



# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906

Telephone: (781) 338-3000  
TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

## Criteria for Review of Charter School Applications<sup>1</sup>

### I. How will the school demonstrate faithfulness to charter?

#### A. Mission

The mission communicates the essence of the proposed charter school and defines the core purpose and key values of the school to its stakeholders and the public. It should be succinct, meaningful, and consistent with high academic standards. A school's mission provides the foundation for the entire charter application and for the five year term of the school's charter. The mission should be reflected throughout all sections of the final application.

Provide the proposed mission. The mission and application should address the following criteria:

- ✓ The mission defines the purpose and specialized focus of the school to its stakeholders and the public.
- ✓ The mission speaks to the value of the school, based on its own merit, and communicates the applicant group's core beliefs and values about education.
- ✓ The mission indicates the key design elements proposed to achieve outcomes.
- ✓ The mission is consistent with high academic standards and student success.
- ✓ The mission is succinct and comprehensible.
- ✓ The mission is reflected throughout all sections of the application.

#### B. Key Design Elements

The application must contain a clear description of the key design elements of the proposed school that make the school unique and distinct from other public school options, and provide readers with an image of the future the applicant group wishes to create. The key design elements must align with the mission and be reflected throughout the application. This section of the application should further articulate what the school will achieve for the school community—students, parents, teachers, board members, and beyond.

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<sup>1</sup> *Application for a Massachusetts Public Charter School Proposed Commonwealth or Horace Mann Charter School By a New Operator 2015-2106*

When describing the key design elements, the application should address the following criteria:

- ✓ The application briefly describes the educational philosophy of the applicant group and their core beliefs and values about education which aligns with the school's mission and key design elements.
- ✓ The application describes the key design elements of the proposed school, such as length of school year and day, and aspects of school design, that make the school unique and distinct from other public school options. The key design elements align with the mission statement, and are reflected throughout all sections of the application.
- ✓ The application describes the key academic and nonacademic goals for students that are consistent with the stated mission, key design elements of the academic program, and educational philosophy of the school. Goals should be specific; measurable; action oriented; rigorous, realistic, and results focused objectives that are time-bound and tracked.
- ✓ The application describes how this school will enhance or expand the educational options available to the targeted student population, including whether the innovative methods to be used by the proposed school differ from the district or districts from which the charter school is expected to enroll students.
- ✓ The application illustrates a compelling image of the school's future and what the school will look like in five years if it is achieving its mission. Explicitly reference key pieces of evidence to demonstrate how the school's success will be measured, including the ways in which the school will positively impact all stakeholders in the school.

### **C. Description of the Community(ies) to be Served**

State law asserts that charter schools are to be established to 1) stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education; 2) provide opportunities for innovative learning and assessments; 3) provide parents and students with greater options in choosing schools within and outside of their school districts; 4) provide teachers with a vehicle for establishing schools with alternative, innovative methods of educational instruction, and school structure and management; 5) encourage performance-based educational programs; 6) hold teachers and school administrators accountable for students' educational outcomes; and 7) provide models for replication in other public schools.

The final application should describe the community(ies) to be served by the school and how the school will offer educational opportunity to students, including the needs of students and their families. These are essential factors that inform the design of a successful charter school, ultimately driving support for and enrollment in the school. Data on district performance on the MCAS is available on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (Department) website and does not need to be reiterated here.

When describing the community(ies) the school plans to serve, the application should address the following criteria:

- ✓ The application describes the student population that the proposed charter school would serve and the needs of that population.
- ✓ The application discusses the reason for the selection of the community(ies) and the applicant's ability to serve this particular area and current connections to the community.
- ✓ The application describes how the educational option provided by the charter school will address the needs of the student population, including the proposed mission, curriculum, instruction, and services.
- ✓ The application describes how the applicant group has assessed parental support within the proposed sending district(s)/region for the proposed school.
- ✓ The application describes supporting evidence for the projected student enrollment at the proposed Commonwealth charter school, such as an analysis of eligible potential students in the community(ies) to be served, analysis of documented demand from families with eligible potential students, and/or an analysis of enrollment at schools currently operating in the community(ies) to be served. Applicants should not submit copies of petitions or interest forms in the charter application.
- ✓ The application describes how the school will publicize and market its program to a broad cross-section of prospective students throughout the district(s) that the school plans to serve, including families that may be less informed about options. The application discusses specific strategies of how the proposed school will ensure adequate enrollment and full access to the school and its proposed educational program for all eligible students.
- ✓ The application describes the school's plan to provide families and community members opportunities to support the success of the school.
- ✓ The application explains why a Commonwealth or Horace Mann charter is necessary in order for this school to exist or succeed.
- ✓ The application discusses specific ways in which the Commonwealth charter school will collaborate with school districts from which it draws students to provide educational models, including programs, curriculum, and teaching methods that can be replicated by other public schools.

#### **D. Enrollment and Recruitment**

Charter schools are public schools and are therefore open to all students. This means that a charter school may not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, ancestry, athletic performance, special need, proficiency in the English language or in a foreign language, or prior academic achievement when recruiting or admitting students. Moreover, a charter school may not set admissions criteria that are intended to discriminate or that have the effect of discriminating based upon any of these characteristics.

