*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley  *Commissioner* |  |
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# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:** | June 15, 2018 |
| **Subject:** | Charter Schools – Report and Recommendation on Probation for Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence |

I recommend that Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence (MLK) be removed from probation. I further recommend that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) extend the condition related to the school’s academic performance. While the school’s academic performance has improved once again, the school has been unable to sustain improvements in academic performance over its history and an extension is warranted to ensure sustained academic progress.

As summarized below, MLK has substantially met the conditions that the Board imposed as part of its probation. The conditions required MLK to demonstrate significant and sustained academic progress by December 2017. As shown in the data charts below, MLK’s achievement and growth scores have improved since 2011, most notably in mathematics and science and technology/engineering. I commend the school for its progress. While MLK has improved its academic performance on every subject covered by state assessments, its results on English language arts lag behind those of mathematics and science. For that reason, I recommend extending the condition requiring sustained academic improvement.

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| ***Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence*** | | | |
| **Type of Charter**  (Commonwealth or Horace Mann) | Commonwealth | **Location** | Springfield |
| **Regional or Non-Regional** | Non-Regional | **Districts in Region**  (if applicable) | N/A |
| **Year Opened** | 2006 | **Year(s) Renewed**  (if applicable) | 2011, 2016 |
| **Maximum Enrollment** | 360 | **Current Enrollment** | 363[[1]](#footnote-1) |
| **Chartered Grade Span** | K-5 | **Current Grade Span** | K-5 |
| **Students on Waitlist** | 186 | **Current Age of School** | 12 years |
| **Mission Statement**  Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence prepares kindergarten through 5th grade students of Springfield for academic success and engaged citizenship through insistence on rigorous, challenging work. The school incorporates Dr. King’s commitment to the highest standards in scholarship, civic participation and the ideal of the beloved community. | | | |

Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence opened in 2006 and is currently in its twelfth year of operation. In January 2011 the Board renewed the school’s charter, placed the school on probation, and imposed three conditions on the school’s charter related to program delivery and academic performance. In January 2013, the Board determined that MLK had “sufficiently met conditions related to academic growth, establishing a fully documented curriculum, and evaluating and staffing its leadership structure to remove MLK from probation.” The Board imposed additional conditions requiring the school to demonstrate significant and sustained academic improvement by December 2014.

In January 2015, the Board again placed the school on probation following another decline in student achievement and imposed additional conditions related to sustained academic improvement. The Board renewed the school’s charter in 2016 and placed the school on probation because, while the school had met the three conditions imposed in January 2015, the school’s performance had not met state standards. The Board imposed four conditions on the school’s charter. A report on the school’s progress in meeting these conditions follows.

The conditions required MLK to demonstrate significant and sustained academic progress by December 2017. As summarized below, MLK has substantially met the conditions imposed by the Board.

**Progress Toward Meeting Conditions**

**Condition 1:** Until further notice, Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence must submit to the Department, at [charterschools@doe.mass.edu](mailto:charterschools@doe.mass.edu), board meeting agendas, materials, and minutes prior to each board meeting at the same time that these items are sent to the school's board members. Additionally, if board materials do not already include this information, the school must also submit monthly financial statements.

**Status: Met**

MLK has submitted board packages as directed by the condition. Board packages contain board committee minutes, reports on academic data, financial updates and projections, budget documents, policy documents, and compliance documents.

**Condition 2:** The school must maintain the established escrow account to pay for any potential closing, legal, and audit expenses associated with closure, should that occur.

**Status: Met**

The school opened an account at the Berkshire Bank by March 25, 2015. The account currently holds approximately $17,500 set aside for potential closing costs, should that occur. During the site visit on March 27, 2018, MLK’s board reported that they continue to maintain this account.

**Condition 3:** By December 31, 2016, the school must demonstrate significant and sustained academic improvement in mathematics, English language arts, and science. Should the school fail to do so, the Commissioner and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will consider revoking the school’s charter based on failure to meet this condition, rather than wait to see improvement by December 31, 2017.

**Status: Met**

In 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015, MLK’s MCAS scores placed the school in Level 3. The school’s percentile, when compared to other elementary schools statewide, improved in 2015 and 2016. In 2012, MLK was in the 12th percentile; in 2013, the 11th percentile; and in 2014, the 9th percentile. In 2015, the school was in the 16th percentile. In 2016, the school was in the 33rd percentile. In 2016, MLK’s PARCC and MCAS scores placed the school in Level 1.

