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| **final application REVIEW 2016-2017** |
| **Proposed School Name (Commonwealth):** | Hampden Charter School of Science West |
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| **Grades Served At Full Capacity:** | 6-12 |
| **Number of Students At Full Capacity:** | 588 |
| **Proposed School Location:** | Westfield |
| **Proposed Opening Year:** | 2018-2019 |
| **Proposed Charter Region:** | Westfield[[1]](#footnote-1), Agawam, Holyoke, and West Springfield |
| **Mission Statement:**The mission of Hampden Charter School of Science West (HCSS-West) is to provide a college preparatory-focused education to the youth of every race and ethnic group in Agawam, Holyoke, West Springfield, and Westfield in a safe, academically challenging, and caring educational environment. Our promise is to sustain small school size, to provide extended math and science curriculum, individualized attention, college guidance, and university outreach programs, and to encourage student-teacher-parent partnership. Fulfillment of our mission will empower our students with the support necessary to reach their highest intellectual, emotional, social, and physical potentials, building on the inherent promise to aid students’ preparation for college.**Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:**

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| **School Year** | **Grade Levels** | **Total Student  Enrollment** |
| First Year | 6-9 | 252 |
| Second Year | 6-10 | 336 |
| Third Year | 6-11 | 420 |
| Fourth Year | 6-12 | 504 |
| Fifth Year | 6-12 | 525 |

**Note:** The applicant group is the board of trustees of the Hampden Charter School of Science (HCSS), a Commonwealth charter school which opened in 2009. The existing HCSS serves students in grades 6-12, with a maximum enrollment of 560, who are residents of Chicopee, Ludlow, Springfield, and West Springfield.The Department has compiled a summary of the evidence identified through the review of the charter application, the responses provided by the applicant group during the subsequent interview, and the testimony and comment provided at the public hearing and during the public comment period. The below summary describes the evidence identified that addresses the application criteria and identifies the areas of the application criteria where limited evidence was provided during the application process.**Public Comment:**The application received testimony and written comment **in support** during the public hearing and public comment process. At the public hearing, 34 speakers spoke in favor of the proposed school, including community members, parents, Hampden Charter School of Science (HCSS) staff members, HCSS students, HCSS alumni, two members of the applicant group, and Massachusetts Charter Public School Association Executive Director Marc Kenen. The Department received two letters in support of the proposed school, including one from a school employee.The application received testimony and written comment **in opposition** during the public hearing and public comment process. At the public hearing, six speakers spoke in opposition to the proposed school, including Westfield School Committee member Cynthia Sullivan, teachers, parents, and community members. The Department received 15 letters from community members opposed to the school, including one from Gateway Regional School Committee Chair Michele Crane and 11 from Gateway Regional School District employees. The districts which comprise the Gateway Regional School District serving grades PK-12, Blandford, Chester, Huntington, Middlefield, Montgomery, and Russell, are not included in the proposed school’s charter region but located in bordering communities. |

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| **Mission (I.A.) and Key Design Elements (I.B.)**

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| **Identified Evidence** | **Limited Evidence**  |
| * The purpose of the school as defined by the mission is to provide a college preparatory-focused education in a safe, academically challenging, and caring educational environment. (I.A.)
* The mission communicates the applicant group’s core beliefs and values, that students’ academic success requires individualized attention and collaboration between students, teachers, and parents. (I.A.)
* The mission, with its focus on preparing students for college, is consistent with high academic standards and student success. The mission is generally reflected throughout all sections of the application. (I.A.)
* The application briefly describes essential elements of the applicant group’s educational philosophy. These elements largely reiterate statements included in the mission, while introducing some additional elements such as setting high expectations and using project-based instruction. (I.B.)
* The five key design elements are generally aligned with the mission statement and are generally reflected throughout all sections of the application. The application identifies the following five key design elements:
* Rigorous academic program with extended math, science and computer technology curriculum;
* Problem and project-based instructional approaches for contextual learning;
* Individualized attention;
* College and career readiness; and
* Supportive, structured, collaborative, and positive school culture achieved by student-teacher-parent partnership. (I.B.)
* The application describes key academic and non-academic goals for students identical to those included in the HCSS approved Accountability Plan. (I.B.)
* The application states that the school will improve access to rigorous curriculum with a math, science, and technology focus, referencing state data in these areas by students in the proposed sending districts. (I.B.)
* The application illustrates the school’s future, describing how successful graduates will serve as role models in the community and how the community will benefit from the high level of parental involvement fostered by the school. (I.B.)
 | * No primary concerns noted.
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| **Description of the Community to Be Served and Enrollment and Recruitment (I.C. and I.D.)**

