



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
From: Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D., Commissioner
Date: January 14, 2011
Subject: Charter Renewal – Initial Discussion and Vote for Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Excellence

This month, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) will discuss and vote on the charter renewal application for Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Excellence (MLK). I recommend that the Board place the school on probation and renew the charter with the conditions described below.

The school’s mission statement is as follows: “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.”

Type of Charter	Commonwealth	Location	Springfield
Regional/Non-Regional	Non-Regional	Districts in Region	NA
Year Opened	2006	Year Renewed	NA
Maximum Enrollment	380	Current Enrollment	407
Students on Waitlist	69	Grades Served	K-5

Basis of Recommendations Regarding the Renewal of Charters

The charter school regulations state that “[t]he decision by the Board to renew a charter shall be based upon the presentation of affirmative evidence regarding the success of the school’s academic program; the viability of the school as an organization; and the faithfulness of the school to the terms of its charter” 603 CMR 1.12. Consistent with the regulations, recommendations regarding renewal are based upon the Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education’s (Department) evaluation of the school’s performance in these areas. In its review, the Department has considered the school’s absolute performance at the time of the application for renewal and the progress the school has made during the past four years of its charter. The accountability process for charter schools recognizes that in exchange for increased freedom, a school must demonstrate results within the term of its five-year charter or risk non-renewal.

The superintendent of the Springfield Public Schools was invited to submit written comment to the Department regarding the renewal of MLK’s charter. No comments have been received.

Recommendation for Board Action

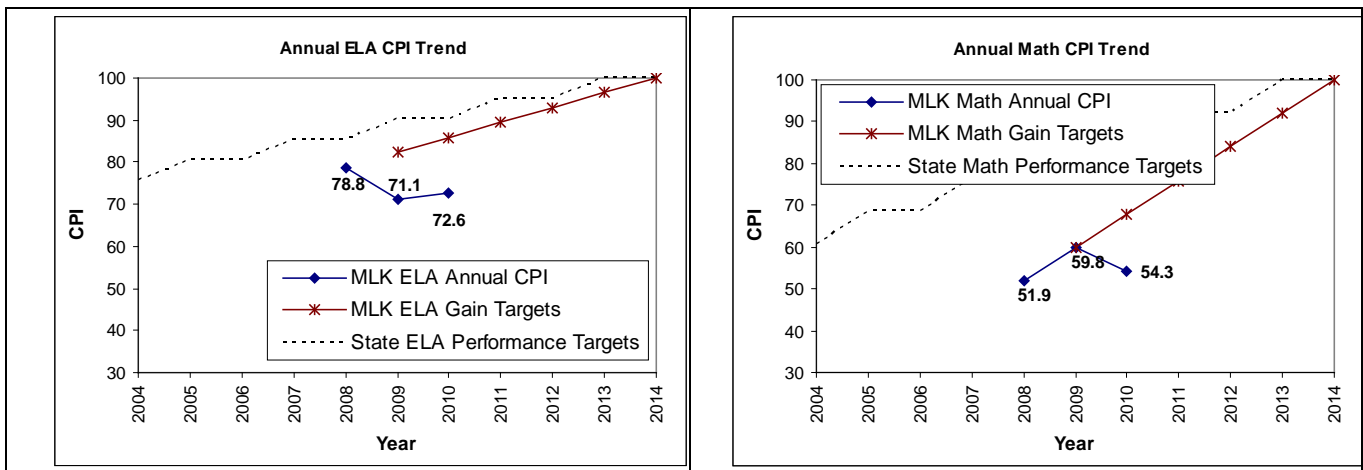
Based on the evidence described in the attached Summary of Review and further summarized below, MLK has seen limited academic success during its first charter term. I recommend that the Board place the school on probation and renew the charter with conditions requiring major improvements in academic performance, school leadership, and school programs. I am not recommending non-renewal at this point in time, because the school is already making efforts to address these deficiencies and it remains possible that it will be successful in those efforts.

I. Faithfulness to Charter

- The school has not shown evidence that it has succeeded in its mission of preparing students for academic success.
- The school has shown progress in establishing a program that aligns with the character development and community aspects of its mission.

II. Academic Success

- As shown in the CPI graph below, student MCAS performance has declined in ELA and remained low in mathematics. A majority of students are not reaching proficiency on either test.



- MLK did not make AYP in 2010 in ELA or mathematics.

- The school has a status of “Improvement Year 2” for ELA, and “No Status” for mathematics.
- Over the term of the charter, MLK students have not demonstrated consistent improvement or success on additional assessments, such as the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA).
- In 2010, MLK had median Student Growth Percentiles of 44.0 for ELA and 32.0 for mathematics. These scores reflect the low end of typical and less than typical student year-to-year growth respectively.
- Throughout the term of the charter, MLK performed at a statistically significantly higher level than the sending district (Springfield) in the aggregate in ELA, but not in mathematics.
- MLK primarily uses commercially created curriculum. However, additional curricular materials – such as lesson plans, pacing guides, curriculum maps – are not well documented.
- Over the past five years, MLK’s classroom and school environment has shown marked improvement. In 2010, the school established a new system to create behavioral and academic norms for all students. In contrast to prior site visits, the renewal inspection team found an orderly and focused classroom and school environment.
- During the 2009-10 school year, MLK administrators began a rigorous evaluation of the school’s academic program, in light of persistently low MCAS performance. The school began to implement significant changes to the academic program that continue this year:
 - The school engaged external providers for professional development and instituted a number of school changes based on the practices of high performing charter schools.
 - MLK hired mathematics and literacy coaches to help inform instruction.
 - The school has begun to implement a system of regular benchmark testing for mathematics and English language arts.
 - The school is beginning to overhaul its curriculum, has changed its course offerings to provide more time on learning for mathematics and ELA, and made adjustments to academic leadership staffing.

III. Organizational Viability

- The instructional leadership is in transition and a key position remains vacant.
- There are four administrators who oversee the school’s academic program, with one vacancy in a key position. However, the school has not developed job descriptions for each administrative position.
- During the summer of 2010, the school relocated to a newly renovated facility, which is a vast improvement over the prior school building. The new building provides students and teachers with ample classroom space and an environment conducive to learning.
- Throughout the charter term, parents and families have expressed strong support for and satisfaction with the school.

Conditions on Renewal

I recommend that the following conditions be included as part of the school’s probation and charter renewal:

1. By December 2012, Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Excellence shall demonstrate that it is an academic success by:
 - a. meeting academic growth standards as established by the Department, or by making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate and for all statistically significant subgroups in English language arts and mathematics by 2012; and
 - b. providing evidence to the Department that the school has met or is making substantial progress towards meeting all benchmarks in its 2011-2016 accountability plan.
2. No later than December 2011, Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Excellence shall provide evidence of a fully documented curriculum that is aligned to the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.
3. No later than June 30, 2011, Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Excellence shall provide to the Charter School Office an evaluation of its leadership structure, an organizational chart with accompanying job descriptions, and a plan to fully staff the administrative structure.

The Department will conduct a follow-up inspection to review and document the school's compliance with these conditions. Failure to meet the conditions placed on renewal of the charter within the timelines specified may result in summary revocation of the charter by the Board.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Jeff Wulfson, Associate Commissioner; Barry Barnett, Interim Director of Charter Schools; or me.

Enclosure: Summary of Review for Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Excellence Motion