As we begin another new school year, we would like to thank all of you for the work you do each day to provide students in Massachusetts with high quality educational options. The 2014-2015 school year begins with a total of 80 Massachusetts charter schools serving almost 38,000 students (see the updated Charter School Fact Sheet). We welcome the three new charter schools that opened their doors for the first time this fall: Argosy Collegiate Charter School in Fall River, City on a Hill Charter Public School New Bedford, and Phoenix Academy Public Charter High School Springfield.

This year, the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign is focused on several key priorities related to Department’s charter school authorization role, continuing the work from the last two few years:

- **Priority 1: Execute new oversight and support processes with high levels of timeliness, fidelity, and quality.** This year, we are not implementing any major updates to any of our standard oversight and support processes. We were encouraged by feedback regarding our revised processes last year, but aim to further refine and strengthen our work.
- **Priority 2: Robustly support and oversee charter schools in meeting Charter School Performance Criteria #2: Access and Equity.** We will continue our focus on access and equity, highlighted by a new collaboration with the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association, Building Capacity to Serve All Students – Including Students with High Needs.

Additionally, we are focused on encouraging sharing between district and charter public schools.

- **Priority 3: Promote the sustainable use of redesigned school models to increase the supply of high quality seats in Boston and Gateway Cities.** This work will feature the dissemination work of many charter schools, including three exciting new grant-funded projects in Boston, Salem and Lawrence, continued support of school models and practices (such as expanded learning time) that are prominent in the charter sector, exploration of additional opportunities for collaboration between district and charter public schools, and our next application to the U.S. Department of Education for federal Charter Schools Program grant funds.
This newsletter contains a number of important items with multiple links to new or updated information, and though lengthy, we encourage you to review it carefully, pass on the information to others as appropriate, and act where requested.

If you haven’t already, please take some time to review the [Commissioner’s Back-To-School message](#). We encourage you to keep abreast of key updates from the Department by reading the [Commissioner’s Weekly Message](#) each Friday. We will also continue to send out periodic email messages that require timely notice/action for charter schools to our various listservs (leaders, business managers, special education directors, and board chairs; be sure to update [Directory Administration](#)). And this year, we plan to provide key updates in quarterly newsletters such as this one in December, March, and June. Best wishes for a great 2014-2015.

**IMPORTANT DATES**

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<th>ITEM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/7/14 and 10/9/14</td>
<td>Webinars on 28.10 Technical Advisory</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/31/14</td>
<td><a href="#">Expulsion Policy Revision Due</a></td>
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<td>11/1/14</td>
<td>FY14 Audit Due</td>
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<td>11/5/14</td>
<td>Orientation for New Charter School Administrators and Board Members</td>
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<td>11/3/14, 1/12/15, 4/6/15</td>
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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**Orientation for New Charter School Administrators and Board Members**

*Wednesday, November 5, 2014: Royal Plaza Hotel & Trade Center, Marlborough, MA*

This full-day orientation is intended for any members of a school’s administrative team who are new to their position or any new board members. In particular, information will be provided for new executive directors, principals, special education and ELL directors, and business managers. Additionally, any current administrator who wants a refresher on basic charter school information is welcome to attend. Fundamental information will be presented about a variety of topics including charter school finance, governance, accountability, special education and English language learners. Department staff will be available for "office hours" throughout the day to answer your school-specific questions. Please [register](#) by October 30th.

**Fall 2014 Charter Leader Meeting**

*Save-the-Date: Friday, November 14, 2014: MCPSA, Hudson, MA*

This session will provide high level updates to charter school leaders regarding key Department initiatives for 2014-2015, and will be scheduled for the afternoon, following the MCPSA delegate assembly scheduled for the morning. More information and registration details will be forthcoming.
POLICY UPDATES

Ed Evaluation FAQ Update
The office has received a number of questions about charter schools and the educator evaluation system. The Department’s Educator Evaluation Team has launched an Educator Evaluation’s FAQ. It can be found at: http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/faq.html?section=1. The FAQ has the answers that charters seek! For easy access, we have reproduced these two key questions and answers:

2. Which types of schools are covered under the new regulations?

All district schools and Horace Mann charter schools are subject to the new educator evaluation regulations. Educators serving in programs or schools operated by Educational Collaboratives are also covered by the regulations. Commonwealth Charter Schools are not covered by the new regulations (see question 3 for more on RTTT Commonwealth charter schools).

3. Are RTTT Commonwealth charters required to continue implementing education evaluation systems consistent with the regulations after their participation in RTTT ends?