All Massachusetts charter schools are required to have a student recruitment and retention plan that includes deliberate, specific strategies the school will use to attract, enroll, and retain a student population that, when compared to students in similar grades in schools from

which the charter school enrolls students, contains a comparable demographic and academic profile. The plan must include strategies for recruiting and retaining students including, limited English-proficient, special education, free lunch, and reduced price lunch students, as well as those who are sub-proficient on the MCAS, at risk of dropping out of school, have dropped out of school, or other at risk students who should be targeted to eliminate achievement gaps.

When preparing the enrollment and recruitment section of the application, the application should address the following criteria:

- ✓ The application indicates in a table the projected number of students to be enrolled by grade each year over the five year term of the charter, as well as up to the year of operation when the overall maximum enrollment requested will be reached. Explain in detail your rationale for selecting the particular enrollment size for your school as well as the growth strategy you have developed. In your projection, indicate clearly the potential for variation in enrollment year-to-year that reflects an understanding of potential student retention and attrition within your growth plan. Inclusion of projected maximum and minimum annual levels of student enrollment will safeguard against the need for a future minor amendment to your growth plan, if chartered.
- ✓ The application includes a draft of the proposed recruitment and retention plan as an attachment. The plan should clearly incorporate strategies that will attract, enroll, and retain a student population that has a comparable academic and demographic profile when compared to students in similar grades in schools from which the charter school is expected to enroll students.
- ✓ The application describes the grade levels at which students will be admitted to the school and the required age for kindergarten admission, if applicable.
- ✓ The application contains a complete draft enrollment policy and application for admission as an attachment. Indicate dates for the application period, including application and lottery deadlines.
- ✓ The application describes how the school will be ready for the required submission of enrollment data to the Department by mid-March prior to opening.

## II. How will the school demonstrate academic success?

### A. Overview of Program Delivery

All Massachusetts charter schools are expected to deliver academic programs that provide improved academic outcomes and educational success for all students. The proposed educational program should address the diverse needs of the student population and should be founded on an understanding of effective, research-based educational practices and high standards for student learning. The proposed school should incorporate a pedagogical approach, curriculum, assessment, culture, and other elements, based on the applicant group's educational philosophy, that create a comprehensive educational program. The overview of program delivery describes how the educational program will be delivered, and provides evidence that the proposed educational program and its associated educational practices may result in high academic achievement and the attainment of the knowledge, skills, and experiences that ensures college and career readiness for the anticipated student population.

When describing the school's program delivery, the application should address the following criteria:

- ✓ The application demonstrates that the proposed educational program will serve the diverse needs of individual students by providing evidence, including explicit research citations, that demonstrates their educational program and its associated educational practices may result in high academic achievement and the attainment of the knowledge, skills, and experiences that ensures college and career readiness for the anticipated student population. Evidence should include the specific subgroups of students listed in the recruitment and retention plan consistent with requirements of M.G.L. c. 71, § 89, such as students with disabilities, English language learners, and students participating in the federal free/reduced lunch nutrition program.
- ✓ The application describes the school calendar including the number of days school will be in session; and the daily hours of operation, including the length of the school day with start and dismissal times. Please be specific in describing these items and pay attention to the state requirements on minimum number of school days and instructional hours as described in 603 CMR 27.00. If the school would not meet the minimum number of school days and instructional hours based on the program proposed, provide justification for a waiver of the requirement. All public schools may request from the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education a waiver of student learning time for good cause to support innovative programs or schedules to improve student learning.
- ✓ The application provides an annual calendar for the first year of operation as an attachment to your application. Draft calendar should reflect the required inclusion of five days within the school year for unanticipated school closures pursuant to 603 CMR 27.03.
- ✓ The application provides a sample weekly schedule for one grade in each grade level grouping at which the school intends to serve (e.g., elementary, middle, high school, or early, primary, upper elementary, etc.). The schedules should clearly describe any

variation across the grades proposed that are related to the educational programming and school design.

- ✓ The application provides a description of the mechanics of the educational program in terms of the daily or weekly organization of students and faculty (e.g., multi-grade, tracking, team-teaching, etc.) to explain the sample schedule.
- ✓ The application indicates if mandatory or optional programming will be offered to students during summer months, and the goals of such programming if offered.
- ✓ The application describes the extra or co-curricular activities or programming that the school will offer, how often they will occur, and the goals of such programming if offered.
- ✓ The application illustrates a typical day from the perspective of a student in a grade level of your choice.
- ✓ The application illustrates a typical day from the perspective of a teacher of any subject or grade of your choice.

## **B. Curriculum and Instruction**

Charter schools have the freedom to choose and/or develop curriculum models that best reflect the mission and educational philosophy of the school and that best serve the needs of the expected student population. Regardless of whether the curriculum is purchased or internally developed, it is important that it aligns with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF) since the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is based on the learning standards outlined in the MCF. Charter schools also have the freedom to determine the instructional methods that will be used to deliver the chosen curriculum model(s).

