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Charter Application Review Process and Criteria for Review

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education conducts a thorough review of charter applications, working within the timelines created by the statute and regulations.

I. Charter Application Review Process

Background

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) received fourteen prospectuses on August 3, 2009. Based upon the results of the review of these twenty-page prospectuses by the Department's staff and external reviewers, eight applicants were invited to submit final applications. Final applications, limited to 50 pages of text and approximately 35 pages of attachments, were due on November 13, 2009. Seven of the final applicant groups submitted materials on time, one withdrew. During the final application review process, an additional group withdrew. By statute, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education must grant charters in February.

Objective of Process

The objective of the charter application review process is to award charters to applicants who show the greatest probability of creating public schools of the highest quality. The Department conducts a process with multiple phases that includes participation by internal and external reviewers, as well as opportunities for public comment. Prospectuses and final applications are reviewed against extensive criteria which is outlined in 603 CMR 1.05 and established by the Department through the application.

Prospectus and Final Application Panel Review

Each prospectus was reviewed by an average of seven individuals and each final application was reviewed by an average of eight individuals. The Department had the assistance of multiple reviewers for prospectuses and final applications, including school leaders and teachers, education consultants, representatives from non-profits, and members of the Department's staff. Teams of reviewers read the prospectuses and final charter applications thoroughly, using a rubric to guide their work. At the prospectus stage, Charter School Office staff incorporated the written review of the external reviewers into their discussion and evaluation of each prospectus. After reviewing the prospectuses, questions and concerns the review team raised were communicated in writing to all applicants and invitations were issued to those chosen to move into the final application stage. In the final application stage, review panels discuss each application and help to generate questions for the next step, an interview with each founding group.

Public Comment

In order to solicit comments on charter applications from the public, the Department held five public hearings in December in areas where applicants propose to locate and requested written comments from the public, superintendents, and school committee members. All oral or written comments were reviewed and any substantial issues raised about a specific application were added to the list of questions for the applicant interview.

Interviews

The Department interviews all final applicant groups. Interviews last approximately two hours. This is an opportunity for applicants to respond to questions about the main weaknesses or areas of confusion identified in the review of their applications or to clarify aspects of their applications. Interviewers will note the degree to which the applicant group successfully addressed these areas of its application and will get a clearer sense, in person, of the capacity of the founding group. Department staff will present all of the information to the Commissioner and, based upon the information presented, the Commissioner will determine which recommendations if any to make for the February meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

II. Criteria for Review

The criteria listed below are for all Commonwealth final applications.

A. Charter School Mission, Vision, and Statement of Need

Mission Statement

- The mission defines the purpose and values of the school.
- The mission informs the public about the students the charter school intends to serve.
- The mission is consistent with high academic standards and student success.
- The mission is succinct and meaningful.
- The mission is reflected throughout all sections of the application.

Vision Statement

- The vision illustrates a compelling image of the school's future.
- The vision describes the ways in which the school will positively impact all stakeholders in the school.
- The vision aligns with the mission statement.
- The vision is meaningful.
- The vision serves as an organizing principle for the application.

Statement of Need

- The statement of need speaks to the value of the school.
- The statement of need provides a description of how the founding group has assessed parental demand within the proposed areas of service.

- The statement of need describes the students the charter school intends to serve and the needs of the population.
- The statement of need describes the ways in which the school will have a positive impact on the proposed community (ies) it will serve.
- The statement of need provides a specific rationale for how this school will enhance or expand the educational options currently available to this student population.
- The statement of need explains why the school could not exist or succeed without a charter.
- The statement of need explains why the type of charter being sought (Commonwealth or Horace Mann) was chosen.

B. How will the school demonstrate academic success?

Educational Philosophy

- The educational philosophy describes the founding group's core beliefs and values about education.
- The educational philosophy aligns with the school's mission and is integrated into the implementation of the comprehensive educational program.
- The educational philosophy demonstrates that it will meet the diverse needs of individual students.
- The educational philosophy is founded on an understanding of effective, research-based educational practices, teaching methods, and high standards for student learning.
- The research shows evidence that this approach will lead to high academic achievement for the anticipated student population.

Curriculum and Instruction

General

- The curriculum and instruction are consistent with the mission and educational philosophy of the school.
- The application provides research on the curriculum and instruction that demonstrates it will result in high academic achievement, it should include citations.