No. In general, the educator evaluation regulations do not apply to Commonwealth charter schools. Charter schools that opted to participate in RTTT agreed to implement educator evaluation systems consistent with the regulations for the duration of their participation in the grant program. If a RTTT Commonwealth charter sought and was approved for a no-cost extension for the 2014-15 school year, the charter school is required to continue to adhere to the educator evaluation regulations. However, if a Commonwealth charter school's participation in RTTT has ended, the school may use an evaluation system of its choosing, which may or may not include elements of the regulatory framework such as the five-step cycle and district-determined measures.

Investigations
As you all know, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) at its March 25th meeting, voted to adopt amendments to 603 CMR 1.00, the regulations for charter schools. In section 1.08: Reporting Requirements and Ongoing Review, the amended regulations require that “Investigations: Every charter school shall notify the Department in writing of all significant matters within two business days. Significant matters include, but are not limited to, all communications made or received by or on behalf of the school with any government audit, investigative, or law enforcement agency” 603 CMR 1.08(10).

Enrollment Policy
In light of the changes in the charter school regulations, the Department is in the process of finalizing a new technical advisory on enrollment policies, along with a FAQ, and new checklist. This material should be available in early October 2014. If you have questions about this, please contact Ruth Hersh at 781-338-3211 or rhersh@doe.mass.edu.

Expulsion Policy
The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved the new Student Discipline Regulations, 603 CMR 53 on April 28, 2014 in response to the new Massachusetts student discipline law, An Act Relative to Student Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School (Act). The new law and regulations went into effect July 1, 2014, and charter schools must comply with the changes in this law. If you have questions about the ramifications of the law for your school, we encourage you to contact your legal counsel.
In order to assist districts and charter schools to effectively implement the statute and regulations, the Department has developed and posted multiple resources on our website for use by schools in updating their policies as needed. These recommended resources include the **Highlights of Massachusetts Student Discipline Statutes and Regulations** and the Superintendent’s 10 point [checklist](#) for implementation of the student discipline law.

Please review all existing student discipline policies and update all written materials issued by your school to reflect the new requirements. This may include, but is not limited to, the school website, student and family handbook, code of conduct, staff handbook, and enrollment materials to ensure that they reflect the changes in the law with respect to student discipline policies. The Department asks that you make the appropriate revisions and clearly document your board of trustees’ approval of the change to your expulsion policy **no later than October 31, 2014**. The Department will confirm compliance with this requirement upon the next formal review of your school’s expulsion policy or upon request. If you have any questions regarding the updating of school policies and materials, please contact Jane Haltiwanger at jhaltiwanger@doe.mass.edu or 781-338-3229.

### DISSEMINATION GRANT AWARDS

**Charter School Dissemination Grant**

This year, the Department held a Charter School Dissemination Grant competition as part of the federal Charter School Program Grant (CSP). The grant is designed to support successful charter schools in disseminating their best practices to other public schools. Although the Department has administered this sub grant in the past, the amounts awarded have been relatively small ($20,000-$50,000) and the results of the projects have been variable. For the most recent competition in FY14, the Department offered much larger awards ($400,000-$600,000), with the hopes that larger awards would encourage larger-scale projects designed to have a significant impact on student achievement beyond the charter school. Twenty-one charter schools were eligible to apply for the funding and seven submitted full proposals. All of the applicants demonstrated strategic thinking in identifying strengths of their own school and building partnerships with district schools in need of these particular innovative practices. In general, the proposals that were recommended for funding had the following characteristics: strong deliberately cultivated partnerships, thoughtful reflection on the applicant school’s best practices and the needs in the surrounding communities, strategic design for knowledge transfer so that the impact of the project would reach beyond the funding period, and a strong capacity to carry out the project.

Congratulations to the 3 recipients of the grant! The projects that were awarded funding are outlined below:

**Conservatory Lab Charter School**
- Will partner with 3 Boston schools to disseminate early literacy integrated units and early literacy teaching strategies.

**Neighborhood House Charter School**:
- Proposes to partner with 4 schools in Lawrence and Boston to provide tailored professional development and coaching in early literacy and the use of data. (Note: the start of this grant project is contingent on a U.S. Department of Education waiver, which we hope will be secured later this fall).

