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WELCOME MESSAGE

We have all had a very busy fall, and are now gearing up for a very demanding winter. Once again, we wanted to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your ongoing dedication and commitment to improving public education for all children throughout Massachusetts. This newsletter provides you with important information and includes multiple links to new or updated information. Please review it carefully and pass on the information to others as appropriate.
Staff Updates
Melissa Gordon has been appointed as Access and Equity Specialist for the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign. Previously, she taught students with disabilities, (including students with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges), in both private and public school settings.

IMPORTANT DATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ITEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 9, 2015</td>
<td>FY16 estimated pre-enrollment report due for state budget (survey will be sent under separate cover).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 26, 2015</td>
<td>3 – 4:30 p.m. Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Charter School Committee Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2, 2015</td>
<td>Commonwealth charter school Feb. 15 tuition claim form due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 13, 2015</td>
<td>FY16 actual (binding) pre-enrollment due for superintendent’s memo.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

POLICY UPDATES

Regulatory Changes and Next Steps
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. The regulations are in effect, and all charter schools must comply with these changes. Last week we sent a memo to all school leaders about new requirements relating to charter amendments, complaints, investigations, bylaws, enrollment policies, expulsion policies¹, and accountability plans. Many of these changes will simply require a change in practice, while others may require formal amendments to the material terms of a school’s charter. The memo has also been posted: http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=15649. If you have questions about this, please contact Ruth Hersh at 781-338-3211 or rhersh@doe.mass.edu.

Enrollment Policy
In light of the changes in the charter school regulations, the Department has developed a new checklist to help you review and possibly revise and formally amend your enrollment policy. The checklist is posted at http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/governance/?section=enrollment. As you know, the amended regulations require schools to maintain waitlists only for the school year for which the students applied. However, the regulations also allow charter schools to use waitlists that were established prior to March 31, 2014 until those waitlists are exhausted. If your school has decided to amend its enrollment policy and refresh its waitlist on an annual basis without choosing to grandfather in existing waitlists, we strongly urge you to go through an appropriate local community process as soon as possible. We are in the final stages of finalizing a new technical advisory on enrollment policies, along with an FAQ. We understand that addressing some of the new provisions in the regulations might be anxiety producing. As always, we are happy to talk things through with you or answer any questions you might have. If you have questions or concerns, please contact Claire Smithney at 781-338-3213 or csmithney@doe.mass.edu.

Joint Urban District-Charter Convening
We are excited about the prospect of a first-of-its-kind joint convening of urban district and charter leaders, most likely toward the end of this school year. The goal of such a convening would be for colleagues to have the opportunity to collaborate on a challenge of mutual interest. A steering committee of district and charter leaders has begun planning. If you have ideas or are interested in contributing to the planning process, please feel free to contact Cliff Chuang at 781-

¹ The Board also 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). This statute and regulations are also in effect, and all charter schools must comply with these changes.
ACCOUNTABILITY

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](http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/1694009/Site-Visit-Volunteer-Interest-Form). Please see [http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=visit](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=visit) for a FAQ related to participating as a site visitor.

Accountability Liaisons – Please Call Us!
Each staff member on the Accountability and Access and Equity teams has an assigned cohort of charter schools. In addition to a staff list and area of specialty, we have posted the list of liaisons on our website: [http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/ContactLiaison.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/ContactLiaison.html). With the addition of a new staff member this month (see Staff Update) we have recently shifted cohorts. Please call your liaison if you have any questions about accountability or as an initial point of contact with the Department in general. We are here to assist you and answer your questions. Liaisons will also be reaching out to schools in the near future to introduce themselves if you have not previously worked together.

The 2014-2015 renewal cohort contains 19 charter schools. Please note that the Accountability Team is working hard to produce the Summaries of Reviews that summarize each school’s record of performance and provide it to school leaders for review. Given the size of the renewal cohort and the always compressed timeframe for decisions to be made no later than March 1, we appreciate your flexibility and understanding regarding the limited window of review time that we can provide for factual corrections prior to finalization. Please feel free to contact Alison Bagg at 781-338-3218 or abagg@doe.mass.edu or Cliff Chuang at 781-338-3222 or cchuang@doe.mass.edu directly if you have any questions or concerns.

Accountability Guide
We have updated the [Guide to Charter School Accountability](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=guide), posted at [http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=guide](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=guide). The purpose of the Accountability Guide is to provide schools and other interested parties with summary information on the accountability system that is unique to charter schools in Massachusetts. This may a good tool to share with new board members.

ACCESS AND EQUITY

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)](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/sped/default.html)), have been posted in multiple languages to: [http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/sped/default.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/sped/default.html).

