education, health and community resources and services). Future training will be needed to better understand and navigate through Lowell's early care and education system.

*-Programmatic supports needed from state.* All three Plans would need instructional support for the teachers and leadership. All three will be applying for and would need to be awarded contracted child care slots. Also, all three would need continued technical assistance to support their CQI plans.

#### **4. Outcomes**

- a. Outcomes for Children and Educators. All three plans using CQI as guidance will seek to prepare children with the school readiness skills needed for formal schooling, or kindergarten. The curricula, program assessment and child assessments will be continued in the plans. The curricula are being purchased by LPS from their PEG budgeted funds for programs throughout Lowell. In addition, the LECAC will be setting goals this summer in providing training, professional development and coaching for all programs in the Lowell community. An October date has been set to facilitate this work.
- b. Plan for ongoing data collection and tracking progress of outcomes. Presently, child assessments are completed by ABT Associates and include the Woodcock-Johnson III

Test of Cognitive Abilities (2 subtests), the PPVT, the Hearts and Flowers task, and the preLAS for DLLs. The results from the beginning of Pre-k to the beginning of kindergarten found statistically significant gains for the children from Lowell. However, the budgets of all three plans can't support the same kind of child assessments. Nevertheless, the programs and classrooms will continue to be evaluated using the same measures of quality: the ECERS and CLASS for overall classroom quality. The children will be assessed using Teaching Strategies Gold (except for the two inclusion classrooms in Plan 1) and the Curricula's standards for child assessment. In addition, Community Teamwork will continue to aggregate and analyze data to inform practice.

c. Plan for reviewing outcomes, communication and changes in program based on outcomes. The leadership and governance of all three plans will decide how to best handle the outcome data collected for CQI purposes.

## **5. Costs and Funding**

Much of the information for this section is not complete as the work for Year 4 of the grant has only just begun. Moreover, the cost report that is being completed by ABT Associates has not yet been shared. However, two community sessions were conducted with the community on May 7, and June 6, 2018 to generate knowledge of funding streams needed to continue the PEG model. It was concluded that a real shift needs to take place in government and the greater society so that funding of early care and education programs need not be dependent on short-term grants but, instead look to long-term and sustainable funding streams so that the goal of closing the achievement gap becomes a reality and that the capacity of communities to provide high quality early care and education becomes possible.

In the meantime, the partners are investigating the use of Chapter 70 funding, accessing the Lowell Loves to Learn fund, Head Start funds, agency funds, private foundation funding and possible collaboration with DOE to avoid duplicate services and in seeking future opportunities for funding.

a. Budget for personnel, space, quality support, monitoring and other. The budgets for all three Plans will rely on subsidized slots, supportive slots and private-pay families. In addition, in Plan 1 (Expanded Plan), two of the classrooms will be under the auspices of the LPS as they will be inclusion classrooms for both children with IEPs and typically developing children. Plan 3 is a Non-Peg Plan with care provided by the combined services of Community Teamwork and Little Sprouts. They plan to fill their 156 slots with subsidized children using federal and state monies as well as private-pay families. LPS will make any necessary purchases for the two inclusion classrooms of Plan 1. Plan 2 and Plan 3 will not have start-up costs. The work of creating budgets for each plan will take place over the next months as the exact cost of each component will depend upon the funding received.

b. Resources (funding stream, braided streams, in-kind contributions). Through the LPS and LECAC, all three Plans would receive in-kind contributions in the forms of the needed curricula and community-wide professional development and coaching. Other forms of alignment will continue to be explored. For the PEG grant, a cost study is a requirement and includes data collected from all four years of the grant. Once ABT releases the report, it will be used to help us in our thinking. As we go into the fourth year, we will learn more about the actual and in-kind costs as well as determine a cost-effectiveness ratio. A meeting in July, 2018 with Melissa King will focus on learning

more about Chapter 70 and how monies can be accessed. In addition, more will be learned about Massachusetts' "pot hole fund", and Foundation reserve. The idea of braided funding will also be explored. Throughout the coming year, the PEG's Steering Committee will determine how much funds they will ask for from the city of Lowell, EEC, DESE, the state legislature and the Governor's office.

Citation: Robeson, W.W. (2018). *Strategic Plan for Pre-Kindergarten Funding and Sustainability/Expansion: Lowell Collaborative Preschool Academy (LCPA)*. Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley, MA.