

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*"To strengthen the Commonwealth's public education system so that every student is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, compete in the global economy, and understand the rights and responsibilities of American citizens, and in so doing, to close all proficiency gaps."*

- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)'s mission as posted on its website

TEC Connections Academy (TECCA) Commonwealth Virtual School will actively support and promote DESE's mission by providing a rigorous, effective virtual K–12 public school that provides students with multiple pathways to learn, communicate, collaborate and successfully compete for advancement in our global society whether they pursue college or career. Virtual schooling is a fast-growing, proven educational model that offers students an individualized, flexible learning environment; comprehensive, challenging, and engaging curriculum; and authentic opportunities to collaborate with a diverse group of educators, experts, resources, and academic peers.

Established in 1980, the Education Cooperative (TEC) is a Massachusetts Educational Collaborative under the authority of Massachusetts G.L. c.40, §4E. As a 501(c)(3) organization, TEC provides innovative educational programs and services that complement and strengthen the school programs of our member public school districts and expand opportunities for students, educators, and communities in the most cost-effective manner. TEC member districts include some of the highest achieving districts in Massachusetts, including: Canton, Dedham, Dover, Dover-Sherborn, Framingham, Holliston, Hopkinton, Medfield, Millis, Natick, Needham, Norwood, Sherborn, Walpole, Wayland, and Westwood. We are committed to creating a virtual school that mirrors the rigor, engagement, and learning opportunities of our local schools. More information about TEC, including its annual reports and financial statements, can be found at <http://www.tec-coop.org/about-tec>.

TEC is an experienced provider of outstanding educational programs and services, including a continuum of special education programs, alternative high schools, educator professional development and licensure programs, college and career services for students including a thriving internship program, and an innovative online program, TEC Online Academy. Since 2009, our TEC Online Academy has provided a virtual program of studies that now includes 40 innovative courses. Each of these courses is designed, developed, and facilitated by highly qualified teachers employed within one of our member districts, with a cumulative TEC investment of over \$100,000. This highly successful virtual program is the result of a collaborative effort by the superintendents of our member districts to design and deliver exemplary online curriculum that enables students to study topics of interest in more depth. To date, over 600 students have successfully completed TEC Online Academy courses. Our work has not only expanded student access to outstanding online learning opportunities, but has also developed the capacity of our teachers and administrators to incorporate 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning strategies into daily classroom practice.

The proposed TECCA Commonwealth Virtual School has a solid foundation: TEC's legacy of providing quality programs and services as well as our TEC Online Academy experience of developing and offering a wide-ranging catalog of semester-long quality online courses combine with the demonstrated leadership and expertise in full-time virtual schooling of our support partner Connections Academy. Our shared vision is to create an exceptional virtual school that offers students expanded learning opportunities by providing a stimulating,

student-centered learning environment with multiple academic pathways designed to inspire in-depth study and career exploration that includes a STEM Academy, Arts Academy, personalized internships, and early college learning experiences.

Connections Education is a leading, fully-accredited provider of high-quality, highly accountable virtual education solutions for students in grades K–12. The organization has an established record of successfully providing comprehensive services and products that promote academic and social emotional success for students in non-traditional settings. Since 2001, the company's Connections Academy division has delivered individualized learning to students through virtual public schools and will serve as TECCA's supporting partner. In November 2011, the company was acquired by Pearson Education, Inc., a subsidiary of the public company Pearson PLC. Being a part of Pearson not only brings Connections Education an incredible source of curriculum and instruction products and services, but it also provides it with the financial resources to support its growth and that of the schools and students it serves. Connections Education is currently providing online and blended curriculum and technology services to 26 Connections Academy virtual public schools and seven Nexus Academy blended public schools operating in 23 states, serving more than 50,000 students across the nation.

The TEC Board of Directors has voted to fully support this application to establish TECCA. We have assembled a team of leaders (the Board of Trustees) who possess a wide variety of skills and qualifications that enable us to develop, open, sustain, operate, and continuously improve a highly effective school. Our Board of Trustees consists of senior representatives from our member districts as well as respected leaders in digital learning and educational technology.

Our students will learn from home under the instruction of Massachusetts-certified teachers. We will implement rigorous protocols, tools, and best-practices to promote excellence and ensure success for the school and its participating students and families. Our program will offer a rigorous, effective curriculum aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and utilize unique technology tools to help every student succeed, while also encouraging social growth. TECCA will offer students throughout Massachusetts hundreds of courses, dozens of clubs and activities, face-to-face field experiences, and access to resources that will help prepare them for a global economy and success in life. Our school will address the unique characteristics of an online learning environment to offer a full continuum of services, allowing students and families to participate fully in the school's educational goals and mission.

The educational leadership of our TEC communities spent a great deal of time learning about online and blended learning before deciding to apply to establish a virtual school and partner with Connections Academy. We met with experts, worked with consultants, visited a number of virtual schools, investigated online content providers, held many round table discussions, conducted several community meetings, and hosted an information session for legislators.. In the end we came to the consensus that we should leverage our success with TEC Online Academy and the blended learning work within our districts and design a virtual school that would meet our own high standards and expectations and would "strengthen the Commonwealth's public education system so that every student is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, compete in the global economy, and understand the rights and responsibilities of American citizens, and in so doing, to close all proficiency gaps."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mission Statement of Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), <http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/>.