**Salem Academy Charter School**:
- Will partner with Salem Public School district to provide professional development to Salem Public Schools school leaders on standards-based instruction.
ACCOUNTABILITY

Document Updates
Since the spring, many accountability documents have been revised. The Charter School Performance Criteria was slightly revised in May 2014, it can be found at http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=criteria. Subsequently, the Renewal Inspection Protocol was revised and can be found here: http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=renew. The Department issued new Guidelines for Writing Accountability Plans. Those guidelines can be found here: http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=guidelines. Because of the revision to the Charter School Performance Criteria, and after a year of implementation, we are currently revising the Site Visit Protocol. As with the revision of the Criteria themselves, we welcome feedback on drafts. By mid-September, the revised Site Visit Protocol will also be posted for review and feedback at http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=visit.

Volunteer Site Visitors
The Department seeks volunteers with expertise in classroom instruction, school leadership, and/or school governance to serve as external site visitors on charter school accountability visits. If you are interested in applying to be a site visitor, please fill out a brief online survey at the following link: http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/1694009/Site-Visit-Volunteer-Interest-Form. Please see http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=visit for a FAQ related to participating as a site visitor.

ACCESS AND EQUITY

603 CMR 28.10 Guidance
The Technical Assistance Advisory SPED 2014-5: Charter School Responsibilities for Students with Disabilities Who May Need an Out-of-District Program - 603 CMR 28.10(6) has now been posted. This advisory is designed to provide guidance about a complex area that has been the subject of many questions over the past several years. Over the past year, several offices within the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education worked intensively, with valuable feedback and input from the Charter School Access and Equity Working Group and many others, to develop this guidance document. We will be hosting two webinars in October (registration can be found here) and providing a companion Q&A based on additional feedback later this fall. If you have any questions regarding this advisory, please contact Ellie Rounds, erounds@doe.mass.edu.

Special Education Building Capacity project
The department recently awarded a contract to the Massachusetts Association of Charter Public Schools to help all charter schools create model program development guidelines and resources, including professional development, focused on building schools’ capacity to establish new programs for low incidence/high needs students with moderate to severe disabilities, as well as how to better support and serve students with behavioral needs. They will be partnering with national experts to offering training and coaching to all Horace Mann and Commonwealth Charter schools to boost their capacity to serve all students.

Notices of Rights to Access and Equity of Educational Services
Department model notices regarding the rights of students with disabilities and English language learners to receive accommodations and support services at charter schools, as required by recent changes to the charter school regulations (603 CMR 1.05(4)), have been posted to the charter school office website here: http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/sped/default.html. We are in the process to get both documents translated and those will be made available on the Department’s website once completed.

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Low Incident Special Interest Group
OELAAA is joining with the Low Incidence Special Interest Group (SIG) in an effort to reach out to low incidence school districts and charter schools to collaborate and also to provide information and support. The purpose of these meetings is to:

- communicate ESE/OELAAA priorities and strategies
- gain feedback regarding ESE/OELAAA priorities and strategies
- provide technical assistance on various topics related to the implementation of the ELE Program
- respond to the questions and concerns school administrators may have regarding the education of ELLs

Meetings will be held on Mondays from 9:00 am to 11:00 am in Shrewsbury. Pre-registration is required for each meeting. The meeting dates for the 2014-15 school year:
- November 3, 2014
- January 12, 2015
- April 6, 2015

Your input is valuable to better plan the meetings and address the needs of the low incidence charter schools. Please complete this survey to help us better understand what you would like to cover during these meetings.

Recruitment and Retention Plans
The Access and Equity team will be closely reviewing recruitment and retention plans this year, and will handle feedback and follow-up in partnership with the Accountability team’s review of annual reports. The Department conducted two webinars over the summer to answer questions about development of recruitment and retention plans, and that presentation is available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=7601. Additionally, schools can now access the compendium of recruitment strategies in planning for recruitment efforts for the future.

Mystery Parent Process
As you are already aware, the exceptional results brought forth by the state’s charter school operators are frequently questioned by critics who allege that charter schools routinely discourage students with high levels of needs from applying to the school. The Department has an affirmative duty to ensure that such practices do not occur in Massachusetts charter schools. In order to ensure that all students enjoy equitable access to charter school programs statewide, the Department will continue to implement “Mystery Parent”. Inspired by retail operations that use a “mystery shopper” to test operations at individual stores, the Department will be initiating interactions with charter schools statewide in a series of random and unannounced contacts with schools to verify that students with high levels of need are provided with equal and unfettered access to each school’s application and enrollment process. In future years, it is likely that mystery parent results will be one source of the evidence used to inform the Department’s assessment of the Charter School Performance Criteria #2: Access and Equity. If you have questions about this process, please feel free contact Ellie Rounds at erounds@doe.mass.edu or 781-338-3212.

