*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley*Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:**  | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:**  | January 17, 2020 |
| **Subject:** | Charter Schools – Amendment Requests of Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter School (Maximum Enrollment), Pioneer Charter School of Science II (Grade Span and Maximum Enrollment), and Veritas Preparatory Charter School (Grade Span and Maximum Enrollment) |

Pursuant to the Charter School Regulations, 603 CMR 1.10(1), the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) must approve certain changes in the material terms of a school’s charter. This year, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) received requests from three charter schools to change their maximum enrollment and grades served. I recommend that the Board approve the amendments requested by Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter School, Pioneer Charter School of Science II, and Veritas Preparatory Charter School. Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter School is a Horace Mann charter school in Boston; Pioneer Charter School of Science II is a regional Commonwealth charter school located in Saugus; and Veritas Preparatory Charter School is a Commonwealth charter school in Springfield.

The Department’s assessment of each school’s request is described below, in preparation for a discussion and vote at the Board’s meeting on January 28, 2020. This memorandum is organized into the following sections: (1) an overview of the Department’s process for review of amendment requests; (2) information about the availability of charter school seats; (3) considerations for two of the schools regarding net school spending caps; and (4) for each school, the school’s request, the school’s performance, and my recommendation. The following information for each request is also attached to this memorandum for your review:

* the original amendment request and any supplemental materials provided by the school;
* a summary of the school’s student demographics, academic and non-academic performance, and five-year financial summary; and
* public comment received by the Department.

Statutory limits on the amount of tuition that districts can transfer to Commonwealth charter schools, referred to as the net school spending (NSS) cap, are an important consideration in all of my recommendations. This memorandum includes an overview of how the Department determines and oversees NSS caps and the impact of NSS caps on the availability of seats for new student enrollment in Commonwealth charter schools. Horace Mann charter schools are not subject to NSS caps under the charter school statute.

**1. Department’s Review Process**

Section 1.10 of the Charter School Regulations contains several criteria to consider in determining whether to grant a school’s request to amend its charter. The Department based its comprehensive review on these criteria.

The Department’s review included the following considerations:

* the charter school’s compliance with applicable state, federal, and local law;
* affirmative, credible evidence regarding the faithfulness of the school to the terms of its charter, including the extent to which the school has followed its recruitment and retention plan and has disseminated best practices;
* affirmative, credible evidence regarding the success of the school's academic program;
* affirmative, credible evidence regarding the viability of the school as an organization;
* the merits of the school’s amendment request when judged against the criteria outlined in the Department’s [Charter Amendment and Notification Guidelines](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/governance/amendmentguidelines.docx) and the [Charter School Performance Criteria](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=criteria);
* the eligibility of the board of trustees of Commonwealth charter schools for proven provider status, if required, based upon the criteria described in 603 CMR 1.04(4);[[1]](#footnote-1) and
* the public comment received regarding the request.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In general, the Department considers requests for increases in maximum enrollment only after the school undergoes a comprehensive evaluation by the Department following the school’s first charter renewal. If the Commissioner declines to bring an expansion request to the Board for consideration, the school’s board of trustees may seek review of that decision by the Board as provided in 603 CMR 1.10(8).

**2. Availability of Seats for Commonwealth Charter Schools**

The charter school statute establishes limits on the amount of charter school tuition that districts can transfer to Commonwealth charter schools in any given year. The limits are expressed as a percentage of the district's NSS for that year. Chapter 70 of the General Laws defines NSS.
NSS represents the district's spending on school operations from state and local funds.[[3]](#footnote-3) The majority of school districts are subject to a 9 percent NSS cap for charter school tuition, with the exception of districts performing in the lowest 10 percent statewide based on two years of MCAS performance. School districts performing in the lowest 10 percent have a higher NSS cap of 18 percent. The 9 and 18 percent NSS caps are described in the charter school statute at G.L. c. 71, § 89(i)(2) and (3).[[4]](#footnote-4)

If the tuition for all students who live in a district and attend Commonwealth charter schools exceeds the district's NSS cap, the Department reduces the tuition to bring the amount under the cap.[[5]](#footnote-5) Any such excess is prorated proportionately across all of the charter schools enrolling students who live in that district. The Department works to avoid such situations, using a variety of regulatory and administrative tools to monitor and control enrollment. Listed below are several of the tools used by the Department.

* Each year, the Department calculates an administrative holdback of five percent of total NSS when projecting seats available for the Board to award to new or existing Commonwealth charter schools.
* In its award of new charters, or amendments to existing charters, the Board establishes maximum enrollment limits as material terms of every charter.
* The Department may establish specific enrollment limits by sending district, known as sub-caps, for Commonwealth charter schools that serve districts near or at their NSS caps.
* The Department permits Commonwealth charter schools to skip over students who live in districts that are near or at NSS caps when enrolling students.