When describing the school's curriculum and instruction, the application should address the following criteria as applicable:

### **Use of Commercial Curriculum**

- ✓ If intending to use developed curriculum, the application identifies the curriculum, 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. Identify which individual(s) in the school's organizational chart will be responsible for identifying and selecting curriculum.
- ✓ The application describes the process that is used to ensure alignment of the curriculum to the MCF and identifies the individual(s) who will be responsible for curriculum alignment to the MCF.
- ✓ If modifications to the curriculum will be required, the application explains the process utilized to identify areas for revision and to make adjustments. Indicate the individual(s) that will be responsible for the process.

**New  
Curriculum  
Required**

- ✓ If intending to develop curriculum, the application explains the process that will be used by the school to develop curriculum. Identify which individual(s) on the school's organizational chart will be responsible for developing curriculum and who will participate in the process.
- ✓ The application describes the process that is used to ensure alignment of the curriculum to the MCF and identifies the individual(s) who will be responsible for curriculum alignment to the MCF.

- ✓ The application contains the curriculum scope and sequence that will be used by the school, including the content and skills to be taught in the core content areas at each grade level.<sup>2</sup> Four grade levels should be included in the text of the application. All additional grade levels must be included in the attachments, but will not be counted toward the page limit. For proposed schools that plan to have fewer than four grade levels, please include all of the intended grades in the application narrative. The curriculum scope and sequence should be clearly aligned with MCF as well as aligned across the grades proposed for implementation.
- ✓ The application describes the processes for the ongoing development, improvement, and refinement of the curriculum. The description should include incorporation of the curricular structures that will be used by the school, e.g. scope and sequence, unit and lesson plans, etc. Identify which individual(s) on the school's organizational chart will be responsible for, and participate in the development, improvement, and refinement of the curriculum.
- ✓ The application describes the process and procedures that will be used to evaluate whether the curriculum is effective and successfully implemented. Identify which individual(s) on the school's organizational chart will be responsible for curriculum evaluation.
- ✓ The application describes the learning environment(s) that will be used to deliver the proposed curriculum model, including the use of technology, and class size and structure.
- ✓ The application describes the pedagogy or instructional methods that will be used to deliver the curriculum model(s).
- ✓ The application contains a detailed plan for a responsive general education classroom that would support the needs of all students. The plan should include how the proposed curriculum and instructional methods will support high standards of achievement for students with a wide range of needs, and be accessible and appropriate for all students at all levels, including students with diverse learning styles; English language learners; students with disabilities; students who enter below grade level, or students identified as at risk; and advanced students who perform significantly above grade level. The plan should also describe the strategies the school will implement to ensure academic success for all students, including students struggling to meet performance standards.
- ✓ The application demonstrates that the proposed curriculum and instruction will serve the diverse needs of individual students by providing evidence or relevant experience, including explicit research citations, that demonstrates the proposed curriculum and

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

instruction may result in high academic achievement and the attainment of the knowledge, skills, and experiences that ensures college and career readiness for the anticipated student population. Evidence should include the specific subgroups of students listed in the recruitment and retention plan consistent with requirements of M.G.L. c. 71, § 89, such as students with disabilities, English language learners, and students participating in the federal free/reduced lunch nutrition program.

- ✓ The application describes the proposed structures for regular, frequent collaboration and professional development to improve implementation of the curriculum and instructional practice. Include a description of how the school plans to train and support teachers to address the unique needs of all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners.
- ✓ The application describes how the school will determine the professional development needs of the staff, including administrators and teachers, on an on-going basis and how these opportunities will be delivered during and outside of the scheduled school year.
- ✓ The application explains the process and frequency of teacher performance evaluations, including the key elements of the evaluation and who will conduct the evaluations.

### **C. Student Performance, Assessment, and Program Evaluation**

Charter schools must assure that students will meet the same performance standards and assessment requirements set by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for students in other public schools. Performance, promotion, and graduation standards should be based on high expectations that are aligned with the school's mission, educational program, assessment system, and the MCF. An integrated assessment system, which includes the MCAS test, serves as a structure for how teachers and administrators will measure what students know and are able to do as a result of the delivery of curriculum and instruction.

Information from assessments serves to help determine what areas of instruction need additional time, the needs of individual students, the quality of instruction, decisions on improvement strategies, and the school's overall progress in meeting Accountability Plan goals. Ultimately, the assessment system provides information to all stakeholders on whether the school is an academic success. The proposed system should reflect how the school would link curriculum and instruction to assessment by measuring the academic progress of individual students, cohorts of students over time, and the school as a whole, with the goal of continual school improvement.

When describing student performance, assessment, and program evaluation, the application should address the following criteria:

- ✓ The application describes the proposed school's policies and standards for promoting students to the next grade, achievement level, or grouping level in alignment with the educational program.
- ✓ The application describes the graduation requirements or "exit standards" for the school's grade groupings as applicable (e.g., elementary, middle, high school, or primary, upper elementary, etc.). These exit standards should be aligned with the school's mission and provide a clear sense of expected student achievement at the end of the last grade of each school level and/or upon graduation. If the proposed educational program includes a high



school, explain how your graduation requirements will ensure student readiness for college and career opportunities.