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| **Identified Evidence** | **Limited Evidence**  |
| * The application states that the sending districts were selected based on their record of performance on state assessments, and goes on to describe proficiency, growth, and graduation rates in those districts. The application also notes the percentages of English learners (ELs) and students with disabilities in the proposed sending districts. During the interview, members of the applicant group stated that multiple board members and HCSS staff members live in the communities to be served by the proposed school. The applicant group also described existing partnerships in those communities that already benefit HCSS, including partnerships with Westfield State University and Western New England University. (I.C.)
* The application briefly describes how elements of the proposed school program will address concerns with low performance in the sending districts, preparing all students, including ELs, students with disabilities and students identified as economically disadvantaged, for success in college. (I.C.)
* The school’s plan to provide families opportunities to support the success of the school is part of the school’s key design element emphasizing student-teacher-parent partnership. In addition to regular communication between the school and parents, parents are invited and encouraged to participate in activities related to guiding students through the college selection and application process. (I.C.)
* The application indicates that the school will enroll 63 students in each grade to begin with, starting with grades 6-9 in year one. Starting in year two, grade cohorts will begin transitioning to 84 students, and the school will add a grade in each of the following four years. The school will be fully expanded by the 2025-2026 school year with a total enrollment of 588 students. (I.D.)
* During the interview, members of the applicant group stated that there are financial reasons for the school’s proposed enrollment size and for opening with grades 6-9. During the launch of the flagship school, student enrollment during the first year of operation was below targets and impacted initial financial resources. During the interview, current school employees noted that the reputation of the flagship school will play a role in recruiting sufficient student enrollment at the proposed school. Members of the applicant group provided a number of reasons they believe the school will be able to attract and retain high school students, including Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings; access to college scholarships and dual enrollment courses; and athletic programs. (I.D.)
* The application contained an enrollment plan that did not take into account student attrition or clearly indicate access for new students. The school has consulted with the Department regarding its enrollment practices and provided additional information regarding the school’s plans to admit new students in grades 6-10, exceeding current requirements. (I.D.)
 | * The application does not describe adequate supporting evidence for the projected student enrollment. The applicant group assessed parental demand by administering surveys in public settings within the proposed charter region (such as the shopping mall in Holyoke) in 2015 and 2016. The application cites the results of these surveys as evidence of need for a college-preparatory school and a student population that is eligible to attend. (I.C.)
* The application includes a draft recruitment and retention plan as an attachment. The plan largely mirrors HCSS’s recruitment and retention plan, which has not been successful to date in recruiting a student population comparable to the student population in that school’s sending districts. Based on a Department analysis known as the comparison index, HCSS does not enroll English learners or students with disabilities at rates similar to other secondary schools in its charter region. (I.D.)
* Plans to collaborate with sending districts are limited, listing a few potential areas for collaboration and indicating that the school will make its curriculum available. During the interview, the HCSS dean of special services and proposed network dean of special services described attending meetings with staff members from other schools in the area, providing professional development support to another charter school, and sharing about project-based learning with pre-service teachers from Westfield State University. (I.C.)
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| **Overview of Program Delivery and Curriculum and Instruction (II.A. and II.B.)**