Managing NSS caps is inherently inexact because the calculation of NSS is made based upon a number of projected variables to inform the award of charter seats and the admission of students by individual Commonwealth charter schools. Final tuition rates, enrollment numbers, and district spending needed to calculate NSS caps and determine actual compliance are not available until well into the school year for which students were already admitted and are attending Commonwealth charter schools.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that a Commonwealth charter school can enroll students from multiple districts, and multiple Commonwealth charter schools can enroll students from a single district. When the Board awards a charter, students who live in the district or districts specified in the school’s charter are given preference in enrollment, but students who live outside those districts[[6]](#footnote-6) may also apply and be admitted to those schools. Enrollment preferences based upon residence may enhance a student's likelihood of admission, but they do not deprive other students of consideration for admission or of inclusion in an admission lottery. Managing the NSS caps requires the Department to estimate and project how many students from a particular district will be attending charter schools in future years and to consider enrollment trends generally. As a result, the Department relies heavily on estimates and projections, as well as administrative safeguards, when recommendations are made to the Board for the award of new seats to Commonwealth charter schools.

Additionally, districts performing in the lowest 10 percent statewide are determined annually. The Department issued the current list of districts in the lowest 10 percent in January 2019, based on results from student assessments administered in the two previous school years. The Department calculates and publishes this list annually, more than six months in advance of the submission of charter applications and amendment requests. Each year's list informs:

(1) the seats available for award by the Board to new Commonwealth charter schools and to existing Commonwealth charter schools in the coming year; and

(2) the admissions decisions by Commonwealth charter schools for the subsequent school year.

For example, the list published during the 2018-2019 school year, based on 2017 and 2018 MCAS results, is used for Board decisions during the 2019-2020 school year, and by Commonwealth charter schools when making enrollment decisions for the 2020-2021 school year.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**3. Considerations for Pioneer Charter School of Science II and Veritas Preparatory Charter School Regarding Net School Spending Caps**

Pioneer Charter School of Science II (PCSS-II) is a regional charter school serving Danvers, Lynn, Peabody, Salem, and Saugus. Based on [Department projections](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/app/nss-projections.xlsx), over 2,000 seats are available for award across the school’s chartered region in Lynn, Danvers, and Peabody. Two of the five districts in the school’s region, however, Salem and Saugus, are at or near NSS caps based on current enrollment, limiting any significant increase in student enrollment from these districts. As a result, my recommendation includes sub-caps for Salem and Saugus. If additional seats become available in future years, PCSS-II may request an adjustment to its sub-caps.

There are no additional seats for Salem residents available for award at this time. Approximately 9 percent of Salem’s NSS is roughly equivalent to the 469 seats already in use by four Commonwealth charter schools, one of which is PCSS-II. In order to manage student enrollment under Salem’s current NSS cap, I recommend a sub-cap of 8 total seats for PCSS-II based upon enrollment trends of Salem residents at the school.

Similarly, there are approximately 39 additional seats for Saugus residents available for award at this time. Approximately 9 percent of Saugus’s NSS is roughly equivalent to 247 seats, with 196 seats already in use by eight Commonwealth charter schools, one of which is PCSS-II. In order to manage student enrollment under Saugus’s current NSS cap, I recommend a sub-cap of 130 total seats for PCSS-II based upon enrollment trends of Saugus residents at the school.

Danvers and Peabody have sufficient seats available under their 9 percent NSS caps, roughly equivalent to 298 seats and 435 seats, respectively, and do not require a sub-cap. For Lynn under its NSS cap of 18 percent, the Department projects that approximately 1,360 seats are available for award.

Veritas Preparatory Charter School (VPCS) is a non-regional charter school serving Springfield. For Springfield, under its NSS cap of 18 percent, the Department projects that approximately 334 seats are available for award. Approximately 18 percent of Springfield’s NSS is roughly equivalent to 5,730 seats, with approximately 5,110 seats already in use by 13 Commonwealth charter schools, one of which is VPCS. I do not recommend that the Board award more than the seats that we currently project are available. VPCS decreased its request by 29 seats to align with Department projections. If additional seats become available in future cycles, VPCS may return with another request.

**4. Amendment Requests**

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| **Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter School**  |
| **Type of Charter**(Commonwealth or Horace Mann) | Horace Mann | **Location** | Boston |
| **Regional or Non-Regional?** | Non-Regional | **Districts in Region**  | N/A |
| **Year Opened** | 1998 | **Year(s) Renewed** | 2003, 2008, 2013, 2018 |
| **Maximum Enrollment** | 405 | **Current Enrollment** | 414[[8]](#footnote-8) |
| **Chartered Grade Span** | 9-12 | **Current Grade Span** | 9-12 |
| **Students on Waitlist** | 103[[9]](#footnote-9) | **Current Age of School** | 22 years |
| **Mission Statement**Boston Day and Evening Academy re-engages off-track students in their education preparing them for high school graduation, post-secondary success and meaningful participation in their community. |

School’s Request

The board of trustees of BDEA requests approval of an amendment to increase the school’s enrollment by 100 seats over three years beginning with the 2020-2021 school year. The school’s request was approved by the Boston School Committee[[10]](#footnote-10) and the Boston Teachers Union as required by 603 CMR 1.10(4)(b). No additional comment was received.