- ✓ The application describes a thorough, clear, measurable, externally credible, and conceptually sound design for measuring and reporting the performance and progress of the school as a whole, student cohorts over time, and the academic and social development of each student to all relevant stakeholders. Selected assessments are both research based and consistent with the school's mission, broad academic and nonacademic student goals, educational program, and high expectations of students. Descriptions should include, but are not limited to, the following information:
  - The types of internal/school-developed assessments that will be administered to measure and report student progress. Explain why these particular assessments were selected for the targeted student population and how the data will be used to support the goal of improved student learning and outcomes.
  - Describe the school's philosophy and plans for student homework.
  - A meaningful and practical approach for measuring and supporting student progress toward attaining non-academic goals in alignment with the proposed school's mission and vision as well as students' needs.
  - Evidence of multiple measures of student performance outcomes that may include reports of absolute scores, within-year student gains/losses, and year-to-year student gains/losses.
  - A plan to use student data, including MCAS performance, to facilitate decision-making about necessary adjustments to the educational program and the staff development plan that will support the goal of improved student learning and outcomes.
  - Indicate if any additional standardized assessment tools will be used to determine and report student progress. If so, explain why those tools were selected for the targeted population and how the data will be used.
  - Indicate the roles of school leadership and faculty in the collection, analysis, and use of student data, and the individual responsible for oversight of the system.
  - Indicate the system for reporting the performance and progress of the school, grades, individual classes, and students, including the frequency of the different forms of assessment, the types of stakeholders who will receive assessment information, and the types of metrics reported.
- ✓ The application describes the processes that will ensure the assessment system is linked to curriculum and instruction, and is used to facilitate timely adjustments that will support the goal of improved student learning and outcomes.
- ✓ The application describes how each of the following stakeholder groups will participate in the review and response to student achievement data:
  - The school's board of trustees
  - School administrators
  - Teachers
  - Students
  - Parents
- ✓ The application briefly describes the process to create an effective accountability plan during the first year of operation. The application identifies who will be primarily responsible for defining and overseeing this process, as well as for collecting and

analyzing the data to evaluate the school's progress towards accountability plan objectives and measures.

- ✓ The application contains draft objectives and measures related to mission and key design elements as an attachment.

#### **D. Supports for Diverse Learners**

All charter schools in Massachusetts are public schools that enroll students through a lottery process. Therefore, all charter schools must be prepared to enroll students with diverse learning needs including English language learners and students with disabilities, all of whom must be provided with full and meaningful access to the general educational curriculum.

The general education classroom needs to be responsive to the educational needs of all children, and accommodates their needs. A full continuum of services must be available within the school so that all students can receive needed services in an appropriate setting and participate fully in the educational goals and mission of the school. This section of the application should describe the school's programs and services, and how they will be implemented within the context of your proposed school.

For information on special education, please see the Massachusetts Primer on Special Education and Charter Schools and related documents found at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/sped/default.html>. For information on special education laws and regulations see <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/laws.html>. Please review the required elements of the special education policies and procedures found at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/new/>. Special education policies and procedures are submitted to the Department during opening procedures of the proposed charter school. Consider the required elements when crafting your response to the application criteria related to the processes and procedures used to identify, assess, and serve students with disabilities.

For information on the laws and regulations relating to English language learners, see <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr14.html>. For guidance on English language learners, please see the Department's website at [http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/guidance\\_laws.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/guidance_laws.html). Please review the required elements of the English language education policies and procedures found at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/new/>. English language education policies and procedures are submitted to the Department during opening procedures of the proposed charter school. Consider the required elements when crafting your response to the application criteria related to the processes and procedures used to identify, assess, and serve English language learners.

When describing the school's plan for special student populations and student services, the application should address the following criteria:

- ✓ The application describes the processes and procedures that the proposed school will employ to identify, assess, and serve students who are English language learners. Descriptions will be considered incomplete if they do not include:
  - a description of the English language development program and support services to be offered including the curriculum and strategies that will be used;

- how student identification and assessment will be conducted;
  - the settings in which required services will be implemented;
  - how services will be delivered within the school's daily schedule;
  - the plan to support core academic teachers in obtaining SEI endorsement;
  - the titles, salaries, and qualifications of the individuals delivering the services; and
  - how the program will be evaluated.
- ✓ The application describes the English language development program staffing levels the school intends to provide by year for each of your school's first five years. Include qualified individuals who will work with your school, administrators, teachers, and other staff, as well as the number of staff you propose to hire each year and their qualifications, salary, and the percentage of their time that will be devoted to English language learner education.
- ✓ The application describes the processes and procedures that the proposed school will employ to identify, assess, and provide specialized instruction to each student in need of special education services. Descriptions will be considered incomplete if they do not include:
  - a description of support services to be offered and some of the methods that will be used to provide a continuum of services;
  - how student identification and assessment will be conducted;
  - the development of individualized education programs;
  - the settings in which required services will be delivered;
  - how services for students in need of special education services will be delivered within the school's daily schedule;
  - the qualifications of individuals who will be recruited to deliver services;
  - the titles, salaries, and qualifications of each position proposed; and
  - how the program will be evaluated.
- ✓ The application describes the special education staffing levels the school intends to provide by year for each of your school's first five years. Include the Special Education Administrator who will work with your school, teachers, aides, and other staff, as well as the number of staff you propose to hire each year and their qualifications, salary, and the percentage of their time that will be devoted to special education. Specify the amounts of time the administrator will allocate to administrative duties and to service delivery. Indicate if you anticipate outsourcing services such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, or speech therapy and if possible, with whom you anticipate contracting for the provision of services.