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| **Identified Evidence** | **Limited Evidence**  |
| * The application indicates the school will be in session for 182 days, with regular school days starting at 8:00 a.m. and ending at 4:00 p.m., with after-school programs running until 4:45. (II.A.)
* The application indicates that an SAT preparation program will be offered to students on Saturdays and during the summer. There will be no charge for the program for students identified as economically disadvantaged. (II.A.)
* The application lists and describes (in an attachment) extra and co-curricular activities that the school will offer. These include a number of activities related to the school’s focus on math, science, and technology, along with a range of more traditional after school activities. (II.A.)
* The application states that the proposed school will use the same curriculum that is used at HCSS, and cites the academic success of students at HCSS as evidence of the curriculum’s strength. (II.B.)
* The application describes the process for aligning the curriculum with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF) at HCSS. Department heads identify the relevant learning standards for each course and monitor that teachers’ lesson plans are aligned with the standards. The dean of academics oversees the curriculum alignment process. (II.B.)
* The application describes a systematic and collaborative process for the ongoing development, improvement, and refinement of the curriculum at the HCSS and indicates that the same process would be used at the proposed school. The process is overseen by the dean of academics. (II.B.)
* The application describes the learning environment that will be replicated at the proposed school. Class sizes will typically be limited to around 20 students, with a student to staff ratio of about 11 to 1. This is intended to facilitate a closer working relationship between students and staff. Classroom environments will also be rich in the use of technology, including smart boards and computer based instruction in science and mathematics. (II.B.)
* The application states that the proposed school will use the teacher evaluation system developed at HCSS, which is based on the Massachusetts Framework for Educator Evaluation. Teachers are evaluated on an annual basis. The application does not specify who conducts the evaluations. During the interview, the HCSS dean of academics and proposed network chief academic officer said that teachers receive walkthrough visits two to three times a week by department chairs and administrators and four more lengthy observations each year. The final observation is conducted by the school director, who also completes the evaluation based on data gathered throughout the year. The school director of the proposed school would be responsible for evaluating teachers at that school. (II.B.)
 | * The application includes a limited description of the instructional methods to be used. It is unclear how one of the key design elements, project and problem-based instructional approaches for contextual learning, is integrated into day-to-day instruction. (II.B.)
* The application contains a brief plan for supporting high standards of achievement for all students that appears to rely heavily on tutoring. (II.B.)
* The application lists opportunities for teachers to collaborate, such as child study team meetings, grade level meetings, department meetings, and so forth, but provides a limited description of the structures for collaboration. Likewise, the application indicates that the school plans to train and support teachers to address the unique needs of students, but provides few specifics. (II.B.)
* The application states that professional development needs will be determined by administrators using a variety of inputs, but provides a limited description of the process to determine needs and is vague with regard to the amount of time to be devoted to professional development. (II.B.)
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| **Student Performance, Assessment, and Program Evaluation (II.C.)**

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| **Identified Evidence** | **Limited Evidence**  |
| * The application outlines the proposed school’s policies and standards for promotion and graduation. These are identical to those used at HCSS. (II.C.)
* The proposed school will use the student assessment system used at HCSS. The system incorporates external assessments (state tests, PSAT, SAT) and internal assessments (benchmark and quarterly assessments, classroom assignments, homework, quizzes, and exams). The system also incorporates non-academic measures, including discipline measures, positive behavior points, and a student of the month program. (II.C.)
* The proposed school will use the same electronic system as the flagship school to record, analyze, and share all student data between the student, staff members, and parents. Teachers use data to inform changes in their approach to meeting students’ needs. Teachers and administrators use data to identify areas of student need and to inform professional development. The board uses data to evaluate the school leader and to identify areas of strength and concern. (II.C.)
 | * The application includes a limited description of how the school’s graduation requirements are consistent with the school’s mission or how they ensure college and career readiness. A table attached to the application showing graduation requirements includes a requirement that students complete 40 hours of volunteer work. This is not referenced in the application. (II.C.)
* The action plan created for each student, an important part of the student performance and assessment system, is not clearly described in the application. During the interview, members of the applicant group stated that the action plan is developed with input from all of a student’s teachers and includes elements specific to different content areas. The plan is revised quarterly. (II.C.)
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| **Supports for Diverse Learners (II.D.)**

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| **Identified Evidence** | **Limited Evidence**  |
| * The application describes processes and procedures to identify, assess, and serve students who are English learners (ELs) that are generally consistent with Department guidance. (II.D.)
* The application indicates that a dean of special services (a network position) who holds an Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) administrator’s endorsement will split time evenly between the two schools, overseeing up to two full-time English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in years one and two. (II.D.)
* The application describes processes and procedures to identify, assess, and serve students with disabilities that are generally consistent with Department guidance. The application indicates that the proposed school will follow HCSS’s special education handbook. (II.D.)
* The application indicates that students with disabilities will be served primarily in inclusive settings, but that the school will provide a full continuum of services, including pull-out or substantially separate settings as needed. (II.D.)
* The application indicates that the dean of special services will oversee two licensed special education teachers and four paraprofessionals in years one and two. The school plans to contract some services such as speech and language therapy and occupational therapy. (II.D.)
* HCSS is the only Commonwealth charter school participating in Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment with a higher education partner. The school has partnered with Westfield State University to support high school students with intellectual disabilities in the pursuit of academic and career success. (II.D.)
 | * The application does not describe the curriculum or strategies that will be used in the English language development program. (II.D.)
* The application includes limited details regarding how the English language development and special education programs will be evaluated. (II.D.)
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| **Culture and Family Engagement (II.E.)**