BDEA is an alternative charter high school. As stated in the school’s mission, BDEA re-engages “off-track students” to prepare them for high school graduation. BDEA has seen increasing demand for its program. In the past six years, the school’s waitlist has averaged approximately 112 students. By increasing enrollment, the school seeks to serve all students seeking admission and to reduce the number of students placed on its waitlist.

School’s Performance

Overall, the Department’s records indicate that the school’s academic program is successful and comparable to similar alternative high schools, the school is a viable organization, and the school is generally faithful to the terms of its charter.

* BDEA implements a competency-based, student-centered program designed to support students who are at risk of dropping out, or who are resuming their education after having dropped out. At its 2018 renewal, the Department found BDEA exceeded expectations for the criterion related to Mission and Key Design Elements. During its past charter term, the school developed and maintained a data system that permits both teachers and students to monitor academic performance, attendance, and post-graduation plans. The school also implements a student support team and advisory model, partners with counselors from outside agencies, and uses a restorative justice model to create a safe and supportive school culture.
* For several years, the Department has examined the performance of alternative charter high schools against a comparison set of similar alternative high schools. The Department generates aggregated performance metrics of identified alternative education programs throughout the Commonwealth. BDEA’s performance on legacy MCAS[[11]](#footnote-11) exceeded the performance of other alternative high schools in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018. In 2018, 84 percent of BDEA students scored proficient or advanced in English language arts (ELA) in comparison to 61 percent of grade 10 students attending other alternative high schools. Similarly, 44 percent of BDEA students scored proficient or advanced in mathematics in comparison with 29 percent of grade 10 students attending other alternative high schools.
* In 2019, the first year of Next Generation MCAS[[12]](#footnote-12) administration for grade 10, 6 percent of BDEA students met or exceeded expectations in ELA in comparison to 14 percent of grade 10 students attending other alternative high schools. Additionally, 12 percent of BDEA students met or exceeded expectations in mathematics in comparison to 10 percent of grade 10 students attending other alternative high schools.
* BDEA consistently enrolls a similar or greater proportion of students with disabilities and students identified as economically disadvantaged than other Boston high schools. BDEA has increased its enrollment of English learners and students whose first language is not English over time, though these numbers are still lower than the comparison set of Boston high schools.
* BDEA typically enrolls over-aged and under-credited students consistent with its mission and similar to other alternative schools. BDEA has a 5-year plus graduation rate[[13]](#footnote-13) comparable to the graduation rates for students attending other alternative high schools. The 5-year plus graduation rate at BDEA has fluctuated between 49.3 percent and 56.2 percent over the most recent five years. The annual dropout rate at BDEA is below the aggregated rate for other alternative high schools. The annual dropout rate at BDEA has fluctuated between 19.8 percent and 23.7 percent over the most recent five years. Additionally, BDEA experiences a higher retention rate because the school does not follow typical grade levels but, instead, implements a competency-based educational program. BDEA reports that the number of incoming students who have more coursework to complete for graduation has increased in recent years, which has decreased its graduation rates, both the traditional 4-year rate and the 5-year rate.
* BDEA has attrition rates for all students and students identified as high need that are substantially lower than other alternative high schools. From 2015 through 2018, the school’s attrition rates for all students ranged from 3.4 percent to 9.8 percent, while attrition rates for students identified as high need ranged from 2.8 percent to 7.9 percent. In comparison, other alternative education schools reported attrition rates for all students and students identified as high need that ranged from approximately 17 percent to 26 percent from 2015 through 2018. During the same five-year period, the statewide average for attrition of all high school students and high school students identified as high need ranged from 8.4 percent to 10.6 percent.
* BDEA has identified student attendance as an area for improvement; BDEA’s attendance rate has declined over the past five years, from 71.3 percent in 2015 to 56.7 percent in 2019. BDEA has a student support team that meets weekly to identify and review interventions for students who are not attending school to ensure an individualized approach. In its recruitment and retention plan, BDEA reports continued examination and refinement of its practices to provide an environment where students can stay engaged and make progress. Examples of recent strategies to increase student attendance include increasing student access to in-house counseling through additional staff and external partnerships, increased use of attendance agreements and check-ins, and revising the instructional schedule to maximize student access to teachers from all content areas.
* At its 2018 renewal, the Department found BDEA exceeded expectations for the criterion related to Dissemination based on the school’s work to share best practices with other public schools. BDEA hosts summer learning labs and two-day residencies for educators to learn about competency-based education. BDEA provides coaching to districts and schools including, but not limited to, Brighton High School in Boston, Lowell Public Schools, and Philadelphia Public Schools. Additionally, the school has presented at multiple conferences and workshops in the Commonwealth and nationally.
* BDEA operates in a financially sound manner. The school maintains sound and stable finances. BDEA has received unqualified audits over the past five years. BDEA had a significant deficiency finding in fiscal year 2018 (FY18) related to the submission of its financial audit after the Department’s deadline and inadequate recordkeeping in certain areas. In response, the school has changed accounting firms, developed additional systems to ensure timely future submissions, and resolved previous instances of noncompliance. The school submitted its FY2019 financial audit on schedule.