## **E. Culture and Family Engagement**

Massachusetts charter schools support students' social and emotional health in safe and respectful learning environments that engages families. The application must describe how the proposed school will create a safe school environment and address the physical, social, emotional, and health needs of its anticipated student population. The application must also describe how the proposed school will develop strong working relationships with families/guardians in order to support students' academic progress and social and emotional well-being.

When describing the school's plan for school culture and parent engagement, the application should address the following criteria:

- ✓ The application describes the culture of the school, and a clear plan for establishing a school culture and norms consistent with the school's mission, educational philosophy, and educational program from the first day of the school's operation. The plan should include specific strategies the school will implement to develop and maintain a safe school environment conducive to learning and consistent with the school's mission and educational philosophy. Describe how school culture and climate will be fostered for and by school leadership, teachers, students, and parents.
- ✓ The application describes the school's programs or strategies to address the physical, social, emotional, and health needs of the anticipated student population.
- ✓ The application describes the school's philosophy and plans regarding student behavior and discipline for the general student population and students with special needs. Describe proposed policies regarding student discipline, including suspension and expulsion, or a reasonable plan for the development of the required discipline policies. Student discipline should be consistent with requirements and the school's mission and educational philosophy.
- ✓ The application describes how the school's discipline policy will be implemented for teachers, students, and parents starting from the first day of the school's operation to ensure a safe environment conducive to learning with consistent and transparent implementation.
- ✓ The application describes how the school plans to involve parents/guardians as partners in the education of their children and to build and maintain family-school partnerships that support students' academic progress and social-emotional well-being. Describe any commitments or volunteer activities the school will offer to parents.
- ✓ The application describes how stakeholder satisfaction will be gauged and the process for collecting and publicizing results. Stakeholders include parents, faculty, and students.
- ✓ The application describes the relationships the applicant group has established or intends to establish with community agencies and organizations that will support the school's educational program and serve the youth who attend the school. Explain the nature of the proposed partnership/relationship(s) and how it will support the school's mission and key design elements. Letters of support or commitment should be included as attachments.
- ✓ The application explains how the school plans to deliver nutrition program services to students, including what meals and/or snacks will be served and when. Describe how you plan to administer the free and reduced lunch program and in the case of a Horace Mann charter school, indicate what role, if any, the district will have in delivery of the school's nutritional program. All public schools in the Commonwealth are required to make a

school lunch available to students, including a free or reduced price lunch for students who meet income eligibility requirements. Regardless of a school's participation in the National School Lunch Program, school lunches must be made available and under certain circumstances, breakfast as well.

- ✓ The application describes any ancillary and support services you expect to offer students and families, for example counseling, family outreach, and/or relationships with community organizations or service agencies. Any wrap-around services described by the school should indicate committed partners and provide letters of commitment as attachments.
- ✓ The application describes your plan to hire a school nurse and his/her role in your school.

### III. How will the school demonstrate organizational viability?

#### A. Capacity

A public school charter is granted to a board of trustees. Members of the board of trustees are public agents authorized by the state and are responsible for governing charter schools. In general, it is important that these individuals possess a wide variety of skills and qualifications that will enable them to found and sustain an excellent school. Members of a founding group may be proposed for the school's board of trustees or may assume other roles in the school. Each founding group should be able to clearly define who is proposed to be a member of the board of trustees and what other roles will be assumed. The proposed board of trustees must be of a number sufficient to provide effective oversight of the school and to participate in the considerable amount of work required to open a charter school.

When describing the capacity of the founding group and/or proposed board of trustees the application should address the following criteria:

- ✓ The application describes how the applicant 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 completed, and identifies the primary author of the application.
- ✓ The application summarizes briefly within the text of the document each founder's and/or proposed board member's experience and qualifications. The experience and qualifications should demonstrate that the founders and/or proposed board members:
  - have the 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 explains how the proposed board of trustees is reflective of or consistent with the school's mission and program.
- ✓ Each member of the applicant must submit a resume as an attachment to the application. The application must indicate if a founder is a proposed board member, proposed school leader, or other school employee. Resumes should indicate the founder's prior experience as it relates to the charter application. Additionally, proposed board members and proposed school employees must complete individual questionnaires to further establish their understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

#### B. Governance

As entities of the state, public charter schools must meet a number of legal requirements set forth by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Many of these requirements are outlined in the *Charter School Administrative and Governance Guide: An Overview of the Laws and Regulations that Boards of Trustees and School Leaders Need to Know*, this document can be found online at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/governance/adminguide.doc>. The guide begins by explaining

that a strong board of trustees defines the mission of the school, develops school policies and changes them when appropriate, hires qualified personnel to manage the school's day-to-day operations and holds them accountable for meeting established goals, and formulates a long-range plan and charter school accountability plan that will ensure the school's continued stability. In addition to its many other responsibilities, the board must ensure that the school is complying with all of the state and federal laws that apply to the school and that the board itself is operating in accordance with the rules set out by all applicable Massachusetts laws and regulations. Finally, the board is responsible for operating the school in accordance with its charter and with any approved amendments to its charter.

