

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: October 12, 2012
Subject: Charter Schools – Requests for Major Amendments

Pursuant to the Charter School Regulations, 603 CMR 1.11(1), the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) must approve major changes in the material terms of a school's charter. This year we received requests from nineteen existing schools for increases in their maximum enrollment, expansions in the grades served, and changes to the sending districts specified in the school's charter. Over the next five months, I will report to the board my recommendations regarding all of the pending requests. A number of the requests are from schools undergoing renewal or requesting seats in districts where charter applicant groups have been invited to submit final applications. As a result, I will not be addressing all nineteen requests at this time.

Section 1.11 of 603 CMR contains several criteria that the Commissioner and the Board may consider in reaching a determination regarding a school's request to amend its charter. First, "the Commissioner and the Board may consider a charter school's compliance with applicable state, federal, and local law." Second, the Commissioner and the Board may consider the 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. Third, in some districts a board of trustees must be determined by the Commissioner to qualify as a "proven provider" based on the existing school and meet the performance criteria described in 603 CMR 1.05(2). Fourth, schools applying to amend their maximum enrollment or grades served must address additional criteria as outlined in the technical advisory on amendments.



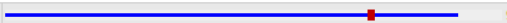



As required for requests that seek an increase in maximum enrollment or grades served, comment was solicited from the superintendents in the school districts within each charter school's district or region, as well as from superintendents in districts from which the charter school draws a substantial number of students.

I am recommending approval of requests from three charter schools at this time. I am recommending that the Board approve the expansion requests from the Community Charter School of Cambridge, Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School, and the South Shore Charter Public School. These requests are described in detail below, in preparation for a discussion and vote at the Board's October 23, 2012 meeting.

Community Charter School of Cambridge

The board of trustees of the Community Charter School of Cambridge (CCSC), serving grades 7-12, requests approval for a charter amendment to add grade 6 to its grade span to better align to the Cambridge Public Schools. Cambridge Public Schools transitioned this school year (2012-2013) to a middle school model with grades 6-8. CCSC believes this change will help to increase the number of Cambridge residents enrolled in the school and increase student achievement with an additional year to improve reading and mathematics skills. CCSC is a Commonwealth charter school chartered in 2004 and renewed without conditions in 2010. A copy of the school's request is attached.

CCSC - Accountability Status: 2012 Accountability and Assistance Level

Accountability Information		About the Data	
Accountability and Assistance Level			
Level 1	Meeting gap narrowing goals		
This school's determination of need for special education technical assistance or intervention			
Meets Requirements (MR)			
This school's overall performance relative to other schools in same grade span (School percentiles: 1-99)			
All students:		51	
	Lowest performing	Highest performing	
This school's progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps (Cumulative Progress and Performance Index: 1-100)			
Student Group (Click group to view subgroup data)	On Target = 75 or higher 		View Detailed 2012 Data
	Less progress	More progress	
All students		91	Met Target
High needs		93	Met Target
Low income		96	Met Target
ELL and Former ELL		-	-
Students w/disabilities		-	-
Amer. Ind. or Alaska Nat.		-	-
Asian		-	-
Afr. Amer./Black		99	Met Target
Hispanic/Latino		-	-
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Lat.		-	-
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.		-	-
White		-	-

2012 MCAS Student Performance Report:

	CPI	Median SGP	% At/Above Proficient	Included in SGP
ALL GRADES - ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS	91.0	61.0	77	141
ALL GRADES – MATHEMATICS	85.9	73.5	66	140
ALL GRADES – SCIENCE AND TECH/ENG	76.6	N/A	54	N/A

The superintendent of the Cambridge Public Schools was invited to submit comment on the school's request. No comments were received.



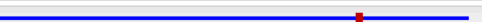
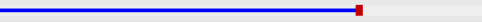

Changes to the grades served by a charter school do not require a proven provider determination by the Commissioner.

We have reviewed this request and it appears reasonable and consistent with the charter school statute and regulations. Given the changes to the Cambridge Public Schools system; the school's solid academic performance; and the charter school's compliance with applicable state, federal, and local law, I recommend that the Board approve the addition of grade 6 to the grades served by CCSC. This request demonstrates a thoughtful consideration of enrollment patterns and responding to the needs of Cambridge students and families. A motion for approval is attached for your consideration.

Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School

The board of trustees of Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School (Hilltown), a regional K-8 school in Haydenville serving Hampshire and Franklin counties, requests approval for a charter amendment to increase maximum enrollment from 180 to 218 students (38 students) to strengthen aspects of the middle school programming and to support improvements to the existing facility. The school intends to add 30 seats to its 6-8 grades to increase the number of sections per grade to two and allow for content area teacher specialization while maintaining smaller classes and meeting individual students' needs. The school will begin implementing the enrollment increase over a four-year period beginning with eight seats during the 2013-2014 school year. Hilltown is a Commonwealth charter school that was chartered in 1995 and has been renewed for three charter terms without conditions, most recently in 2010. The school has previously implemented maximum enrollment increases over its three charter terms. A copy of the school's request is attached.