Recommendation

I have reviewed the school's request, and it appears reasonable and consistent with the charter school statute and regulations. Overall, the submitted amendment request, the local support of the Boston School Committee and Boston Teachers Union, the renewal of the school's charter in 2018, and the Department's accountability records indicate that the school's academic program is a success, that the school is a viable organization, and that it is faithful to the terms of its charter. I recommend that the Board approve the request.

If the Board votes to grant BDEA’s request, the school’s maximum enrollment will be 505 students. As a Horace Mann charter school, BDEA’s enrollment is not limited by any NSS cap, and the request for additional enrollment is not subject to the proven provider requirements. A motion for approval is attached for your consideration.

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| **Pioneer Charter School of Science II**  |
| **Type of Charter**(Commonwealth or Horace Mann) | Commonwealth | **Location** | Saugus |
| **Regional or Non-Regional?** | Regional | **Districts in Region**  | Danvers, Lynn, Peabody, Salem, Saugus |
| **Year Opened** | 2013 | **Year(s) Renewed** | 2018 |
| **Maximum Enrollment** | 360 | **Current Enrollment** | 360[[14]](#footnote-14) |
| **Chartered Grade Span** | 7-12 | **Current Grade Span** | 7-12 |
| **Students on Waitlist** | 372[[15]](#footnote-15) | **Current Age of School** | 7 years |
| **Mission Statement**The mission of Pioneer Charter School of Science II (PCSS-II) is to prepare educationally under-resourced students for today’s competitive world. PCSS-II will help students to develop the academic and social skills necessary to become successful professionals and exemplary members of their community. This goal will be achieved by providing the students with a rigorous academic curriculum with emphasis on math and science, balanced by a strong foundation in the humanities, a character education program, career-oriented college preparation, and strong student–teacher–parent collaboration. |

School’s Request

The board of trustees of PCSS-II requests approval of an amendment to add grades K-6 and to increase its maximum enrollment by 498 students over three years. PCSS-II seeks to replicate the K-12 grade configuration of the network’s flagship school, Pioneer Charter School of Science (PCSS), which was granted a similar expansion request in 2016.[[16]](#footnote-16) PCSS-II proposes to add 198 students in grades K-2 in the 2021-2022 school year, add 66 students in grade 4 in the 2022-2023 school year, and add 66 students in grade 6 in the 2023-2024 school year to complete its K-6 grade span. PCSS-II has also committed to accept new students in grades K-9, which exceeds the statutory requirement to fill vacancies in grades K-6.

PCSS-II’s request is prompted by demand for K-6 education and interest in strengthening its students’ preparation for its rigorous college preparatory program. Evidence of demand includes the number of applications received by PCSS from elementary school-aged applicants who reside in PCSS-II’s sending region and the number of elementary school-aged students who are on the waitlist at nearby KIPP Academy Lynn Charter School, a K-12 school.[[17]](#footnote-17) PCSS-II proposes to adopt the elementary school program currently used at PCSS. During the proposed 18-month planning period, the school plans to leverage the expertise of PCSS and the network[[18]](#footnote-18) to support planning and preparation for implementation. The school will use the 2020-2021 school year as a planning period to secure the desired facility and complete necessary renovations. PCSS-II currently proposes to locate the elementary program in Peabody.[[19]](#footnote-19) The school currently provides regional transportation for residents of its charter region and will continue to do so under the proposed expansion.

The Department received letters of support from Peabody Mayor Edward A. Bettencourt, Jr. and State Representative Donald Wong (Saugus, Lynn, and Wakefield), in addition to approximately 87 letters in support from current and potential future members of the school community. Superintendents of Danvers, Lynn, Peabody, Saugus, and Salem declined to comment.

School’s Performance

Overall, the Department’s records indicate that the school’s academic program is successful, that the school is a viable organization, and that the school is generally faithful to the terms of its charter.

