



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: February 16, 2011
Subject: Charter Renewal – Discussion and Vote for Seven Hills Charter Public School

This month, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) will discuss and vote on the charter renewal application for Seven Hills Charter Public School (SHCPS). 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: "Seven Hills Charter Public School is committed to preparing a diverse cross section of Worcester children for success as students, workers, and citizens by providing them a high quality education at prevailing public school costs."

Type of Charter	Commonwealth	Location	Worcester
Regional/Non-Regional	Non-Regional	Districts in Region	NA
Year Opened	1996	Year(s) Renewed	2001, 2006
Maximum Enrollment	666	Current Enrollment	680
Students on Waitlist	265	Grades Served	K-8

Basis of Recommendation Regarding Renewal

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 both 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 Worcester Public Schools was invited to submit written comment to the Department regarding the renewal of the school's charter and did so. She submitted a letter in which she urged the Department to impose appropriate sanctions or consider non-renewal due to SHCPS's "fail[ure] to meet a majority of the targets designed to assess its progress" and, with respect to academic performance, its "very uneven and mixed results."

Recommendation for Board Action

SHCPS opened in 1996. For its first ten years, the school contracted with Edison Schools, Inc. (Edison), for management and academic services. In June 2005, the Board granted SHCPS an amendment to sever its contractual relationship with Edison at the close of the 2005-06 school year. At the time, SHCPS noted that Edison had failed to meet contractual obligations for delivering academic results, such as making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Additionally, the school's board of trustees noted that the school had sufficiently matured to be "more than capable of operating successfully on its own" and its desire to redirect the fees currently paid to Edison.

As noted above, SHCPS' charter has been renewed twice, in 2001 and 2006. In 2001, SHCPS' MCAS scores were found to be significantly below those of Worcester Public Schools. In its fifth year, the school was clarifying systems, structures, and building school culture. By the school's second renewal, SHCPS had improved its academic performance. From 2001 to 2003, SHCPS made AYP for both mathematics and ELA each year. In 2004, the school made AYP for ELA, but not mathematics. The next year, SHCPS made AYP for mathematics, but not ELA. Additionally, in 2006, after the separation from Edison and loss of the prescribed Edison curriculum, the school was working to replace and align curriculum materials with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. From 2006 until the present, SHCPS has not made AYP in any subject, for any year.

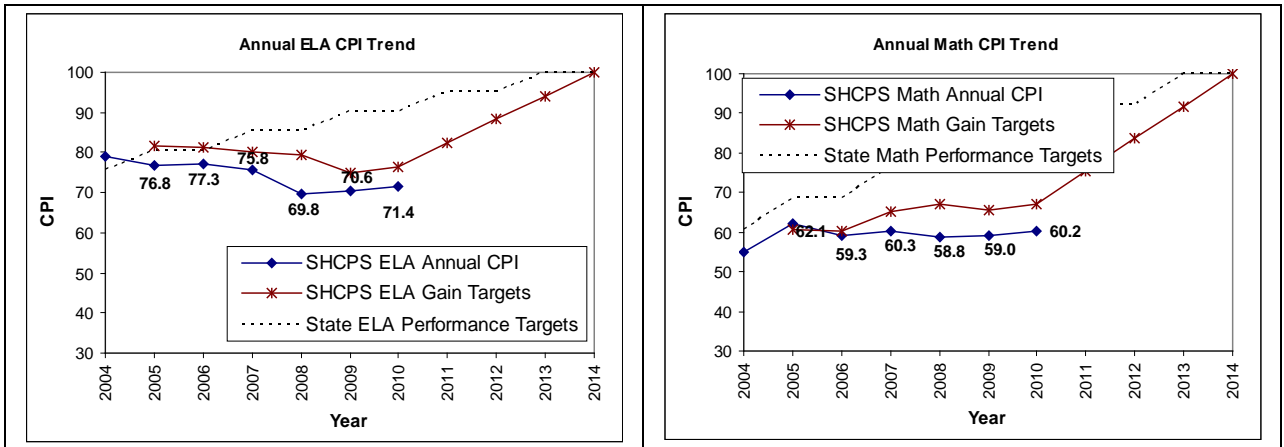
Based on evidence described in the attached Summary of Review and further summarized below, SHCPS has seen limited academic success during the past four years. I recommend that the Board place the school on probation and renew the charter with conditions requiring major improvements in academic performance, school leadership, and board oversight.

I. Faithfulness to Charter

- SHCPS has not operated in a manner consistent with its mission of providing students with a "high quality education."
- The school's curriculum emphasizes the arts as well as character education and ethics.
- During the charter term, SHCPS experienced board member and administrator turnover that impacted implementation of the school's governance/leadership structure.
- The school has not yet established a permanent leadership structure.

II. Academic Success

- Student MCAS performance has been persistently low over the past six years, particularly in mathematics.