Hilltown - Accountability Status: 2012 Accountability and Assistance Level

Accountability Information		About the Data	
Accountability and Assistance Level			
Level 1	Meeting gap narrowing goals		
This school's determination of need for special education technical assistance or intervention			
Meets Requirements (MR)			
This school's overall performance relative to other schools in same grade span (School percentiles: 1-99)			
All students:		85	
This school's progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps (Cumulative Progress and Performance Index: 1-100)			
Student Group (Click group to view subgroup data)	On Target = 75 or higher 		View Detailed 2012 Data
	Less progress	More progress	
All students		96	Met Target
High needs		75	Met Target
Low income		-	
ELL and Former ELL		-	
Students w/disabilities		-	
Amer. Ind. or Alaska Nat.		-	
Asian		-	
Afr. Amer./Black		-	
Hispanic/Latino		-	
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Lat.		-	
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.		-	
White		99	Met Target

2012 MCAS Student Performance Report:

	CPI	Median SGP	% At/Above Proficient	Included in SGP
ALL GRADES - ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS	93.6	70.0	81	86
ALL GRADES – MATHEMATICS	83.0	60.0	62	86
ALL GRADES – SCIENCE AND TECH/ENG	95.7	N/A	86	N/A

The superintendents of the following public school districts served by the school were invited to submit comments on the school's request: Amherst-Pelham, Belchertown, Central Berkshire Regional, Easthampton, Gateway Regional, Granby, Hadley, Hampshire Regional, Hatfield, Mohawk Regional, Northampton, South Hadley, Ware, Erving, Frontier Regional, Gill-Montague Regional, Greenfield, Hawlemont Regional, Leverett, New Salem-Wendell, Ralph C. Mahar Regional, and Pioneer Valley Regional. The superintendent of the Greenfield Public Schools, Superintendent Susan Hollins, submitted comment requesting that the Department study the effects of school choice on rural regions prior to approving any charter amendment awarding additional seats. No other comments were received.

Hilltown has demonstrated solid academic achievement and continued evidence of parent and student demand. Over the past ten years, the school reports an average of 220 applications annually for 18-25 openings. The amendment request reflects faithfulness to the terms of the charter by maintaining small class sizes, a focus on individual students' needs, and expanding educational options for students in the region.




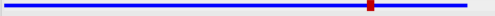










A sufficient number of seats is available in Greenfield and Ware under the original 9 percent spending cap, so a proven provider determination is not needed. The net school spending of the remainder of the districts in the school's sending region is capped at 9%.

We have reviewed this request and it appears reasonable and consistent with the charter school statute and regulations. Given the school's size; the fact that the school provides a small alternative educational option for students in western Massachusetts; and the charter school's compliance with applicable state, federal, and local law, I recommend that the Board approve an enrollment increase of 38 students for the Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School. A motion for approval is attached for your consideration.

South Shore Charter Public School

The board of trustees of South Shore Charter Public School (South Shore), a regional K-12 school in Norwell serving Norfolk and Plymouth counties, requests approval for a charter amendment to increase enrollment from 540 to 610 students (70 students) to be able to increase the number of Advanced Placement and honors courses offered at the high school and increase competitiveness with sending districts. The amendment request indicates that increased enrollment will provide teachers with the additional resources to better meet students' needs. South Shore was chartered in 1995 and has been renewed for three charter terms, most recently in 2010. The school has implemented a previous maximum enrollment increase during its second charter term. A copy of the school's request is attached.

South Shore - Accountability Status: 2012 Accountability and Assistance Level

Accountability Information		About the Data	
Accountability and Assistance Level			
Level 1	Meeting gap narrowing goals		
This school's determination of need for special education technical assistance or intervention			
Meets Requirements (MR)			
This school's overall performance relative to other schools in same grade span (School percentiles: 1-99)			
All students:		80	
	Lowest performing	Highest performing	
This school's progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps (Cumulative Progress and Performance Index: 1-100)			
Student Group (Click group to view subgroup data)	On Target = 75 or higher 		View Detailed 2012 Data
	Less progress	More progress	
All students		99	Met Target
High needs		93	Met Target
Low income		90	Met Target
ELL and Former ELL		-	-
Students w/disabilities		94	Met Target
Amer. Ind. or Alaska Nat.		-	-
Asian		-	-
Afr. Amer./Black		100	Met Target
Hispanic/Latino		-	-
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Lat.		-	-
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.		-	-
White		100	Met Target

2012 MCAS Student Performance Report:

	CPI	Median SGP	% At/Above Proficient	Included in SGP
ALL GRADES - ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS	94.3	43.0	82	239
ALL GRADES - MATHEMATICS	86.1	58.5	67	238
ALL GRADES - SCIENCE AND TECH/ENG	81.5	N/A	56	N/A

The superintendents of the following public school districts served by the school were invited to submit comments on the school's request: Abington, Braintree, Brockton, Cohasset, Duxbury,

East Bridgewater, Halifax, Hanover, Hanson, Hingham, Holbrook, Hull, Kingston, Marshfield, Norwell, Pembroke, Plymouth, Plympton, Quincy, Randolph, Rockland, Scituate, Weymouth, and Whitman. No comments were received.

A sufficient number of seats is available in Brockton and Randolph under the original 9 percent spending cap, so a proven provider determination is not needed.

We have reviewed this request and it appears reasonable and consistent with the charter school statute and regulations. The school has established a solid educational program, demonstrated academic results, and shown evidence of persistent parent and student demand with a waitlist of 472 students. Given this evidence and the charter school's compliance with applicable state, federal, and local law, I recommend that the Board approve an enrollment increase of 70 students for the South Shore Charter Public School. A motion for approval is attached for your consideration.

If you have any questions regarding these amendments or require additional information, please contact me; Jeff Wulfson, Deputy Commissioner; or Barry Barnett, Acting Assistant Director of Charter Schools, Innovation, and Redesign.

Attachments: Correspondence from Community Charter School of Cambridge
Motion for Board action on Community Charter School of Cambridge
Correspondence from Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School
Correspondence from Greenfield Superintendent of Schools
Motion for Board action on Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School
Correspondence from South Shore Charter Public School
Motion for Board action on South Shore Charter Public School