A school's ability to carry out its purpose and objectives is largely determined by the governance structure of the school and by developing an effective board of trustees.

### **(1) Governance and Management Structure**

- ✓ The application explains the proposed reporting structure and relationship between the board of trustees and the individual(s) reporting directly to the board regarding the governance and management of the proposed charter school.
- ✓ The application includes a brief job description for each officer of the board of trustees.
- ✓ The application describes any committees, advisory groups, and/or task forces and their role in supporting school development and success.
- ✓ The application includes a copy of your complete bylaws in the attachments.
- ✓ The application and draft bylaws indicates if there are any ex-officio members of the board of trustees, denoting seats that are earmarked based on a person's position or status, such as school principal, teacher, parent, or student representative, and explains the rationale for the proposed governance model as applicable.

### **(2) Roles and Responsibilities**

- ✓ The application describes the roles and responsibilities of the board of trustees. The application clearly articulates the role distinctions amongst the board, the school district (in the case of Horace Mann charter schools), and the school administration as they relate to curriculum, personnel decisions, budget allocation, and vendor selection.
- ✓ The application provides examples of the proposed board's future actions in governing the proposed school that accurately reflect an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the board of trustees, consistent with public accountability, such as open meeting law, state ethics law, and charter school law.
- ✓ The application describes the processes related to the board's oversight of the school, including setting priorities and goals; monitoring progress towards priorities and goals; supporting, monitoring, and evaluating the school leader(s); developing the annual budget; monitoring the school's finances; and conducting long-term financial and strategic planning.
- ✓ The application describes the proposed systems that will be put into place to ensure clear decision-making and communication processes that facilitate and ensure public accountability, including board meetings that are designed to foster open, deliberate, and thorough discussions.

- ✓ The application describes the proposed process and procedure for handling inquiries and complaints made to the board.
- ✓ The application describes the proposed annual process the board uses to evaluate its own performance, and describe the steps taken to guide its development as an effective governing board.

### **(3) Policy Development**

- ✓ The application describes the proposed process by which the board of trustees will develop policies and make decisions. Provide specific examples whenever possible.
- ✓ The application describes the plan for seeking feedback from the school staff, parents, and the larger community when setting policy. Provide specific examples whenever possible.

### **(4) Board Sustainability**

- ✓ The application describes the recruitment, and selection processes for new board members.
- ✓ The application describes specific plans for the recruitment of additional board members with the skills and expertise that will ensure the sustainability of the proposed charter school, and the targeted qualifications sought in additional board members, if applicable.
- ✓ The application describes the orientation and development process for new board members.
- ✓ The application describes the succession planning for board officers.

### **(5) School Management Contract**

If the proposed board intends to enter into a contract with another entity to provide substantially all the school's educational or management services, such as an educational management organization (EMO), (whether or not the entity was granted Proven Provider status), the applicant group must include the following information:

- Identify the entity.
- Include a comprehensive summary of the entity's history, a description of how it implements its program, extensive evidence of past results (including student academic achievement and financial status) of its school management efforts, and its educational philosophy. There should be strong evidence that the entity has demonstrated positive academic results and responsible fiscal management, as well as success in serving similar student populations.
- Explain how and why the entity was selected, what due diligence has been conducted, and how contracting with this entity will assist the school in meeting the challenges outlined in your description of the community(ies). Provide a clear description of the services to be provided by the entity.
- Describe the respective roles and responsibilities of the proposed school's board of trustees and the entity for the financial management and effective oversight of the school, and the internal controls that the board will put into place, including a plan to monitor the performance of the entity to hold them accountable.
- Include a draft of the proposed contract. The draft contract may be submitted as an attachment and does not count towards the page limit for the application. The contract must include a delineation of the roles and responsibilities of the other



entity and the school, a description of how the charter school board of trustees will monitor the academic performance and fiscal activity of the school, performance evaluation measures (including student academic performance), 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.

#### **(6) Programmatic Relationship with Other Organizations**

If you are filing the application with a college, university, museum, educational institution, other not-for-profit entity, or any other partner, the applicant group must provide the following information:

- Identify the partner organization. Indicate the name of the contact person at the partner organization with the mailing address, phone number, and email address.
- Provide a letter of commitment from the organization indicating the proposed affiliation, and the terms and scope of the partnership.
- Describe the nature and purpose of the school's partnership with the organization.
- Briefly explain how the relationship enhances, complements, and/or supports the mission and educational philosophy of the proposed charter school.
- Explain if the partner organization will be involved in the governance of the school.