- A majority of students failed to reach proficiency in ELA or in mathematics on the 2010 administration of the MCAS.
- In 2010, SHCPS has an NCLB status of Restructuring Year 2 for ELA and mathematics.
- The school has not made AYP for the past five years in either ELA or mathematics.

		Adequate Yearly Progress History								NCLB Accountability Status
		2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	
ELA	Aggregate	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Restructuring Year 2
	All Subgroups	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	
MATH	Aggregate	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Restructuring Year 2
	All Subgroups	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	

- Throughout the term of the charter, the Worcester Public Schools District (WPS) performed at a statistically significantly higher level than SHCPS in the aggregate on both ELA and mathematics MCAS assessments in a majority of instances. In subgroups, SHCPS sometimes performed at a statistically significantly higher level than WPS. It should be noted that SHCPS serves a disproportionately larger population of Low Income, African-American, and Hispanic students than most WPS schools.
- In the aggregate, and particularly in grades four and five, student growth lags that of Worcester Public Schools and the state by a substantial margin. Most of SHCPS students are losing ground compared to their peers in the Worcester Public Schools and statewide. However, 2010 growth scores show that SHCPS has achieved the low end of the “typical” growth range (between 40-60 SGP).

SHCPS Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGP)			
<i>Year</i>	2008	2009	2010
<i>English Language Arts</i>	37.0	34.5	40.0
<i>Mathematics</i>	39.0	42.0	41.0

- Students have not consistently demonstrated proficiency on the school’s internal assessments of literacy and numeracy skills.
- The classroom and school environment at SHCPS is orderly.
- The school is providing services for all students, including English language learners and those with disabilities and/or special educational needs, as required by law.
- The school has engaged instructional coaches to assist teachers in using assessment to inform instruction.

III. Organizational Viability

- After a significant increase in membership during the 2009-10 school year, the board is rebuilding its capacity to provide oversight of SHCPS.
- The board and the administration began a strategic, whole school improvement effort in the fall of 2010.
- Throughout the charter term, school stakeholders (administrators and board members) have attributed poor student achievement to teacher performance.
- Every year of the current charter term, SHCPS altered the school’s administrative structure.
- The board is currently evaluating the school’s leadership structure and has yet to determine an appropriate structure for the school.
- SHCPS has not developed a systematic process to review the quality of school programs to address persistently low MCAS scores. The school has an informal process for assessing the effectiveness of programs which has resulted in a number of programmatic changes.
- Students and parents report satisfaction with the school.
- SHCPS has created a safe school environment.

Conditions for Renewal

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

1. No later than March 31, 2011, Seven Hills Charter Public School shall submit to, and receive approval from, the Charter School Office the following:
 - a. a comprehensive school self-evaluation that determines the strategies to be used to address academic underperformance of the school. The self-

evaluation and subsequent corrective actions should include, but not be limited to:

1. a comprehensive evaluation of the school's current academic program, and a plan to implement proven curricular and instructional programs;
2. a comprehensive evaluation of school leadership and a plan to staff an effective administrative structure; and
3. a comprehensive evaluation and plan for any necessary development of the board of trustees to ensure that the members have the skills and experience required to implement changes in leadership and programs and to oversee the school on an ongoing basis.

The evaluation must include an action plan with a timetable for the implementation of corrective actions, must set deadlines for the completion of key tasks, and must set clear and specific implementation benchmarks to allow the Charter School Office to monitor implementation.

2. No later than May 31, 2011, Seven Hills Charter Public School shall have completed the process to receive approval from the Charter School Office for an Accountability Plan, including objectives and measures regarding academic success, organizational viability, and faithfulness to charter in alignment with the implementation benchmarks of the self-evaluation.
3. By December of 2012, Seven Hills Charter Public School shall demonstrate that it is an academic success by:
 - a. meeting academic growth targets in English language arts and mathematics, as established by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, or
 - b. achieving Adequate Yearly Progress in the aggregate and for all statistically significant subgroups in English language arts and mathematics by 2012, and
 - c. by meeting the goals and objectives established in the school's Accountability Plan.

Seven Hills Charter Public School shall be operated in accordance with the provisions of General Laws chapter 71, section 89, and 603 CMR 1.00 and all other applicable state and federal laws and regulations and such additional conditions as the Commissioner may from time to time establish, all of which shall be deemed conditions of the charter.

These conditions give the school until December 2012 to demonstrate satisfactory progress through annual results from MCAS tests, site visits by the Charter School Office, information submitted by the school in its annual reports, and other means as necessary. I will provide information to the Board on the school's success in meeting the 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; or Barry Barnett, Interim Director of Charter Schools; or me.

Enclosures:

- Summary of Review for Seven Hills Charter Public School
- Letter from district superintendent
- Letter from SHCPS superintendent
- Motion