*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley*Commissioner* |  |

# Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools

# Review Process for Applications

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) conducts a thorough review of applications for Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools (CMVS) that is consistent with statute and regulation.

## **Objective of the Process**

The objective of the review process for virtual school applications is to award certificates to applicants who demonstrate the potential to create virtual public schools that are of high quality. The Department conducts a process with multiple phases that includes participation by internal and external reviewers, opportunities for public comment, a review of the learning management system,[[1]](#footnote-2) and an interview with each applicant group. The prospectuses and final applications are reviewed against criteria outlined in the virtual school statute, regulations, and the CMVS application.

**Prospectus and Final Application Review**

The Department utilizes multiple reviewers for prospectuses and final applications including members and former members of the Digital Learning Advisory Council, experts in virtual education and digital learning, school governance and finance, and services for students with disabilities and English language learners, and Department staff. Teams of reviewers read the prospectuses and final CMVS applications with reference to the criteria in the CMVS application.

At the prospectus stage, the Department incorporates the written review of the external reviewers in its evaluation of each prospectus. Upon completion of its evaluation, the Department provides applicants with a comprehensive written summary containing evidence of significant strengths and weaknesses based on the application criteria. The Department requests final applications from applicant groups that adequately address the majority of the application criteria and that demonstrate the potentialto create a public school of high quality.

At the final application stage, review panels discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the application based upon the application criteria and identify areas where clarification from the applicant is needed. This process helps to generate questions for the next step, an interview with each applicant group.

**Review of Learning Management System (LMS)**

The applicant must provide the Department with access to its LMS and must provide a live demonstration of its LMS. The Department examines features of the applicant’s LMS and whether it will enhance student learning, communication, and efficiency. The Department also examines the overall performance, security, data-handling, interoperability, and accessibility of the LMS.

**Public Comment**

The Department holds a public hearing to solicit comments on final applications. At least one member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) presides over each hearing and will provide a report to the full Board if the Commissioner recommends that the Board award a certificate to the proposed CMVS. The Department reviews all oral and written comments and requires the applicant group to address any substantial issues that were raised in the comments, during the applicant interview.

## **Interviews**

The Department interviews all final applicant groups. Interviews last approximately two hours. The interviews allow applicants to respond to questions about their proposed school and issues of capacity identified in the review of their applications. Interviewers note the degree to which the applicant group successfully addresses the identified weaknesses of its application and evaluate, in person, the capacity of the applicant group including the proposed board of trustees, proposed employees, and proposed partner organizations.

**Commissioner Recommendation**

The Department summarizes the evidence gathered during the application process. Department staff present all of the information to the Commissioner and, based upon the information presented, the Commissioner determines whether to recommend that the Board award a certificate to the proposed CMVS.

1. A learning management system (LMS) is a software application or web-based technology used to administer, automate, and deliver educational courses and materials. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)