*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley*Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:**  | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:**  | January 17, 2023 |
| **Subject:** | Charter Schools – Application for New Charter School |

By statute, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) grants charters for new charter schools at its meeting in February. This year, one charter application is eligible for consideration.

In August 2022, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) received one initial application for the proposed Worcester Cultural Academy Charter Public School (WCACPS). The Department also received a request for a proven provider determination from the existing board of trustees of the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School (PVCICS), relating to its proposal to establish a new school. Existing boards of trustees seeking to establish a new charter school may omit submission of an initial application but still undergo a proven provider review at the initial application stage, if required.

I invited both applicant groups to submit final applications after the conclusion of my review. In November 2022, the Department received two final charter applications. Only the proposed WCACPS, however, is eligible for charter award and is currently under consideration. The proposed Central Massachusetts Chinese Immersion Charter School (CMCICS), sought by the board of trustees of PVCICS, is ineligible for charter award due to specific limitations in the charter school statute.

The charter school statute requires that at least two of the new Commonwealth charters approved in any year be for charter schools located in districts with MCAS performance in the lowest 10 percent statewide. The Board may grant additional charters only after two such charters are granted.[[1]](#footnote-2) Because WCACPS is a single district proposal for location in Worcester, a district performing in the lowest 10 percent of all districts based on MCAS test results in 2018 and 2019, that proposal is eligible for charter award.

The board of trustees of PVCICS, however, did not propose a charter region identified as a lowest 10 percent district for CMCICS.[[2]](#footnote-3) Because only one other applicant group submitted a final charter application, the application for the proposed CMCICS is ineligible for consideration under the limitations in the charter school statute.

This memorandum provides a preview of the charter application currently under review and describes the Department’s review process. The proposed school is listed in the table that follows. The executive summary for the final application, as prepared by the applicant group, is attached.

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| **Proposed Commonwealth Charter School Name** | **Districts to be Served** | **Grade Span**  | **Max Enrollment**  | **Proposed****Opening Date**  |
| Worcester Cultural Academy Charter Public School | Worcester | K-8 | 360 | 2023 |

Also attached is a detailed description of the review process and the criteria for Commonwealth charter school applications. Briefly, the charter school final application review process includes the components that follow.

* Public comment*.* During the current application process, the Board held a public hearing in December in Worcester. Three Board members attended the hearing. The Department also invited written comments from Worcester Public Schools. Written comments were also accepted from other government officials and members of the public. Prior to the February meeting, you will receive access to a recording of the public hearing and copies of all written comments that the Department has received. In addition, the Chair will ask those Board members who attended the hearing to make brief oral reports to the full Board at the February meeting if the Commissioner recommends the applicant group to receive a charter.
* Review panel*.* In December, a review panel of external reviewers met to discuss the applicant group’s response to the application criteria and to identify areas of the application where clarification from the applicant was needed.
* Interview*.* In January, the Department conducted an interview with the applicant group. Applicant groups typically have the following individuals participate in the interview: proposed members of its board of trustees; proposed school employees, if identified; and representatives of anticipated partners in the operation of the school, if identified. The Department prepares a summary of the applicant interview, which will be sent to the Board if the applicant group is recommended for charter award.

Prior to your February meeting, I will forward my recommendation to the Board regarding the award of a new charter. In the meantime, if you have any questions on the pending charter application or the review process, please contact Alison Bagg, Director, at 781-338-3218; Alyssa Hopkins, Assistant Director, at 781-605-4476; Cliff Chuang, Senior Associate Commissioner, at 781-338-3222; or me.

Attachments: Description of the Charter Application Review Process

Criteria for Review of Charter Applications

Executive Summary of Proposed Worcester Cultural Academy Charter Public School

1. “Not less than 2 of the new commonwealth charters approved by the board [of elementary and secondary education] in any year shall be granted for charter schools located in districts where overall student performance on the statewide assessment system approved by the board under section 1I of chapter 69 is in the lowest 10 per cent statewide in the 2 years preceding the charter application.” G.L. c. 71, § 89(i)(2) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The Department completes an analysis of all applications for regional Commonwealth charter schools, like the proposed CMCICS, to determine if the proposed charter region, as a composite, constitutes a lowest 10 percent district as described in the charter school statute. The Department informed PVCICS of the ineligibility of its proposed charter region when the PVCICS board requested a proven provider review at the initial application stage. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)