* PCSS-II’s mission is to prepare “educationally under-resourced” students, and to help them develop the academic and social skills necessary to become successful through a rigorous academic curriculum. In alignment with its mission, the school is guided by five key design elements: extended learning time, college preparation, mathematics and science focus, character education, and strong student-teacher-parent collaboration. At its 2018 renewal, the Department found PCSS-II met expectations for the criterion related to Mission and Key Design Elements.
* In 2018, PCSS-II was identified as a "school of recognition" for its high achievement, including achieving an accountability percentile of 91. In 2019, the school achieved an accountability percentile of 93.
* PCSS-II has administered the Next Generation MCAS assessment since 2017 for grades 7 and 8. The school administered the Next Generation MCAS assessment for grade 10 in 2019. PCSS-II students performed at or above the statewide average for achievement on the Next Generation MCAS assessment for all years in both the aggregate and the majority of selected student populations.
	+ In 2019, 67 percent of PCSS-II students in grades 7 and 8 met or exceeded expectations in ELA in comparison to 50 percent of students in grades 7 and 8 statewide. Similarly, 78 percent of PCSS-II students in grades 7 and 8 met or exceeded expectations in mathematics in comparison to 47 percent of students in grade 7 and 8 statewide.
	+ In 2019, 85 percent of PCSS-II students in grade 10 met or exceeded expectations in ELA in comparison to 61 percent of students in grade 10 statewide. Similarly, 93 percent of PCSS-II students in grade 10 met or exceeded expectations in mathematics in comparison to 59 percent of students in grade 10 statewide.

Similar high performance on the Next Generation MCAS assessment was achieved by selected student populations, including students identified as economically disadvantaged, Hispanic/Latinx, and African-American/Black.

* The flagship school, PCSS, completed its expansion to a K-12 school in 2018-2019. The Department reviewed the performance of elementary students at PCSS for evidence of the capacity and expertise necessary to replicate K-6 programming at PCSS II. PCSS has administered the Next Generation MCAS assessment since 2018 for grades 3 and 4. Additionally, in 2019, PCSS administered the Next Generation MCAS assessment for grades 5 and 6. Students in PCSS’s new elementary grades performed at or above the statewide average for achievement in both the aggregate and the majority of selected student populations in 2018 and 2019.
	+ In 2019, 55 percent of PCSS students in grades 3 and 4 met or exceeded expectations in both ELA and mathematics in comparison to 54 percent of students in grades 3 and 4 statewide in ELA and 49 percent of students in grades 3 and 4 statewide in mathematics.
	+ In 2019, 72 percent of PCSS students in grade 5 met or exceeded expectations in ELA compared to 52 percent of students in grade 5 statewide, and 61 percent of PCSS students in grade 5 met or exceeded expectations in mathematics compared to 48 percent of students in grade 5 statewide.
	+ In 2019, 60 percent of PCSS students in grade 6 met or exceeded expectations in ELA compared to 53 percent of students in grade 6 statewide, and 80 percent of PCSS students in grade 6 met or exceeded expectations in mathematics compared to 52 percent of students in grade 6 statewide.
* Enrollment of students in PCSS-II identified as English learners, students whose first language is not English, and students with disabilities has increased since 2015. The school has served greater numbers of these selected student subgroups than its respective comparison indices[[20]](#footnote-20) over the past four years.
* PCSS-II experienced an unusually high rate of attrition between its first and second year of operation that the school attributes in large part to its temporary location in Everett for the first year of operation.[[21]](#footnote-21) Since 2015, the attrition rate for all students at PCSS-II has declined from 21.6 percent to 7.7 percent. Similarly, the attrition rate for students identified as high need has declined from 20 percent to 8.2 percent.
* The in-school suspension rate at PCSS-II has been at or below the statewide average for four of the past five years. The school’s out-of-school suspension rate has declined from a high of 6.7 percent in 2014 to 2.7 percent in 2019. During the expansion of PCSS to a K-12 school, its in-school suspension rate and out-of-school suspension rate also declined in comparison with previous years. In 2019, PCSS reported an in-school suspension rate of 1.5 percent and an out-of-school suspension rate of 0.9 percent.
* Three cohorts of students have graduated from PCSS-II. Based on available data, 100 percent and 96.9 percent of students graduated in four years in 2017 and 2018, respectively. Additionally, 100 percent of students identified as low income graduated in four years in 2017 and 2018. The dropout rate at PCSS-II is below the statewide average for four of the past five years, and was 0 percent in 2014, 2016, and 2018.
* PCSS-II and the flagship school operate in a financially sound manner. The schools maintain sound and stable finances. As evidenced by their financial dashboards, the schools have received unqualified audits and have experienced no findings over the past five years.
* Proven provider status is required for PCSS-II to enroll more students from Lynn under its 18 percent NSS cap. After evaluating the performance of PCSS-II and PCSS, against the criteria for proven provider status, I have determined that the board of trustees of PCSS-II and PCSS is a proven provider[[22]](#footnote-22) for the purposes of the current amendment request. Included in your materials are the relevant student achievement and indicator data that I used to make this determination.

