



# **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:** April 15, 2011  
**Subject:** Lowell Community Charter Public School – Amendment request to modify probationary conditions

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Lowell Community Charter Public School (LCCPS) opened in 2000 and was first renewed in 2005. In February 2010, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) granted LCCPS a probationary renewal with conditions. The conditions require the school to meet specific academic targets, to develop and to implement a school wide corrective action plan, and to reduce its enrollment and grade span. Specifically, the conditions require that the school reduce maximum enrollment from 900 to 610 by September 2011. Additionally, the conditions require LCCPS to reduce its grade span from K-8 to K-4 by September 2011. For the current school year (2010-11), the school reduced its enrollment to 791 students and reduced its grade span to K-6.

The school's board of trustees has submitted an amendment request to (1) allow an extra year to reach the planned enrollment level of 610, and (2) allow the school to remain at grades K-6. If the amendment request is granted, LCCPS would reduce its enrollment to 653 for the 2011-12 school year and make a final reduction to 610 in the 2012-13 school year. As outlined in this memo, LCCPS is making progress in its turnaround effort, and so I am recommending that the Board approve this request.

### **Mission**

The school's mission statement reads: "The purpose of the Lowell Community Charter Public School is to prepare a cross section of Lowell children for success as students, citizens, and workers by providing them with a comprehensive curriculum in a supportive, challenging, multicultural learning environment. The school's highest priority is the promotion of academic achievement for all students in each of the areas addressed by the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, including: English, reading and language arts, writing, mathematics, science, health

and fitness, world languages, art, and music, as well as character and ethics. The Lowell Community Charter Public School will place special emphasis on the contributions that immigrants have made to American life and to Lowell's development over the years, and on the culture, language, and history of the Southeast Asian and Latino peoples who comprise a substantial portion of Lowell's present day population. The school will actively promote the joy of discovery and creativity in the learning process, and will integrate the use of technology into aspects of instruction. The opportunity for learning will be enhanced through a longer school day and an extended year. Student achievement will be demonstrated in measurable terms to parents, students, and the community at large."

### **Report on Conditions**

The following conditions were imposed at the time the school was placed on probation.

**Condition 1:** No later than March 10, 2010, the school shall submit a plan to reduce the school's maximum enrollment to 610 students and grade span to Kindergarten-grade 4 from Kindergarten-grade 8 no later than September 2011. No later than September 2011, the school's maximum enrollment shall be 610 and it shall serve grades Kindergarten through 4.

**Status: In progress:** The school submitted a plan to reduce the school's maximum enrollment and grades served by the March 10, 2010 deadline. The school followed the plan for the 2010-11 school year, serving 791 students in grades K-6.

**Condition 2:** No later than April 30, 2010, Lowell Community Charter Public School shall submit to the Charter School Office the following:

a comprehensive self-evaluation that determines the strategies to be used to address academic underperformance and governance in the school, including, but not limited to:

- a possible contract with a management company with a proven track record;
- implementation of proven curricular and instructional programs;
- a comprehensive revamping of school leadership;
- the addition of members to the board of trustees with the skills and experience to implement systemic changes in leadership and programs.

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.

**Status: Met:** The school submitted the self-evaluation and action plan by the required April 30, 2010 deadline. As of June 21, 2010, LCCPS entered into a contract with Renaissance

School Services (RSS), an education management organization with a focus on assisting schools in need of turnaround to improve academic performance. Prior to the formal contract, LCCPS had hired RSS on a consultant basis in April 2010. At that time, RSS began a process to align the school’s curriculum to the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, began evaluating teacher instructional capacity, and began to institute school wide practices for MCAS preparation. In March 2010, the school’s executive director was replaced with an interim executive director. In June 2010, RSS implemented a new organizational structure. Four of the ten administrators are new to the school including the head of school, the special education and English language learner coordinator, and two assistant principals. Additionally, in February 2010 the LCCPS Board of Trustees began to transition its membership, with old members resigning and new members joining the board. This process was facilitated by an external consultant. As of August 2010, the board was comprised of entirely new members with a variety of skills and experiences.

**Condition 3:** No later than June 30, 2010, Lowell Community 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.

**Status: Met:** The school worked with the Charter School Office to create an accountability plan by the June 30, 2010 deadline.