### **C. Management**

School management is fundamental to creating an environment that can support a successful charter school. In this section we ask applicants to write about (1) school management structure; (2) school leadership roles and responsibilities; and (3) human resources.

#### **(1) School Management Structure**

- ✓ The application includes a school organizational chart for year one of operation and at full student enrollment that encompasses all employees of the proposed school and the board of trustees. The application describes how the applicant group determined the structure shown in the organizational chart.
- ✓ The application includes a narrative that clearly explains the reporting structure and relationship between the school's leader and administration regarding teachers, specialists, and other staff members.
- ✓ The application describes the lines of authority and communication among school leadership (e.g. executive director, principal, instructional leader, operational leaders, and other key leaders and administrators) and staff at the proposed school.

#### **(2) School Leadership Roles and Responsibilities**

- ✓ The application describes the plan for how the school will make key organizational decisions about curriculum and instruction, student achievement, professional development, culture, staffing, fiscal planning, and operations.
- ✓ The application describes the roles and primary responsibilities of the school's leader and other administrative staff. Articulate key role distinctions with regard to curriculum

development and implementation, instructional leadership, student achievement, personnel decisions, financial management, and operations.

- ✓ If the applicant group includes the proposed school leader (or any other position at the school), the application describes the process and criteria used to determine that the individual is the best candidate for the position. Identify the skills and experience of the selected individual(s) and describe how their professional background supports their capacity to be successful in founding a high quality charter school and achieving the school's mission as the school leader or a member of the leadership team. If the proposed school leader has never led a school, describe any training programs that s/he has completed or is currently participating in.
- ✓ If the applicant group does not include the proposed school leader, the application describes the desired skills and experience of the ideal individual and the plans for the recruitment and selection of the school leader.
- ✓ If the educational/instructional leader is different from the school leader, the application describes the desired skills and experience of the ideal individual and the plans for the recruitment and selection of the instructional leader.
- ✓ The application describes how administrators will be evaluated and by whom.
- ✓ The application describes how the proposed board of trustees will address potential human resource challenges as it grows to scale over the next five years. The application describes the actions that will be taken to attract, develop, and retain an effective leadership team to implement the proposed school.

### **(3) Human Resources**

- ✓ The application describes the qualifications and attributes of an ideal teacher for the proposed school.
- ✓ The application describes the school's plan for staff recruitment, advancement, and retention. The plan should include specific strategies for recruiting and retaining effective teachers.
- ✓ The application describes briefly the teaching program of typical teachers. Indicate how many hours they will be performing instructional duties and other school-related responsibilities they will have outside the classroom (lunch duty, dismissal, advisory group, after-school program).
- ✓ The application explains the school's working conditions and compensation package(s) that will attract highly qualified staff. Be clear on the specific commitments expected of and made to school employees, including leadership, administrators, faculty, and non-instructional staff.
- ✓ The application explains how individual base salaries and increases will be determined for all employees, including leadership, administrators, teachers, and non-instructional staff.
- ✓ The application includes a staffing chart and narrative staffing plan, for each year of the proposed charter school within the five year term of the charter that is viable and adequate for the effective implementation of the proposed educational program. Explain the process of determining job positions, roles, and responsibilities that provides evidence of knowledge of opening and operating a high quality charter school. Indicate the number of administrators by title, the number of faculty including classroom teachers by grade and/or subject, the number of aides or assistants, the number of special student service

providers, and other specialists, clerical staff, and any other school employees. Include contractors or district resources as applicable. Ensure the chart and plan are consistent with the submitted budget, the organizational chart(s), student enrollment planning, and staffing levels described in other sections of the application.

#### **D. Facilities and Student Transportation**

The school must provide facilities and transportation that meet applicable state and federal requirements, are suited to its programs, and are sufficient to serve diverse student needs.

When describing plans for school facilities and student transportation, the application should address the following criteria:

- ✓ The application describes the process for identifying viable options for a facility for this school and any sites already identified. Explain why these sites were chosen as possibilities. If a specific facility has not been determined, describe the applicant group's plan for identifying possible locations, choosing the final location, securing all necessary local building approvals for use of the facility as a charter school, and securing financing.
- ✓ If possible, the application includes a layout and description of the proposed charter school facility. Include the number and size of classrooms, common areas, and recreational space.
- ✓ If a facility has not been selected, the application includes potential locations that are under consideration and discusses the process and timeline for selecting, acquiring, renovating as applicable, and occupying a suitable facility.
- ✓ The application describes the financing plans and proposed budget for acquisition (purchase or lease) of a facility and any necessary renovations to meet the school's needs, to meet all local building requirements for use of the facility as a charter school, and to meet accessibility requirements. Please be aware that Commonwealth charter schools may take out loans, but the loan may not extend beyond the term of the charter without approval of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, M.G.L. c. 71, § 89(k) (6).
- ✓ The application includes plans for student transportation and describes how transportation services will be provided to eligible students. The application states explicit intent to utilize district transportation services or to provide services independently of the district.
- ✓ The application explains how students who are physically challenged will be transported and how all students, staff, parents, and the general public who are physically challenged will have access to the school facility in accordance with state and federal law.