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| **Identified Evidence** | **Limited Evidence**  |
| * The application states that the culture of the proposed school will be carried over from HCSS: “a safe environment in which to learn, opportunities to celebrate their cultural diversity, and programs that are offered to make learning fun and competitive.” Class sizes will be small, as they are at HCSS, in order to enable staff members to spend more time with each student. Staff members are expected to be dedicated to the overall well-being of students, which includes an expectation that they be involved in extracurricular activities. The school will require students in grades 6-8 to participate in character education classes designed to instill such values as accountability, compassion, integrity, tolerance, and leadership. The school will offer a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, many of them related to the school’s focus on math, science, and technology. The application does not further describe opportunities for students to celebrate cultural diversity. (II.E.)
* The proposed school will provide a range of programs and services to address the physical, social, emotional, and health needs of students, including speech and language therapy, counseling services, physical education, access to a school nurse, and free breakfast and lunch (to be provided to all students). (II.E.)
* The proposed school will adopt plans for student discipline and behavior that are used at HCSS. The discipline system incorporates the use of points for merits and demerits, and is overseen by the school director, dean of students, and assistant dean of students. (II.E.)
* The application describes how parents will be involved as partners. The school plans to use an online system for sharing student data, both academic and behavioral. The system can be accessed by parents as well as by students and teachers. Teachers will be expected to respond to any parent communication within 24 hours, and to conduct a minimum of five home visits each year. The school’s activity coordinator will send weekly newsletters and update the school’s online calendar and social media feeds. The school will offer a variety of activities for families, including parent teacher meetings, cultural celebrations, informational meetings, athletic events, concerts, and activities associated with the college selection and application process. (II.E.)
 | * The application includes a limited description of the relationships the applicant group has established or intends to establish with community agencies and organizations that will support the school’s educational program. The application states that HCSS has built relationships with professors from a number of colleges and universities who have served as guest judges for the science fair, as speakers at assemblies, and with STEM-related (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) field trips and events. During the interview, members of the applicant group indicated that these same partnerships would benefit the proposed school, and that they anticipate developing additional partnerships in the communities to be served by the proposed school. (II.E.)
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| **Capacity and Governance (III.A. and III.B.)**

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| **Identified Evidence** | **Limited Evidence**  |
| * The applicant group consists of current board members of HCSS and the HCSS school leader. The application describes the relevant experience and skills of each member of the applicant group. The group as a whole possesses experience in the areas of education, management, finance, development, real estate, law, community development, and in STEM fields. Members of the group have tangible ties to the communities the school will serve. (III.A.)
* The flagship school has achieved Level 1 status within the state’s accountability system since 2013. The school is currently in its eighth year of operation and graduated 130 students thus far. The school is currently implementing an enrollment increase from 350 to 560 students to be completed by 2019-2020. (III.A.)
* The current school leader and proposed Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Tarkan Topcuoglu, was the school’s dean of academics prior to his role as CEO of a charter school in New Jersey. During his five years as CEO, Mr. Topcuoglu led the school to National Blue Ribbon status and was awarded the Terrel H. Bell Award for Outstanding School Leadership by the United States Department of Education in 2016. (III.A.)
* The application explains that the organizational structure that exists for HCSS will be expanded to include a network layer consisting of a CEO who will oversee a number of network staff in addition to the leaders of HCSS and proposed school. In the new organizational structure, the CEO will report to the board. (III.B.)
* The application indicates that the board will continue to operate with the same officers and committees, and will follow the same policies and procedures outlined in the current bylaws. These include policies and procedures for conducting meetings, handling inquiries and complaints, developing policies, recruiting and orienting new board members, and evaluating the board’s performance. During the interview, board members stated that the CEO will provide updates on both schools at each meeting, and that the governance committee will develop an action plan for the startup period. During the interview, board members also described the process they followed in making a recent decision to change the schedule. The school director brought the proposal to the board based on input from students, parents, and faculty. (III.B.)
 | * The application does not provide adequate evidence that the applicant group has broad and diverse representation from the communities the school will serve. (III.A.)
* The flagship school is currently in its eighth year of operation and has undergone one renewal in 2014 and the approval of an increase in enrollment from 350 to 560 students in 2015. The expansion of the flagship school is anticipated to be completed in the 2019-2020 school year. In addition to the current expansion at the flagship school, the school is reviewing the length of its school day in a response to stakeholder feedback and may seek to shorten the school day. A change to the current or the proposed school’s schedule is subject to Department review and approval by the Commissioner. (III.A.)
* The application briefly notes that the board will have more work to accomplish in overseeing a network of two schools, but does not explain what additional resources may be required or invested to ensure success. With regard to board capacity to oversee the expansion, during the interview, board members stated that they have recently added two new members. They also indicated they plan to seek an amendment to the board bylaws to increase the number of terms permitted under the board’s bylaws which would allow founding trustees to remain on the board beyond their current terms of nine years. Any amendment to the bylaws is subject to Department review and approval by the Commissioner. (III.B.)
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| **Management (III.C.)**