Recommendation

I have reviewed the school's request, and it appears reasonable and consistent with the charter school statute and regulations. Overall, the submitted amendment request, the renewal of the school's charter in 2018, and the Department's accountability records indicate that the school's academic program is a success, that the school is a viable organization, and that it is faithful to the terms of its charter. I have also determined that the board of trustees of PCSS-II is a proven provider. I recommend that the Board approve the request, with sub-caps for Salem and Saugus as previously described.

If the Board votes to grant PCSS-II’s request, the school will serve students in grades K-12 with a maximum enrollment of 858 students. A motion for approval is attached for your consideration.

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| **Veritas Preparatory Charter School** |
| **Type of Charter**(Commonwealth or Horace Mann) | Commonwealth | **Location** | Springfield |
| **Regional or Non-Regional?** | Non-Regional | **Districts in Region**  | N/A |
| **Year Opened** | 2012 | **Year(s) Renewed** | 2017 |
| **Maximum Enrollment** | 432 | **Current Enrollment** | 365[[23]](#footnote-23) |
| **Chartered Grade Span** | 5-8 | **Current Grade Span** | 5-8 |
| **Students on Waitlist** | 378[[24]](#footnote-24) | **Current Age of School** | 8 years |
| **Mission Statement**Veritas Preparatory Charter School prepares scholars in grades 5 to 8 to compete, achieve, and succeed in high school, college, and beyond. |

School’s Request

The board of trustees of VPCS requests approval of an amendment to add grades 9-12 and to increase the school’s enrollment by 334 seats.[[25]](#footnote-25) The school proposes to reach full enrollment in grades 5-12 in approximately five years as students matriculate through to graduation. While the school has indicated a desire to backfill beyond its statutory requirement, the limited number of seats remaining in Springfield cannot support backfilling in ninth and tenth grades without significantly altering the existing enrollment patterns and program at VPCS. VPCS proposes to enroll new grade 9 students as needed to maintain a viable high school cohort. VPCS intends to create a second campus in Springfield to accommodate the new high school, but can also accommodate one additional grade at its current facility in Springfield during the first year of implementation, if necessary.

VPCS’s request is prompted by parent demand, as evidenced by survey data and focus group data collected by the school, and the number of waitlisted students in Springfield seeking admission to a charter school for grades 9-12. The school has developed additional capacity to launch a high school, including a leadership team and external partners. The Barr Foundation will provide the school with a $300,000 grant to support the planning and preparations for implementing the proposed high school. VPCS has obtained the support of Elms College and Bard College to aid in the development and eventual implementation of an early college program. The school is also considering a partnership with Propel America so that it provides a variety of pathways for students to achieve post-secondary success.

Superintendent Daniel J. Warwick from Springfield Public Schools submitted comment in opposition to the school’s request, which is enclosed in this memorandum. No other comment was received.

School’s Performance

Overall, the Department’s records indicate that the school’s academic program is successful, that the school is a viable organization, and that the school is generally faithful to the terms of its charter.

* VPCS’s mission is to prepare students to succeed in high school, college, and beyond. In alignment with its mission, the school is guided by six key design elements: high expectations; character development; structured learning environment; curriculum focused on literacy and outcomes; data-driven instruction; and teacher quality and effectiveness. At its 2017 renewal, the Department found VPCS met expectations for the criterion related to Mission and Key Design Elements.
* VPCS has administered the Next Generation MCAS assessment since 2017, performing at or above the statewide average in ELA and mathematics in all three years, and exceeding the performance of its sending district. In 2019, 51 percent of VPCS students met or exceeded expectations in ELA and 53 percent of VPCS students met or exceeded expectations in mathematics. The school has also exceeded typical growth for students in multiple years. For example, VPCS students who took the Next Generation MCAS ELA and mathematics assessment in 2017 received an average Student Growth Percentile (SGP) of 72.5 and 73.5, respectively. Similar high performance and growth was achieved by selected student populations. In 2019, on the Next Generation MCAS assessment in mathematics, English learners at VPCS achieved an average SGP of 69.4, Hispanic/Latinx students at VPCS achieved an average SGP of 60.4, and African-American/Black students at VPCS achieved an average SGP of 65.9.
* Enrollment of students in VPCS identified as economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, English learners, and students whose first language is not English has increased since 2015. The school served greater numbers of these selected student subgroups than its respective comparison indices over the past four years.
* VPCS’s approach to discipline, which is evolving to focus on restorative justice, has continued to yield declines in both in-school and out-of-school suspensions. In June 2016, the Department identified VPCS as having a large disparity in the rates of suspension for students with disabilities based on the 2014-2015 state student discipline report data, with an out-of-school suspension rate for students with disabilities of 37.1 percent. Since joining the Rethinking Discipline Professional Learning Network, the school has implemented an action plan and revised its behavioral management plan, which both school and board leaders monitor for effectiveness. The school has demonstrated progress in reducing discrepancies. Discipline rates have declined for all students and selected student populations, including students with disabilities. During the 2018-2019 school year, the number of students with disabilities who received an in-school or an out-of-school suspension was too low to be reported as a percentage (2 students).
* VPCS had an unusually high attrition rate of 23.4 percent in 2017. Based upon surveys of families, the school identified a number of factors contributing to student attrition, including enrollment at schools that serve high school grades, relocation to another community, or transfer to Springfield Public Schools. Since 2017, VPCS has experienced a decline in attrition rates for both the aggregate and students identified as high needs. The school’s attrition rate has declined to 10.5 percent for all students and 9.5 percent for students identified as high needs in 2019, far below the median of comparison schools.
* VPCS operates in a financially sound manner. The school maintains sound and stable finances. As evidenced by its financial dashboard, the school has received unqualified audits.
* Proven provider status is required for VPCS to enroll more students from Springfield under the 18 percent NSS cap. After evaluating the performance of VPCS against the criteria for proven provider status, I have determined that the board of trustees of VPCS is a proven provider[[26]](#footnote-26) for the purposes of the current amendment request. Included in your materials are the relevant student achievement and indicator data that I used to make this determination.