Low Incident Special Interest Group
The Low Incidence Special Interest Group meeting is open to all schools who are members of MATSOL. MATSOL welcomes educators from charter schools to follow the Join/Renew link on their website, at [www.matsol.org](http://www.matsol.org), to become MATSOL members and register for the meetings.
GOVERNANCE

Board of Trustees Membership – New Electronic System Pilot
It is important to ensure that the membership of your board of trustees is always updated with the Department. Information regarding this process is available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/governance/?section=trustees. In the new year, we will begin piloting a new online system that will allow individual board members to file required forms and each school to submit requests and documentation directly through the system. Official communications, reminders, and approvals would be sent through this system directly to individual board members. If you are interested in helping to pilot this system, please contact James DiMaio at 781-338-3228 or jdimaio@doe.mass.edu.

FINANCE AND DATA

Commonwealth Charter Tuition Calculation Memo
The Charter School Tuition Calculation and Disbursement memo has been updated to reflect the new monthly tuition payments. It can be found at http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/finance/tuition/calculation.html.

Preliminary FY15 Commonwealth Charter School Tuition and Enrollment
The Department’s most recent calculation of preliminary FY15 charter school tuition and reimbursements has been posted at http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/finance/tuition/ fy15/preliminary.html. These amounts will be used by the Department of Revenue for the purpose of certifying the December 31, 2014 local aid distribution. Final FY15 tuition and reimbursements will be calculated in June 2015. All districts and charter schools are reminded that these tuition calculations are still estimates. For a summary of the tuition disbursement process, please go to the School Finance: Charter School web posting.

We are convening a working group to improve and revise the CSEOYFR. If you would like to part of this group, please contact Joanna Laghetto at 781-338-3221 or jlaghetto@doe.mass.edu.

Charter Analysis and Review Tool: CHART – MCAS
Under separate cover, you should have received information about how to access the new CHART – MCAS tool now available for review and feedback. CHART – MCAS has been primarily developed to provide school leaders with a transparent look at the comparative multi-year performance data used to determine whether a current charter school board of trustees qualifies for "Proven Provider" status pursuant to 603 CMR 1.04(4)(b). Other demographic data related to the proven provider status is already presented in the current CHART tool (to be renamed "CHART – Demographics", which will be updated in the coming weeks for your review/feedback with FY15 demographic data). Please continue to send any feedback on this iteration of CHART – MCAS to James DiMaio at jdimaio@doe.mass.edu.

FY14 Fiscal Dashboard
The fiscal dashboard will be updated soon to reflect the financial data received from charter school’s audits and CSEOYFR. The Unrestricted Days Cash indicator will also be revised to reflect monthly tuition payments. The preliminary updated dashboard will be ready in the beginning of January for feedback and comment and will be finalized in the beginning of February.
FY14 Commonwealth Charter School Excess Surplus Report
The FY14 Commonwealth Charter School Excess Surplus Report is now posted. Please be reminded that for surplus calculations for FY15 and subsequent years, a vote of the board of trustees of a charter school is required to designate funds to be held in reserve for the purchase or renovation of an academic facility pursuant to a capital plan. Capital plans must be submitted as part of the charter school’s annual report, and amounts transferred into reserve accounts for capital projects are reported as an adjustment in the surplus tuition calculation. In addition, compliance testing procedures and additional details for the surplus calculation are now included in the Charter School Audit Guide.

NEW SCHOOLS AND EXPANSIONS

New Charter School Application Review Process
Four charter final applications were submitted on November 14, 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=15609. Each charter application will undergo a thorough review process over the winter. We appreciate all of you who have participated as reviewers this year. All applicant groups will be notified by the Department in early February if their group has been recommended for charter award by the Commissioner. New charters are awarded by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education at their February 24, 2015 meeting.

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 Commonwealth charter schools and one Horace Mann charter school that involve changes to the districts served, the grades served, and/or the maximum enrollment. The eight 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, Salem Academy Charter School, and UP Academy Charter School of Boston. The Department anticipates decisions regarding each of these requests to occur in January and February. If you wish to request a copy of any of the submitted amendment requests or if you have any questions, please contact charterschools@doe.mass.edu.

COMMUNICATIONS AND CONTACTS

Security Portal Upgrade: MassEdu Gateway
The Department’s Security Portal has been upgraded to a new system called MassEdu Gateway. User logins and access to Department applications will remain the same as they were for the Security Portal. In addition, the MassEdu Gateway will provide personalized content for teachers and administrators, access to PBS Learning Media, and featured content for Edwin Analytics and Edwin Teaching and Learning. For an overview, visit http://www.mass.gov/edu/gateway/

Login: User names, passwords, and application access will not be affected. Your Security Portal login and password will remain the same.

Application List: As a result of the upgrade, the biggest difference to Security Portal users is that you will see the homepage below after you enter your user name and password. From this screen, click on the “Application List” link on the left hand side of the screen to see the same list of applications you see today.
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).

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#). Please feel free to contact us at any time with your questions or concerns.