Curriculum

- The application explains the process utilized to identify the curriculum that will be used by the school and provide reasons why the curriculum was chosen for the school.
- The application provides an outline of the curriculum that will be used by the school, *including* the content and skills to be taught in the core content areas at each grade level.¹ Up to four grade levels should be included in the text of the application. Additional grade levels must be included in the attachments but will not be counted toward the page limit.
- The application includes non-academic goals for students that are consistent with the stated mission, academic program, and educational philosophy of the school.

¹ Content is what students should know; skills are what students should be able to do; and the core content areas include English, reading/language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography.

- The application describes a clear plan and curricular components that will facilitate ongoing development, improvement, and refinement of the curriculum.
- The application describes the process and procedures used to evaluate whether the curriculum is effective and successfully implemented.
- The application describes the process that will be used to align the curriculum to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF).
- The application identifies which individual(s) on the school's organizational chart will be responsible for the above processes and procedures.

Instruction

- The application describes the pedagogy or instructional methods that will be used to deliver the curriculum model(s).
- The application describes how the instructional methods support high standards of achievement and are accessible and appropriate for all students at all levels, including students with diverse learning styles, English language learners, special education students, and students who enter below grade level.
- The application explains how the school will ensure that teachers are proficient in delivering the chosen instructional methods.
- The application briefly explains the process for teacher evaluations.
- The application describes how the school will determine the professional development needs of the staff.

Performance, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

- The application provides an example of performance standards for at least one grade grouping. It indicates to teachers, parents, and students the attributes that merit a particular letter grade or rubric score. Performance standards for student assessment are clear and easy to understand, not only for teachers and administrators, but also for parents and students.
- The performance, promotion, and graduation standards are based on high expectations, and are aligned with the school's mission, educational program, assessment system, and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF).
- The application clearly describes the proposed school's policies and standards for promoting students to the next grade, achievement level, or grouping level.
- The application provides examples of graduation or "exit standards" for the school's grade groupings in three areas: mathematics, English language arts, and one other subject of the applicant's choice. This provides reviewers with a clear sense of what students will know and be able to do at the end of the last grade of each school level.

Assessment System

- The application indicates which person(s) in the school have primary responsibility for overseeing the assessment system.
- The assessment system describes how achievement data will be collected and how it will be used.
- The application indicates whether, in addition to administering the MCAS tests, the school will use additional standardized assessment tools to determine and report student

progress, and explain why that decision was made for the targeted population and how the data will be used.

- The assessment system includes descriptions and/or examples of assessments that are consistent with the school's mission, program, and high expectations of students, and that are based upon solid research.
- The assessment system includes internal/school-developed instruments in order to measure and report student progress and why these particular assessments were selected for the targeted student population and how the data will be used.
- The assessment system includes a meaningful and practical approach for measuring student progress toward attaining non-academic goals.
- The assessment system features multiple measures of student outcomes that can be reported in terms of absolute scores, within-year student's gains/losses, and year-to-year student gains/losses.
- The assessment system provides a thorough, clear, measurable, externally credible, and conceptually sound design for measuring and reporting the performance and progress of the charter school and the academic and social development of each student to all relevant stakeholders.
- The assessment system is linked to curriculum and instruction and will facilitate decision-making about adjustments to the educational program and inform a staff development plan that will support the goal of improved student learning.

School Characteristics

- The school characteristics include the number of days school will be in session, daily hours of operation, and the way school will be organized for instruction, independent study, and extra or co-curricular activity, if any.
- The school characteristics fulfill state requirements on minimum number of school days and instructional hours.
- The application describes the grade levels at which students will be admitted to the school and the required age for Kindergarten, if applicable.
- The application describes any external programs that will be brought into the school and why.
- The application describes how the school's educational program will be implemented for students and faculty (multi-grade, tracking, team-teaching, etc.).
- The application describes the methods and strategies the proposed school will take for supporting students with a wide range of needs.
- The application illustrates the typical student's day from the perspective of the student.
- The application illustrates the typical teacher's day from the perspective of the teacher.
- The application describes the culture of the school.
- The application provides a clear plan for establishing a school culture and norms consistent with the school's mission and educational philosophy that is implemented from the first day of the school's operation.
- The application describes a student behavior philosophy and plan that is appropriate for all students and is consistent with the school's mission and educational philosophy, is

communicated to teachers, students, and parents, and is implemented from the first day of school.

- The application includes a viable plan to maintain and build effective family-school partnerships to support school goals.
- The application includes a clear plan for gauging parental satisfaction and publicizing results.
- The application describes a clear plan for establishing meaningful relationships or describes existing relationships with community agencies and organizations in order to support the school's educational program and serve the youth who attend the school.

