



# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.  
Commissioner

## **Review Process for Charter School Applications and Criteria for Review**

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) conducts a thorough review of charter school applications, working within statutory and regulatory timelines. The charter school statute requires that the award of new charters for Commonwealth and Horace Mann I and III charter schools occur in February of each year.

### **Objective of the Process**

The objective of the review process for charter school applications is to award charters to applicants who demonstrate the **greatest probability** of creating public schools of the highest quality. The Department conducts a process with multiple phases that includes participation by internal and external reviewers, opportunities for public comment, and interviews with each applicant group. The prospectuses and final applications are reviewed against extensive criteria outlined in 603 CMR 1.04 and specified in the charter school application.

### **Prospectus and Final Application Review**

During the current application process, every prospectus and final application was reviewed by an average of nine individuals. The Department utilizes multiple reviewers for prospectuses and final applications, including school leaders and teachers, education consultants, representatives from non-profits, higher education administrators, and Department staff. Teams of reviewers read the prospectuses and final charter applications thoroughly, with reference to the criteria in the charter application.

At the prospectus stage, the Department incorporates the written review of the external reviewers into the discussion and evaluation of each prospectus. Upon completion of its evaluation, the Department provides applicants with a written description of substantial questions and concerns based on the application criteria. The Department requests final applications from applicant groups who adequately address the majority of the application criteria and demonstrate the **potential** to create a public school of the highest quality.

At the final application stage, review panels discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the application based upon the charter application criteria and identify areas where clarification from the applicant is needed. This process helps to generate questions for the next step, an interview with each applicant group.

## **Public Comment**

In order to solicit comments on charter applications from the public during the current application cycle, the Department held five public hearings in November and December in areas where applicants propose to locate and requested written comments from the public, superintendents, and school committee members. All oral or written comments are reviewed and any substantial issues raised about a specific application are added to the list of questions for the applicant interview.

## **Interviews**

The Department interviews all final applicant groups. Interviews last approximately two-and-a-half hours. The interviews allow applicants to respond to questions about their proposed school and issues of capacity identified in the review of their charter applications. Interviewers note the degree to which the applicant group successfully addressed the identified weaknesses of its application and evaluate, in person, the capacity of the applicant group, including the proposed board of trustees, proposed employees, and proposed partner organizations, if applicable.

## **Commissioner Recommendation**

The Department summarizes the evidence gathered during the charter application process. Department staff present all of the information to the Commissioner and, based upon the information presented, the Commissioner determines which recommendations, if any, to make for the February meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board).

## **Final Application Criteria**

The attached document contains the charter application criteria for final applications.