In 2016, MLK administered the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) assessments in grades 3 through 5. In 2016, the school had a cumulative Progress and Performance Index (PPI) of 88 for all students and 86 for the high-needs subgroup. In 2016, the school met gap-narrowing targets for both all students and the high-needs subgroup. PARCC scores are designated by Levels, with Levels 4 and 5 meeting and exceeding expectations respectively. In 2016, 42 percent of MLK students scored in Level 4 and 5 on the PARCC assessment for English language arts (ELA). In mathematics, 60 percent scored in Level 4 and 5. Forty percent of grade 5 students scored proficient and advanced on the MCAS assessment for science and technology/engineering, below the state average of 47 percent. The school’s SGP for all students in 2016 was 64.0 in ELA, above target growth, and 76.0 in mathematics, above target growth.

Below, please see MLK’s Composite Performance Index results for the ELA, mathematics, and science from 2008 until 2016. In each subject area, MLK has demonstrated improvements, some of which are significant, from 2014 to 2016.

**Condition 4:** By December 31, 2017, the school must demonstrate continued significant and sustained academic improvement in mathematics, English language arts, and science. Should the school fail to do so, the Commissioner and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will consider revoking the school’s charter based on failure to meet this condition.

**Status: Met**

The school’s academic results continued to show significant and sustained improvement in 2017.

In 2017, the Next-Generation MCAS was administered statewide for the first time. As such, a majority of schools did not receive Accountability Levels. In 2017, MLK administered the Next-Generation MCAS in ELA and mathematics. The school also administered the legacy MCAS science and technology/engineering assessment for grade 5.

In grades 3 through 5, 33 percent of students met or exceed expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment in ELA, below the statewide average of 49 percent but above Springfield Public Schools (SPS), the school’s sending district, at 26 percent. In mathematics in grades 3 through 5, 48 percent of students met or exceeded expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment, equal to the statewide average and double SPS at 23 percent. In grade 5, 42 percent of students received proficient or advanced on the MCAS for science and technology/engineering, below the statewide average of 46 percent, but above the SPS average of 30 percent.

In 2017, student growth percentiles were 48.5 for ELA and 59.5 in mathematics.

**Additional Evidence**

On March 27, 2018, the Department conducted a site visit at MLK. The full site visit report is attached to this memorandum. Below, are the findings in the areas of faithfulness to charter, academic success, and organizational viability.

Faithfulness to Charter

* In Year 12, all stakeholders at MLK share a common and consistent understanding of the school’s mission to provide students with rigorous academics, character development, and Dr. King’s “beloved community.” The school has systems and structures to support its mission and all of its related key design elements; the school continues to work toward fully realizing its mission to provide a rigorous, challenging academic program.
* Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence has an approved recruitment and retention plan. Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence has lower attrition rates for all students and all student subgroups than at comparison schools. Additionally, the school’s stability rate is higher than the median of comparison schools and has remained above the median for all subgroups. Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence has consistently enrolled populations of all subgroups of students at greater rates than have comparison schools.

Academic Program Success

* The school’s ELA and math curricula are aligned to state curriculum frameworks; they are aligned horizontally across classrooms and vertically between grades; they are regularly reviewed and revised. The school does not have fully aligned science and English Language Development (ELD) curricula. The school is working to ensure that the existing curricula support all students, including diverse learners.
* The school demonstrates a common understanding of high-quality instruction. The majority of the classrooms reflected high expectations for students. Almost all observed classrooms reflected high levels of student engagement and were conducive to learning.
* The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to improve student outcomes and to evaluate the effectiveness of its programs.
* The school has systems and structures in place to meet the academic needs of all students, including, but not limited to, students with disabilities and English learners.
* The school has a safe and respectful environment and addresses the physical, social, emotional, and health needs of its students.

Organizational Viability

* The school has a leadership team to implement its mission, to define clear roles and responsibilities, and to develop a shared decision-making model.
* The school has consistent structures for collaboration, professional development, and supervision. Instructional leadership, however, has been inconsistent throughout the school’s existence. During the previous charter term, the school employed three different individuals as the principal. Following the departure of the most recent principal in June 2017, the school employed a part time director of teaching who assisted the executive director in fulfilling the principal role. The school plans to hire a new principal for the next school year (2018-2019). While the executive director had remained the same since the school’s founding, the school has also recently hired a new executive director.
* The board of trustees of MLK provides appropriate governance for the school.

**Recommendation**

Given this evidence, further detailed in the attached Site Visit Report, I recommend that the Board remove the school from probation. I further recommend that the Board keep the condition that follows in place, extending the timeline for the school to demonstrate sustained academic success.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence must demonstrate that it is an academic success by December 31, 2019, by demonstrating significant and sustained academic improvement in English language arts and by maintaining sustained academic success in mathematics.

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If you have any questions regarding this recommendation or require additional information, please contact Alison Bagg, Director of the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign (781-338-3218); Cliff Chuang, Senior Associate Commissioner (781-338-3222); or me.

Attachments: Year 12 Site Visit Report

Motion

1. According to the October 1, 2017, SIMS data, MLK is over-enrolled by 3 students, in violation of the school’s charter terms. Charter schools do not receive tuition for over-enrolled students. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)