Special Student Populations and Student Services

- The application describes the processes and procedures, in compliance with all state and federal laws and regulations that the proposed school will use to identify, assess, and serve students who are English language learners. This includes a description of support services, the settings in which these required services will be implemented, the qualifications of individuals performing the assessments and interpreting the assessment results, and delivering services. The application also includes how services will be delivered within the school's daily schedule, the titles, salaries, and qualifications of the individuals delivering the services, and some of the methods they will use.
- The application describes the processes and procedures, in compliance with all state and federal laws and regulations that the proposed school will use to identify, evaluate, and develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for each student in need of special education services. This includes a description of support services, the settings in which these required services will be implemented, the qualifications of individuals delivering services. The application also includes how services will be delivered within the school's daily schedule, the titles, salaries, and qualifications of the individuals delivering the services, and some of the methods they will use.
- The application describes the plan for a school nutrition program, including a way to distribute free and reduced lunch.
- The application describes evaluative procedures that will be implemented by the school to ensure that the programs are effectively servicing the needs of the targeted student populations. This will include the data sets that will be used to conduct the analysis.
- The application shows evidence that the founding group has knowledge regarding program requirements and effective means of implementation, and understands the obligations of charter schools, as public schools, under state and federal law regarding special education, English language learners, and school nutritional programs.
- The application proposes staffing levels and a program structure that will support the delivery of high quality services for all students.
- The application indicates the special education staffing levels the school intends to provide *by year* for each of your school's first five years. This includes the Special Education Administrator, as well as the proposed number of staff to hire each year and their qualifications, salary, and the percentage of their time that will be devoted to special education.

- The application describes the school's plan for addressing student health needs, including counseling/outreach services and your plan for hiring a school nurse and his/her role in your school.

C. How will the school demonstrate organizational viability?

Enrollment and Recruitment

- The application indicates the number of students enrolled by grade each year over the five year term of the charter as well as maximum enrollment.
- The application provides a specific rationale for a viable and sustainable size and growth strategy.
- The application offers a clear link between demand among parents for the proposed school and enrollment and recruitment.
- The application offers an aggressive and broad outreach and recruitment including to families that may be less informed about options.
- The application offers a student admissions plan that ensures adequate enrollment and full accessibility of the school for all eligible students.
- The proposed enrollment process includes a plan for public lottery, is open, fair, and in accordance with the charter school statute and regulations.
- For potential schools applying to open fall 2010, the application includes a complete enrollment policy in the attachments and describes how the school will be ready for the required submission of enrollment data to the Department by mid-March 2010.

Capacity

- The application describes how the founding group came together to form this proposed school and why the group is united to establish the proposed charter school.
- The application explains how often the group meets, how the planning and writing process is being executed, and identify who is the primary author of the application.
- The application summarizes each founder's and/or proposed board member's experience and qualifications briefly within the text of the document. The experience and qualifications should demonstrate that the founders and/or proposed board members:
 - have experience and qualifications necessary to implement the proposal;
 - demonstrate the capacity to found and sustain an excellent charter school;
 - can manage public funds effectively and responsibly;
 - include members who possess skills and experience in areas such as education, management, finance, development and law; and
 - have tangible ties to, and broad and diverse representation from the communities the school will serve.
- The application includes an attachment with a statement of commitment and resume for each founding group member and specifies whether the individual is a proposed board member, proposed school leader, or proposed for any other positions.
- If the founding group includes the proposed school leader (or any other person targeted for a position at the school), indicate the process used to determine that the individual is the best candidate for the position.

School Governance

- School governance is represented as required through the organizational chart.
- The governance model presents a clear workable structure and encourages an appropriate relationship between the board of trustees, school leader, and administration regarding the governance and management of the school.
- The governance model encourages an appropriate reporting structure and relationship between the school's leader and administration regarding teachers, specialists and other staff members.
- The application describes the recruitment, selection, and development plans for board members.
- For schools opening in fall 2010, the proposed school will provide a draft copy of its complete bylaws.
- If not opening in fall of 2010, the proposed school will provide a sample section of its bylaws.
- The governance model presents clear roles and responsibilities of the board of trustees, consistent with public accountability and charter school law.
- The application explains how the board of trustees is reflective of, or consistent with, the school's mission and program.
- The application identifies clear criteria for the selection and evaluation of a school leader.
- The application clearly delineates the respective roles and responsibilities of the board and the school staff.
- The application describes one policy that the founding group has established and the process for developing that policy.
- The application establishes a viable process for policy making and ongoing board development and self evaluation.