**Condition 4:** By December of 2011, Lowell Community Charter Public School shall demonstrate that it is an academic success by:

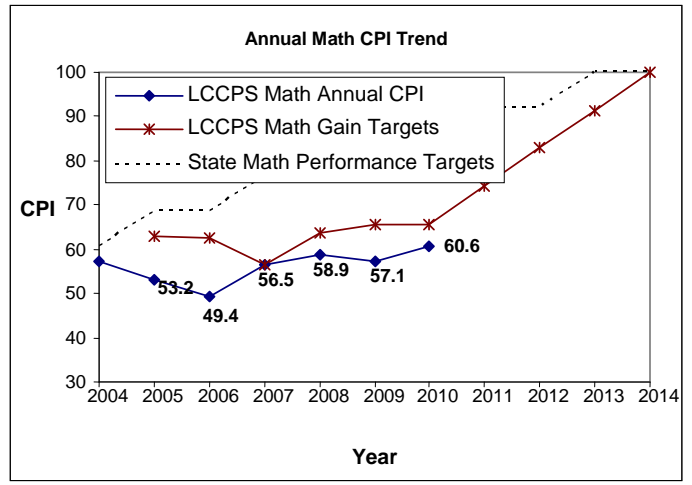
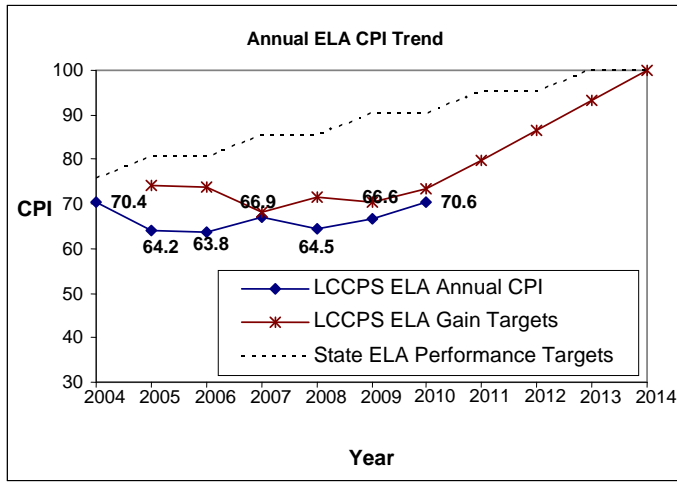
- meeting academic growth targets in English language arts and mathematics, as established by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, or
- achieving Adequate Yearly Progress in the aggregate and for all statistically significant subgroups in English language arts and mathematics in 2010 and 2011, and
- by meeting the goals and objectives established in the school’s Accountability Plan.

**Status: In progress:** While the school did not make AYP in 2010, the CPI scores showed improvement in both mathematics and English language arts (ELA). Additionally, the school’s median student growth percentiles in 2010 were 53.0 for ELA and 50.5 in mathematics, showing improvement from prior years. Please see the data tables below:

ELA All Grades	2007	2008	2009	2010	Math All Grades	2007	2008	2009	2010
% Advanced	3	2	4	4	% Advanced	5	9	8	7
% Proficient	32	30	29	34	% Proficient	22	20	18	23
% Needs Improvement	42	41	47	45	% Needs Improvement	35	35	37	40
% Warning/Failing	24	26	21	18	% Warning/Failing	37	36	37	30
N	422	446	463	485	N	420	448	463	484

CPI	66.9	64.5	66.6	70.6
SGP	-	39.0	37.0	53.0

CPI	56.5	58.9	57.1	60.6
SGP	-	47.0	38.0	50.5



**Recommendation**

Although it is too early to assess whether the school’s academic performance has improved, it is clear that the board of trustees has taken the school’s probationary status seriously and has fully engaged in the turnaround efforts mandated in your February 2010 vote.

The request for an extra year to reduce the school’s enrollment will allow the school to meet this requirement through attrition. My original recommendation for a K-4 grade span was primarily based on the prevailing grade structure in the Lowell Public Schools, but LCCPS has indicated that there is a strong preference among its parents for the two additional years. The school also believes that, given their high percentage of English language learners (36.2% this year), the ability to assess students in grade 6 as well as grade 4 will be a better indicator of their performance.

I believe these requests are reasonable and will not jeopardize the school’s improvement efforts. Therefore, I recommend your approval. A motion to that effect is attached.

If you have any questions regarding this amendment please contact Barry Barnett, Acting Director of Charter Schools, at 781-338-3225; Jeff Wulfson, Associate Commissioner, at 781-338-6500; or me.

Enclosures: Motion  
Amendment request letter from LCCPS