#### **E. School Finances**

Having the capability to manage school finances is essential for accountability and organizational viability. Comprehensive financial planning is an indispensable tool for successful charter school planning, program implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of resource allocations. In this section, we ask applicants to describe their proposed fiscal policies and procedures; complete a five year operating budget; complete a cash flow projection for the first year of operation; and provide a descriptive budget narrative. The school finances narrative and budget should demonstrate knowledge of the practical matters relevant to the operation of a school.

## **(1) Fiscal Management**

- ✓ The application explains the systems and procedures for managing the school's finances, describes the role(s) responsible for financial oversight and managements and describes his/her qualifications.
- ✓ The application describes the fiscal controls and financial management policies the board of trustees employs to remain informed of the school's financial position.
- ✓ The application describes how the school will track finances in its daily business operations in order to maintain needed cash-flow.
- ✓ The application describes contingency planning for potential challenges in cash flow or budget shortfalls due to lower than anticipated student enrollment or other financial challenges in the early years of operation, including specific strategies.

## **(2) Operating Budget and Budget Narrative**

- ✓ The application explains how the budget and cash flow projection were developed and the process used by the applicant group to ensure the accuracy and realistic nature of their final projections.
- ✓ The application summarizes financial forecasts from the school's start-up phase through its fifth year of operation. Financial forecasts must include total expected realistic sources of revenue—including tuition and other grants (federal, state, and private), and fundraising—as well as all expenditures, the timeframe for a positive cash balance, and the anticipated growth of the school. Define and give support for the assumptions behind projections.
- ✓ Applicants must submit a cash flow projection for the first year of operation, and a multi-year budget from the school's start-up phase through its fifth year of operation. Cash flow projections are expected to reflect a similar level of detail to the budget template used for the annual budgets – see templates.
- ✓ The cash flow projection and budget need to be realistic and reflect the expenses related to all commitments proposed in the application, through the proposed school's fifth year of operation, including the school's educational program, expected student population of students with disabilities and English language learners, human resources needs, and the acquiring and repayment of potential debt.
- ✓ The cash flow projection narrative should discuss and explain the assumptions behind the projections made for the first year of operation.
- ✓ The budget narrative should discuss and explain the projected revenue and expense amounts in the budget, including descriptions of administrative and instructional staff and other operating expenses. Provide detailed explanations for each of the five years of the draft budget. Define and give support for the assumptions behind projections.
- ✓ The application explains how the school will ensure it has sufficient funds to cover all anticipated expenses, including but not limited to start-up costs, and school operation.
- ✓ The application describes whether the applicant group expects the school to raise additional funds and why. The application briefly describes any planned fundraising efforts and who will lead and coordinate these efforts. The application briefly describes any financing, short-term or long-term, that the school anticipates securing during the period covered by this budget, including the planning and first year implementation period.

## **F. Action Plan**

After a charter is granted, but before the school opens is a time of great activity. The action plan outlines the steps that need to be taken within a clear timeline for opening the school.

The applicant group's Action Plan should:

- ✓ Outline the strategies, steps, designated point person and provide a clear timeline for opening the school, dating from March 1<sup>st</sup>, in the year the charter is granted to the first day of school. The action plan should be specific and consistent with the proposal's objectives, and outline the steps that need to be taken for a successful school launch. In a chart, describe the timeline; action(s) to be taken (specific to and consistent with the application's objectives); designated point person; and start date and projected completion date.

## Required Attachments – Final Application

Limited to **40** pages

All attachments should be sequentially numbered and clearly referred to in the text. The choice of non-required attachments is up to the applicant group, though attachments should be used to provide additional evidence, support a particular aspect of the application, or lend insight into the applicant group.

Required and counted toward 40 page maximum:

- Draft Bylaws (use Bylaws Checklist).
- Draft Recruitment and Retention Plan (use Recruitment and Retention Plan Template).
- Draft Enrollment Policy (use Enrollment Policy Checklist).
- Draft Organizational Chart.
- Operating Budget: Projected Revenues and Expenditures, and Cash Flow Projection.

Required, but not counted toward 40 page maximum:

- Cover Sheet
- Table of Contents
- Applicant Information Sheet
- Appropriate Certification Statement
- General Statement of Assurances - Application for a Massachusetts Public Charter School
- Statement of Assurances - Federal Charter School Program Grant
- Executive Summary (no more than three pages)
- Individual resumes from each founding group member, indicating if a founder is a proposed board member, proposed school leader, or proposed for any other position(s).
- Individual completed questionnaires of each founding group member. There are two different versions of the questionnaire: one for proposed board members, and one for proposed school employees and/or founding group members who are playing an advisory role.
- Description of curriculum scope and sequence for grade levels beyond those required in the text of the application, including the content and skills to be taught in the core content areas.
- Draft management or EMO contract (if applicable).