

Request of Hampden Charter School of Science, Evidence Regarding Performance

Hampden Charter School of Science [Tab C]			
Type of Charter	Commonwealth	Location	Chicopee
Regional or Non-Regional?	Non-Regional	Districts in Region (if applicable)	Chicopee, Ludlow, Springfield, West Springfield
Year Opened	2009	Year(s) Renewed	2014
Maximum Enrollment	350	Current Enrollment	350
Students on Waitlist	402	Grade Span	6-12
Amendment Request: Increase enrollment from 350 to 560 (210) Implementation: 2015-2016		Current Age of School	5 years
		Proven Provider Status Required [Springfield]. ¹	
Mission Statement The mission of the HCSS is to provide a college-preparatory-focused education to the youth of every race and ethnic group in Chicopee, Ludlow, Springfield, and West Springfield in a safe, academically challenging, and caring educational environment. Our promise is to sustain small school size, provide extended math and science curriculum, individualized attention, college guidance, university outreach programs, and to encourage student-teacher-parent partnership. Our mission will empower our students with the support necessary to reach their highest intellectual, emotional, social and physical potentials, building on the inherent promise to aid students’ preparation for college.			

Request:

Hampden Charter School of Science (HCSS) seeks to increase its maximum enrollment by 210 seats over the next five years. The school proposes to initially increase enrollment by 90 students during the 2015-2016 school year in grades 6-8, eventually growing to enroll approximately 80 students per grade by 2019-2020 school year. The school will enroll new students at all grades as vacancies occur, which exceeds statutory "backfill" requirements. A copy of the school's request is attached.

The school reports that the increase in student enrollment will increase access to the educational program for families, expand curricular and extra-curricular options for students, maximize the effectiveness of the current staffing model, and increase the efficiency of costs related to transportation and facility. The school's landlord is currently renovating the school's facility to accommodate the increased enrollment, creating separate wings for the upper and lower grades.

¹ While Chicopee Public Schools have been identified as performing in the lowest 10 percent for the purpose of expansions this year, there are sufficient seats available in Chicopee under the 9 percent NSS cap to support the school's request. The proven provider requirement is triggered by the inclusion of Springfield in the school's charter region; Springfield is already above the 9 percent NSS cap.

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Overview of School's Performance:

Overall, the submitted amendment request, the school's 2014 renewal, and the Department's records indicate that the school's academic program is a success, that the school is a viable organization, and that it has been faithful to the terms of its charter. HCSS has high student performance, achieving Level 1 status in both 2013 and 2014, a school percentile of 49 and 64 respectively, and a PPI of 93 and 92 in the aggregate. The PPI of the school's high needs subgroup was 92 in 2013 and 92 in 2014. The school's 4-year graduation rate in 2013 for its first graduating class exceeded current state accountability targets for cohort graduation rates.

Overall, the school has made gains in the recruitment of students qualifying as low income, students with disabilities, and English language learners during its first charter term. Students living in Chicopee will continue to receive transportation from Chicopee Public Schools; the school will continue to provide transportation for residents of Ludlow, Springfield, and West Springfield.

As noted in its 2014 renewal, and evidenced by the fiscal dashboard, the school has maintained sound and stable financial conditions and demonstrated a consistent history of strong performance on key financial metrics. The school received unqualified audit opinions for all five years of its current charter. In four of the five years, the audits were free of instances of deficiency or noncompliance. Although there were findings of deficiency and noncompliance in FY2011, the school followed the corrective action plan to resolve the issues, and the next two audits in FY2012 and FY2013 were free of findings.

In February 2014, the school was renewed with conditions in the areas of governance. The school met these conditions, and the Board removed them in December 2014. In the Department's report to the Board in December, I indicated the establishment of effective governance practices by the school's board of trustees. The practices included the development of a strategic plan for the current charter term, implementation of formal structures at board meetings to support adherence to Open Meeting Law, the selection and implementation of an evaluation tool for the school leader, and the participation of board members in targeted trainings related to their positions as board members.

The Department solicited comment from the superintendents of Chicopee Public Schools, Ludlow Public Schools, Springfield Public Schools and West Springfield Public Schools. No comment was received. The Department received over thirty letters from the school community in support of the expansion, including students, parents, alumni, and school employees.