*****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:** | February 21, 2024 |
| **Subject:** | Charter Schools – Voluntary Return of Charter for City on a Hill Charter Public School and Amendment Request Regarding Grade Span |

On February 13, 2024, the board of trustees of City on a Hill Charter Public School (CoaH) voted to voluntarily return its charter, effective July 1, 2025. As the basis for its decision, the school’s board of trustees cited decreased enrollment demand and the school’s lack of progress towards meeting probationary conditions imposed on the school’s charter by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) as part of the renewal of the school’s charter in [2020](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2020/2020-02/item4.docx). The school is committed to continuing operations through the end of the current 2023-2024 school year for all students attending grades 9-12.

The school also intends to operate for the final year of its charter term, the 2024-2025 school year, with a modified grade span for students who wish to complete a junior or senior year at CoaH. The board of trustees has submitted an amendment request to limit its grades to 11 and 12 for 2024-2025, its last year of operation. Pursuant to the Charter School Regulations, 603 CMR 1.10(1), the Board must approve changes to the grades specified in the school’s charter.

I recommend that the Board vote on February 27, 2024, to accept the voluntary return of the charter granted to CoaH effective July 1, 2025. I also recommend that the Board vote to approve the school’s request to serve only grades 11 and 12 during the 2024-2025 school year. The school will remain on probation with conditions until the effective date for return of its charter. This memorandum summarizes the basis for my recommendations.

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| **City on a Hill Charter Public School** | | | |
| **Type of Charter** | Commonwealth | **Location** | Boston |
| **Regional or Non-Regional** | Non-Regional | **Districts in Region** | N/A |
| **Year Opened** | 1995 | **Year(s) Renewed** | 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015,  2020 |
| **Maximum Enrollment** | 350 | **Current Enrollment** | 199[[1]](#footnote-2) |
| **Chartered Grade Span** | 9-12 | **Current Grade Span** | 9-12 |
| **Students on Waitlist** | 0[[2]](#footnote-3) | **Current Age of School** | 29 |
| **Mission Statement:**  City on a Hill graduates resourceful, responsible, and respectful democratic citizens prepared for college and to advance community, culture, and commerce, in order to compete in the 21st century. We do so by emphasizing:  Academic Achievement: We maintain high academic standards and ensure results. We acknowledge our students’ competition and seek to find additional resources to prepare our students to compete.  Citizenship: We maintain standards of civility, promote our students’ civic engagement and participation, and link our school to the best of Boston.  Teacher Leadership: Teachers take responsibility for the performance of students and of our school. Teachers drive decision-making in doing, building, and growing City on a Hill. Teachers are reflective practitioners and managers. Teachers contribute to urban public school reform in our city, state, and nation.  Public Accountability: City on a Hill shows the tax-payer results, invites the public in to ensure that we are delivering on our promise to educate our students, and engages parents and guardians as key school stakeholders. | | | |

**School History**

CoaH received its charter in 1994 to serve 250 students in grades 9 through 12. The school opened in 1995, serving 60 students in grades 9 and 10. The school added one grade each year, reaching its full grade span during the 1997-1998 school year. In February 2013, the Board granted two additional charters to the board of CoaH. City on a Hill Charter Public School Dudley Square (CoaH Dudley Square) opened in 2013 in Boston. City on a Hill Charter Public School New Bedford (CoaH New Bedford) opened in 2014 in New Bedford. The original school changed its name to be CoaH Circuit Street. Each school’s maximum enrollment was 280 students in grades 9 through 12.

In January 2019, the Board renewed the charter of CoaH New Bedford and placed the school on probation noting concerns regarding faithfulness to its charter and concerns regarding academic performance. On November 25, 2019, the board of trustees voted to return the charter for CoaH New Bedford, effective June 30, 2020. The board of trustees stated that CoaH New Bedford had been unable to attract enrollment sufficient to maintain financial viability and that the school had not made progress toward meeting its probationary conditions.

In February 2020, the Board renewed CoaH’s charter and placed the school on probation with eight conditions related to academic performance, enrollment, governance, and finance. The Board also approved an amendment to consolidate CoaH Circuit Street and CoaH Dudley Square, both located in Boston, into one school, CoaH.[[3]](#footnote-4) The Department monitored the school’s progress towards conditions and visited the school during the 2022-23 school year.

Amendment Request

The board of trustees of CoaH submitted a request to remove ninth and tenth grade, effective for the 2024-25 school year. The school’s board of trustees is seeking an amendment to serve only grades 11 and 12 for its final year of operation to enable students who wish to complete a junior or a senior year at CoaH to do so.

I considered several key facts in recommending approval of this amendment request. First, the school’s current leadership will remain at the school through the closure, and they have experience operating an upper school program for grades 11 and 12 at CoaH. Second, as evidenced by the school’s FY23 annual audit and End of Year Financial Report, CoaH seems to be financially stable. The school developed multiple enrollment and budgetary scenarios for its final year of operation, all of which will support key student programs during its final year of operation. These include college and career preparatory academics, opportunities for dual enrollment courses at Roxbury Community College, college preparation and guidance, and extracurricular activities. Third, the school plans to provide retention bonuses to current staff and for staff in FY25 to ensure educational continuity. The school’s proposed model for its final year of operation is enclosed.

Recommendation

The Department reviewed the amendment request in light of the school’s closure plans, taking into account the criteria outlined in 603 CMR 1.10 for amendment requests. The school’s request is reasonable and consistent with the charter school statute and regulations. I recommend that the Board grant CoaH’s request for the school to serve students only in grades 11 and 12 effective July 1, 2024. Additionally, I recommend that the Board accept the return of CoaH’s charter, effective June 30, 2025. A motion to accept the return of CoaH’s charter and to change the grades served for FY25 is attached for your consideration.

The Department will work with CoaH to facilitate an orderly closure by June 30, 2025. The school is working with other charter schools in Boston and Boston Public Schools to ensure students have information about enrollment options for the 2024-25 school year. The school provided information to families of rising tenth grade students to assist them in transitioning to new schools for the next school year.

If you have any questions regarding the amendment or require additional information regarding the school’s closure, please contact Alison Bagg, Director of the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign (781-338-3218); Regina Robinson, Deputy Commissioner (781-338-3104); or me.

Attachment: Correspondence from CoaH regarding voluntary return of charter and amendment request to change grade span

Motions for Board action

1. As reported in the Student Information Management System (SIMS) as of [October 1, 2023](https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=04370000&orgtypecode=5&). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. As reported in the [Massachusetts Charter School Waitlist Updated Report for 2023-202](https://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/enrollment/fy2024/updated-waitlist.html)4 as of October 1, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The Board reduced the school’s maximum enrollment to 400 students in grades 9 through 12, effective July 1, 2020. The Board further limited enrollment to 350 students until the school met the conditions imposed on its charter, including the conditions for academic success. The school has not met the conditions imposed on its charter. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)