RETELL
The Access and Equity team continues to work closely with the Office of English Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement (OELAAA) on the implementation of the Rethinking Equity in Teaching English Language Learners (RETELL) initiative in the charter community. This is the final year for any charter schools in Cohort 1 for SEI teacher and administrator endorsement courses; thus the last opportunity to get SEI endorsement at no cost. Registration can be found here. Please contact Ellie Rounds at erounds@doe.mass.edu or 781-338-3212 if you have questions regarding the RETELL initiative.

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GOVERNANCE

Guidance for Charter School Board Members
As public agents authorized by the state, the members of the board of trustees of a charter school are responsible for governing the school and hold the charter for the school. Upon beginning service on a board and subsequent years, each trustee must meet a number of legal requirements set forth by the Commonwealth. These requirements are clearly outlined in guidance information available at: http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/governance/?section=trustees.

Board of Trustees Membership
It is important to ensure that the membership of your board of trustees is always updated with the Department. When a charter school’s board of trustees votes to accept new members, this is considered a charter amendment and must be approved by the Commissioner prior to any action by the new member, including counting towards a quorum or voting. Please find information regarding this process available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/governance/?section=trustees. Please note that schools are also required to notify the Department when members leave the school’s board of trustees, whether it is through a resignation, the expiration of a term, or a removal.

Charter Amendments - Board and Commissioner Approvals
When a school receives its original charter and any subsequent renewals of that charter from the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board), the state approves the charter school’s broad academic and organizational plans for the next five years. Any substantive changes to those plans require the approval of the Commissioner and/or Board for an amendment to the school’s charter before the changes are implemented. The Amendment Guidelines, the Amendment Request Template, and Cover Sheet can be found on our website: http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/governance/.

The Department will continue to review charter amendments subject to Commissioner approval in a monthly batch cycle. We will do our best to ensure that review and approval, as appropriate, of each amendment request submitted by the end of each month are communicated back to the school no later than the close of the following month. This includes the approval of new members to boards of trustees, so please plan accordingly.

FINANCE AND DATA

Superintendent’s Checklist
Please be sure you adhere to all relevant reporting deadlines and requirement outlined in the 2014-2015 Superintendent Checklist posted at: http://www.doe.mass.edu/commissioner/checklist.html.

FY15 Waitlist Data
Thank you for your cooperation with the collections of charter school waitlist data. We will collect updated waitlist data as of October 1 to coincide with the SIMS submission, and will be due November 7th. We continue to explore options for automating its collection. We will update you regarding the details once they are finalized, but going forward, please continue to be sure that you collect and maintain in an electronic format the following six data elements below for each student who applies to your school.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Middle Name</th>
<th>Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY)</th>
<th>Town Code</th>
<th>Grade Applied For</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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FY14 Audit and Charter School End of Year Financial Report (CSEOYFR) and Surplus Calculation
FY2014 independent financial audits are due to ESE on November 1, 2014. In addition, charter schools are required to electronically file the FY2014 Charter School End of Year Financial Report (14CSEOYFR) which includes the Surplus Calculation on or before **November 26, 2014**. The 14CSEOYFR template has been posted to the portal, as well as a memo with more information ([http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=12453](http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=12453)). Please note that the Audit Guide was updated with most of the changes taking place for FY15 with the exception of schools that participate in the Charter School Program grant. For more information see the Audit Guide at: [http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/finance/auditing/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/finance/auditing/). The Fiscal Policies and Procedures Guide is being updated as well. Updated information related to the submission of audits and 14CSEOYFR files will be a topic for the charter leader meetings this fall and will be sent under separate cover. Please contact Joanna Laghetto at [jlaghetto@doe.mass.edu](mailto:jlaghetto@doe.mass.edu) or 781-338-3221 with questions.

Changing Bank Account for Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), and Change of Address or Name
If you are planning to change bank accounts, in order to ensure that tuition and grant funds are deposited in a timely manner, please make sure a new Electronic Funds Transfer form is completed and sent to Victoria Munoz in the Grants Management Office. This form can be found at [https://massfinance.state.ma.us/VendorWeb/efRegisterfrm.asp](https://massfinance.state.ma.us/VendorWeb/efRegisterfrm.asp). Please be sure to include a voided check and allow sufficient time for the changes to be made as it can take several weeks to process. If your school has moved recently, a new W-9 form ([http://www.mass.gov/osc/docs/forms/vendorcustomer/newmass-w9.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/osc/docs/forms/vendorcustomer/newmass-w9.pdf)) must be completed and sent to Ms. Munoz along with a letter on letterhead stating the old and new address. If an amendment has been approved for a school name change, please contact Joanna Laghetto ([jlaghetto@doe.mass.edu](mailto:jlaghetto@doe.mass.edu)) for any necessary forms needed by the business office.