If filing application with a college, university, museum, educational institution, not-for-profit entity or any other partner:

- The application provides all the required information; name of partner organization, contact person, description of the nature and purpose of the school's partnership, etc.
- The application explains how the relationship enhances, complements, and/or supports the mission and educational philosophy of the proposed charter school.

If Using an Education Management Organization (EMO) or similar entity:

- The application includes a brief summary of the entity's history, educational philosophy, and past academic and management results. There should be evidence that the EMO has demonstrated positive academic results and responsible fiscal management.
- Define the school's board of trustees' relationship with the entity and how the board of trustees will provide oversight to the entity.
- The application clearly explains why the entity was selected and how the due diligence was conducted.
- For schools opening in 2010, the application will provide a draft contract which includes the total fee paid for management services, a description of the payment structure,

clarification of authority over hiring and firing, and the conditions and procedures for the contract's renewal and termination.

- The contract shows evidence of a clear understanding and agreement about the respective roles and responsibilities of the Board and the proposed EMO.
- The contract shows evidence of a clearly defined performance-based relationship between the EMO and the school's board of trustees.

Management Structure

- The management structure is clearly shown in the organizational chart.
- The application describes the reporting structure and solid plan for making key school-level decisions on student achievement, fiscal planning, and operations.
- The management structure includes clearly delineated roles and responsibilities for the school's leader and other administrative staff.
- The application describes policy development and implementation on a management level.
- The management structure includes process for the development, supervision, coordination, and continued assessment of the educational content and pedagogical approach.
- The application includes a staffing chart and narrative staffing plan.
- The application describes the school's plan for staff recruitment, advancement, and retention.
- The application describes how faculty and administrators will be evaluated and by whom.
- The application describes professional development activities for faculty and administrators.
- The management system includes working conditions and compensation packages that will attract and retain highly qualified staff.
- The application briefly describes the teaching program of typical teachers, indicating how many hours they will be in class and what other school-related responsibilities they will have outside the classroom (lunch duty, dismissal, and advisory group, after school).
- For schools opening in fall 2010, the school will provide a copy of its Code of Conduct.
- For schools opening in fall 2010, as requested in the enrollment section, the school will provide a copy of its Student Enrollment Policy.

Facilities and Student Transportation

- The applicant group has a viable process for conducting a facility search for an adequate school facility in the proposed area of service.
- The applicant group has sound financing options.
- The applicant group has proposed a transportation plan that will serve all eligible students and is consistent with charter school statute and regulations.

School Finances

(1) Fiscal Management

- The application describes the structure and process for managing the school's finances.

- The application describes the fiscal controls and financial management policies the board of trustees will employ to remain informed of the school's financial position.
- The application describes how the school will track finances in its daily business operations.

(2) Operating Budget and Budget Narrative

- The budget is consistent with all parts of the proposal, including the school's mission, educational program, and human resources.
- The budget reflects all the commitments proposed in the application through its third year of operations.
- The budget narrative describes whether the founding group expects the school to raise additional funds and why and briefly describes any planned fundraising efforts and who will lead and coordinate these efforts.
- There is evidence that the budget demonstrates knowledge of the practical matters relevant to the operation of a school, is based on sound reasoning, and shows that resources will be consistently deployed to meet the school's goals.
- There is a realistic assessment of projected sources of revenue that are adequate to ensure the fiscal viability of the school.

G. Action Plan

- The action plan includes: a timeline, action(s) to be taken, designated point person, and start date and projected completion date.
- The action plan outlines the steps that need to be taken for a successful school launch.
- The action plan is specific and consistent with the proposal's objectives.

D. How will the school demonstrate it is faithful to the terms of the charter?

Accountability and Proposed Dissemination Plans (Final Application Only)

Process

- The application describes the process the proposed school will undertake in the first year to create an effective Accountability Plan and identifies who will have primary responsibility for defining and overseeing the process.

Goals

- This section requires three examples of accountability plan objectives for each area of charter school accountability.
- This section includes school performance objectives that are consistent with the school's mission and program.
- The school performance objectives are clear, measurable, and data-driven.

Narrative

- The application gives a snapshot of what successes the school may have in five years.

Dissemination

- The application proposes ways in which the school will be able to disseminate best practices, including clear ways the charter school will be able to provide educational models, including programs, curriculum, and teaching methods that can be replicated by other public schools.