Recommendation

I have reviewed the school's request, and it appears reasonable and consistent with the charter school statute and regulations. Overall, the submitted amendment request, the first renewal of the school's charter in 2017, and the Department's accountability records indicate that the school's academic program is a success, that the school is a viable organization, and that it is faithful to the terms of its charter. I have also determined that the board of trustees of VPCS qualifies as a proven provider. I recommend that the Board approve the request. Based upon the inherent challenges of launching a new grade span, the need to locate a high school facility, and the school’s current implementation of a previously awarded enrollment increase, my recommendation includes an extended planning period to ensure a successful high school. VPCS will begin implementation of its high school expansion in the 2022-2023 school year once the school has completed its expansion to 432 students in grades 5-8.

If the Board votes to grant VPCS’s request, the school will serve students in grades 5-12 with a maximum enrollment of 766 students. A motion for approval is attached for your consideration.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Cliff Chuang, Senior Associate Commissioner, and Alison Bagg, Director, will be at your meeting on January 28 to assist with the discussion. In the meantime, if you need any additional information, please contact Cliff (781-338-3222), Alison (781-338-3218), or me.

Attachments: Tab 1 (Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter School) contains:

Correspondence from Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter School

Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter School’s performance summary, including academic performance, student enrollment demographics, indicators such as discipline and attrition rates, and five-year financial summary

Motion for Board Action on Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter School

Tab 2 (Pioneer Charter School of Science II) contains:

Correspondence from Pioneer Charter School of Science II

Pioneer Charter School of Science II’s credentials as a proven provider, including academic performance, student enrollment demographics, indicators such as discipline and attrition rates, and five-year financial summary

Public Comment

Motion for Board Action on Pioneer Charter School of Science Charter School II

Tab 3 (Veritas Preparatory Charter School) contains:

Correspondence from Veritas Preparatory Charter School, including the original amendment request and additional materials subsequently submitted by the school

Veritas Preparatory Charter School’s credentials as a proven provider, including academic performance, student enrollment demographics, indicators such as discipline and attrition rates, and five-year financial summary

Public Comment, including comment from Superintendent Daniel J. Warwick of Springfield Public Schools

Motion for Board Action on Veritas Preparatory Charter School

1. Proven providers must meet the performance criteria described in 603 CMR 1.04(4) (“evidence, satisfactory to the Commissioner, to demonstrate a significant management or leadership role at a school or similar program that is an academic success, a viable organization, and relevant to the proposed charter school”). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. At the time of each school’s submission to the Department, pursuant to 603 CMR 1.10(5), copies of all requests were provided to the districts identified in their respective chartered region. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. NSS does not include spending funded by grants or most spending related to capital facilities, transportation, or adult education. In the case of municipal school districts, NSS can include spending by other municipal departments to support schools. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Section 89(i)(2) of G.L. c. 71 provides as follows with respect to NSS.

In any fiscal year, no public school district's total charter school tuition payment to commonwealth charter schools shall exceed 9 per cent of the district's net school spending; provided, however, that a public school district's total charter tuition payment to commonwealth charter schools shall not exceed 18 per cent of the district's net school spending if the school district qualifies under paragraph (3).

Section 89(i)(3) of G.L. c. 71, referred to in the language quoted above, provides as follows.