NEW SCHOOLS AND EXPANSIONS

Three New Charter Schools
This year, the state’s charter school sector continues to grow with three new charter schools opening this year: Phoenix Academy Public Charter High School, Springfield; City on a Hill Charter Public School New Bedford; and Argosy Collegiate Charter School, Fall River. The Springfield Preparatory Charter School is planned to open in fall 2015.

New Charter School Application Review Process
Seven charter prospectuses were submitted on July 24, 2014. For a complete list of the proposed schools, and the school districts that have been included in each school's region, see the headline at [http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=11384](http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=11384). Each charter prospectus has undergone a thorough review process over the summer. We appreciate all of you who have participated as prospectus reviewers this year. All applicant groups will be notified by the Department in late September if their group has been invited by the Commissioner to submit a final application, including the determination of proven provider status if required. In addition, the Department will advance to the final application stage an eighth proposal to grow a charter school network in Boston under a new one-stage process for eligible, existing charter school boards of trustees. The board of trustees of the UP Academy Charter School of Boston and the UP Academy Charter School of Dorchester is seeking to open a third Horace Mann charter school in Boston as part of its existing network of schools. All final charter applications will be due on November 5, 2014.
Charter School Expansion Requests
Pursuant to the Charter School Regulations, 603 CMR 1.10(1), the Board must approve major changes in the material terms of a school's charter. This year, the Department received requests from seven existing Commonwealth charter schools that involve changes to the districts served, the grades served, and/or the maximum enrollment. The seven schools are Hampden Charter School of Science, Helen Y. Davis Leadership Academy Charter Public School, KIPP Academy Lynn Charter School, Mystic Valley Regional Charter School, Pioneer Charter School of Science, Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School, and Salem Academy Charter School. In addition to these seven requests, the Commissioner has granted a waiver of the administrative deadline for expansion requests to UP Academy Charter School of Boston as the board of trustees pursues approval from the Boston School Committee to submit a request an increase to maximum enrollment. If you wish to request a copy of any of the submitted amendment requests or if you have any questions, please contact charterschool@doe.mass.edu.

COMMUNICATIONS AND CONTACTS

Electronic Correspondence
We plan to continue to deliver official correspondence as much as possible via electronic means, emailing and scanning, as appropriate, school-specific approvals and documents. If you would like a hard copy mailed to you, please be sure to let us know on a case-by-case basis. Because we also collect many of our files through Security Portal dropboxes, please be sure to follow electronic file naming instructions included with each submission. In general, please be sure that your electronic files are named in a uniquely identifiable way, either including the school’s name, acronym, or LEA code along with identifying the date/year and report type. For example, Not unique: Annualreport.doc or Audit.pdf Unique: ABCS_annualreport2014.doc and ABCS_FY14Audit.pdf

Contact You: School and District Profiles and Directory Administration
The Department collects a variety of data from schools and districts through Directory Administration, some of which is published on the Department’s School or District Profiles page. Contact information, multiple directories, and a variety of reports from individual organizations can also be found here. Charter Schools appear as both a “District” and as an individual “School”. It is imperative that the information contained in your district, as well as your school profile, be accurate, especially at the start of the school year. If it is inaccurate, your school may be missing important Department communications. In particular, the email address for the individual identified as “charter school leader” and “charter school board chair” in Directory Administration should have received this message directly. If for some reason they did not, your school’s directory administrator(s), the individual(s) who are authorized to edit information about their school in Directory Administration, should update this information. See http://www.doe.mass.edu/InfoServices/data/diradmin/list.aspx to identify your school’s directory administrator(s).
**Staff Updates and Job Opportunity**

We are currently in the final stages of the search process for the Access and Equity Specialist, and will be able to announce the new appointment soon.

- **Ellie Rounds** has been officially appointed as the Access and Equity Coordinator for the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign. Previously, she worked in the Department as an Access and Equity Specialist. Prior to her work at the Department, Ellie worked for 12 years in charter schools in Boston as the special education administrator.

- The Department is now hiring for the position of **Contract Expanded Learning Time Program Specialist** within the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign. Please review the job description and share this opportunity with qualified individuals. Please contact Moira Connolly at mconnolly@doe.mass.edu or 781-338-3216 with any questions.

**Contact Us**

Contact information for Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign staff can be found at [http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/contact.html#](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/contact.html#). Future updates to this section will include new listings of charter schools by accountability liaison and contacts for particular topics. Please feel free to contact us at any time with your questions or concerns.