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| **Identified Evidence** | **Limited Evidence**  |
| * The application includes an organizational chart showing the network layer that will be added. The CEO will oversee the directors of HCSS and the proposed school, along with four additional network staff: a chief academic officer (who will in turn oversee four network curriculum coordinators), a dean of special services, a chief financial officer, and a chief technology officer. The application clearly explains the reporting structure and lines of communication between the board, the network staff, and staff at the proposed school. (III.C.)
* The application describes a plan for making key organizational decisions regarding curriculum, instructional leadership, student achievement, personnel, financial management, and operations. The plan is designed to encourage collaboration among multiple stakeholders across the network, partly for purposes of maintaining consistency in the programming offered at both schools. The plan also indicates who is ultimately responsible for each type of decision. Significantly, although school directors are to be involved in the recruitment and evaluation of staff members, the CEO retains ultimate responsibility for staffing decisions at both schools. (III.C.)
* The application indicates that no one has been identified for any of the new network positions or for positions at the proposed school, but states that there are multiple staff members at HCSS who may be candidates for positions within the network or at the proposed school. Before the interview, the applicant group identified HCSS school director Tarkan Topcuoglu as the proposed network CEO. During the interview, board members described Mr. Topcuoglu’s experience at HCSS and his success as the leader and CEO of a school in New Jersey as evidence of his capacity to serve as network CEO. Other positions that have been identified include HCSS dean of academics Murat Polat as the proposed network chief academic officer, HCSS dean of special services Robyn Nelson as the proposed network dean of special services, and HCSS’s four current department heads as network curriculum coordinators. (III.C.)
* The application describes the attributes of teachers to be recruited for the proposed school, and states that the same processes will be used to recruit, hire, and retain teachers that are currently used at HCSS. During the interview, members of the applicant group described plans to develop the capacity of HCSS staff members to take on new responsibilities at the proposed school or to replace staff members leaving for the proposed school. Members of the applicant group also stated that they expect Westfield State University, with whom HCSS has an existing partnership, will be a source of teachers. In order to retain teachers, applicant group members stated that HCSS has developed an induction program and a mentoring program for new teachers, regularly highlights good things teachers are doing, seeks their input in the budget process, and has two deans of students to better support teachers in managing classroom behavior. HCSS also increased base salaries and implemented a system of rewarding teacher performance with financial bonuses. (III.C.)
 | * The application includes a staffing chart but a limited narrative to explain the staffing plan. Most administrative positions will be filled in year one. During the interview, members of the applicant group clarified that for the proposed school’s charter term, most network staff members will also function as administrators at one of the two schools. For example, the network chief academic officer will also serve as dean of academics at one school. (III.C.)
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| **Facilities, Student Transportation and Finances (III.D. and III.E.)**

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| **Identified Evidence** | **Limited Evidence**  |
| * The applicant group is currently exploring three different facility options within the proposed charter region in consultation with a local real estate agent. The school is also exploring the possibility of working with the Charter School Development Corporation to acquire and develop a school facility. During the interview, members of the applicant group indicated that network offices would be housed in the proposed school. (III.D.)
* The application states that the proposed school will provide transportation to students who are residents of the proposed charter region. The application states the applicant group’s intent to ensure that students who are physically challenged will be transported and have access to the school facility in accordance with state and federal laws. (III.D.)
* The application cites the current school’s track record of fiscal responsibility, and indicates that the processes for overseeing the proposed school’s finances will be similar, with some modifications reflecting the network structure that is to be developed. (III.E.)
* The proposed school will apply for a line of credit to be used to cover temporary deficits, if there are any. The current school has a $450K line of credit, and the application includes a letter of support from the bank. (III.E.)
* Network expenses are to be shared proportionally between HCSS and the proposed school based on enrollment. (III.E.)
* The budget for the proposed school was developed using the assumptions built into the budget for HCSS. (III.E.)
 | * The application includes a limited discussion of the facilities that would be required to meet the school’s needs and of the financing plans and proposed budget. (III.D., III.E.)
* The application includes a limited budget narrative, including the assumptions behind the projections made for the pre-operational year. During the interview, the board treasurer indicated that not providing the assumptions that had been developed for the application was an oversight. (III.E.)
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1. The applicant group has indicated possible facility options in all four municipalities within the proposed charter region. During the interview, the board of trustees indicated the possible use of a temporary location during the first year of operation while a permanent facility was being renovated or constructed. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)