In any fiscal year, if the board determines based on student performance data collected pursuant to section 1I, said district is in the lowest 10 per cent of all statewide student performance scores released in the 2 consecutive school years before the date the charter school application is submitted, the school district's total charter school tuition payment to commonwealth charter schools may exceed 9 per cent of the district's net school spending but shall not exceed 18 per cent. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The facility component of charter tuition is excluded from this calculation because sending districts are fully reimbursed by the Commonwealth for this amount. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. They must reside in the Commonwealth, however. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The charter school statute also provides direction on how to calculate a district’s NSS cap when a district exits the lowest 10 percent list, at G.L. c. 71, § 89(i)(3).

If a district is no longer in the lowest 10 per cent, the net school spending cap shall be 9 per cent, unless the district net school spending was above 9 per cent in the year prior to moving out of the lowest 10 per cent in which case the net school spending cap shall remain at the higher level plus enrollment previously approved by the board. The department shall determine and make available to the public a list of the school districts in said lowest 10 per cent.

In short, if such a district’s charter enrollment has surpassed the 9 percent NSS cap, that district’s NSS cap must be set to accommodate all previously approved enrollment. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. According to the Student Information Management System (SIMS) report from October 1, 2019, BDEA was over-enrolled by nine students. This is a violation of the school’s charter. BDEA is a Horace Mann charter school and receives tuition as set forth in the school’s memorandum of understanding with the Boston School Committee. BDEA is working with BPS and the Department to review and refine its enrollment and discharge practices to ensure accurate reporting while maintaining fidelity to its student re-engagement strategies. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. As reported in the [Massachusetts Charter School Waitlist Initial Report for 2019-2020](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/enrollment/fy2020/waitlist.html) from March 15, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Boston School Committee’s unanimous vote of approval on February 27, 2019 was contingent upon “the identification and provision of sufficient space to accommodate increased enrollment.” After the school committee vote, Boston Public Schools provided BDEA the wing of an underutilized middle school facility for use beginning in the 2019-2020 school year that will accommodate the additional proposed enrollment. Thus, the condition imposed was met, enabling consideration by the Board of BDEA’s amendment request. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Legacy MCAS scores are designated for each grade by proficiency levels. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Next Generation MCAS scores are designated by grade level expectations. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The 5-year plus graduation rate is comprised of students who graduate with a regular high school diploma within five years, in addition to the students who were identified as still enrolled at the school. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. As reported in the Student Information Management System (SIMS) as of October 1, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. As reported in the [Massachusetts Charter School Waitlist Initial Report for 2019-2020](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/enrollment/fy2020/waitlist.html) from March 15, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The board of trustees of PCSS-II also oversees the flagship charter school, PCSS, which is located in Everett. A network of charter schools exists when a single board of trustees oversees multiple charter schools. Each charter school within a network operates under a separate charter. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. As reported on the FY20 March Initial Waitlist report, 1,779 students from the towns of Danvers, Lynn, Peabody, Salem, and Saugus-PCSS-II’s chartered region-are seeking admission to KIPP Academy Lynn Charter School. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The network leadership team is comprised of the chief executive officer, the chief operational officer, the chief academic officer, and the chief development officer. The role of the network leadership team is to support the educational and operational programming of both charter schools. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For K-6 students who live in the district in which the charter school is located and live more than two miles from the school that they attend, the school district of residence is required to provide transportation. G.L. c. 71, § 68; and G.L. c. 71, § 89(cc). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The comparison index provides a comparison figure derived from data of students who reside within the charter school’s sending district(s). The comparison index is a statistically calculated value designed to produce a fairer and more realistic comparison measure that takes into account the charter school’s size and the actual prevalence of student subgroups within only those grades offered by the charter school. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. PCSS II temporarily located outside of its charter region during the first year of operation, 2013-2014 school year. The school consulted with the Department as it was preparing to open regarding its facility challenges in Saugus, and was granted a charter amendment to permit a temporary location in Everett for one year. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Pursuant to 603 CMR 1.04(4)(b), the award of proven provider status by the Commissioner to an existing board of trustees must include successful student academic performance over a three-year period. This is measured by using proficiency/achievement levels and growth measures on the state assessment test or equivalent assessments for English language arts and mathematics in comparable grades for all students and for one or more targeted subgroups. The Department compares the school’s student performance data to statewide averages and to relevant district averages for the grades served by the charter school. In addition to demonstrating successful academic student performance, the Department assesses the organizational and financial viability of a school and the school's performance on various indicators such as attrition, attendance, retention, and discipline rates. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. As reported in the Student Information Management System (SIMS) as of October 1, 2019. VPCS is in its second year of implementing a four-year growth plan to increase enrollment from 324 to 432. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. As reported in the [Massachusetts Charter School Waitlist Initial Report for 2019-2020](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/enrollment/fy2020/waitlist.html) from March 15, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. In response to Department feedback regarding the number of seats available for charter award, the school decreased its original request from 363 seats to 334 seats. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See footnote 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)