



**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**  
**FY2016 Application for Grants under the Charter Schools Program**  
**(CFDA Number: 84.282A)**

**Massachusetts Charter Schools Program Project 2016-2021**

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**Important Note:**

Under Massachusetts’ charter school statute (M.G.L. c. 71, § 89) (App. 1 ) and charter school regulations (603 CMR 1.00), (App. 2 ) the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) is the sole public charter authorizer in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. BESE acts through its administrative arm, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), led by its commissioner, Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D. (Commissioner), who is assisted by ESE’s Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign (OCSSR) for all delegable authorization and oversight responsibilities for charter schools.

## **ABSOLUTE PRIORITIES**

### **Absolute Priority 1: Periodic Review and Evaluation**

The [Massachusetts charter school statute M.G.L. c. 71, §89](#) and the [Massachusetts charter school regulations](#) (App. <sup>1</sup> 1 and 2) authorizes the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to issue charters for a term of 5 years, with a high-stakes renewal decision required every 5 years, unless poor academic performance or lack of operational viability dictate an earlier decision. For a description of Massachusetts comprehensive periodic review and evaluation system for charter schools, including all state statutory, regulatory, and administrative requirements, see [Selection Criteria \(f\)\(2\)\(ii\)](#).

### **Absolute Priority 2: Charter School Oversight**

*(a) (1) Operates under a legally binding charter or performance contract.* State law (App. 1) outlines the rights and responsibilities of charter schools and the public chartering agency, as well as describing performance expectations and the material terms of a school's charter. A founding group's final application, serves as the basis for BESE's granting a charter, and establishes the material terms of the charter. This charter operates as a legally binding agreement that the school enters into with the SEA-authorizer. The specific material terms of each school's charter include the school name, mission, location, leadership and governance structure, districts served, maximum enrollment, and grades served. Other key policy document serve as material terms of the charter and legally obligate each school as well: Accountability Plan-includes clear performance expectations;<sup>2</sup> bylaws; enrollment policy; expulsion policy; schedule (length of school year, week, and day); board of trustees' membership roster; management contracts (if applicable); and Memoranda of Understanding (for Horace Mann charter schools).

*(2) Conducts annual, timely, and independent audits of financial statements.*

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<sup>1</sup> "App." followed by a number will be used to indicate a document that is included in the Appendix to this application.

<sup>2</sup> The Accountability Plan is a performance contract, outlining a school's objectives and measures for demonstrating achievement of its mission and key design elements, and the school's commitment to meet the Charter School Performance Criteria as further described in [Competitive Preference Priority 1\(a\)\(1 & 2\)](#).

Massachusetts' charter school statute (App. 1) requires each charter school to have an independent audit of its accounts conducted annually, consistent with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States, and consistent with [Massachusetts Charter School Audit Guide](#)<sup>3</sup> (App. 3), issued by the Department of Elementary and Secondary (ESE). In addition to outlining comprehensive requirements for auditing the school's accounts, the Audit Guide details requirements for a specific Agreed Upon Procedures (AUP) engagement for any charter school receiving a Charter School Program grant (CSP) funds to ensure dedicated monitoring of CSP subgrants. If a charter school received \$750,000 or more in federal funds, requiring an A-133 audit, the CSP grant will be monitored as a separate program fulfilling the criteria in the AUP. Audits must be filed annually on or before November 1<sup>st</sup> with ESE and the Office of the State Auditor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

**(3) Demonstrates improved student academic achievement.** All Massachusetts charter schools must demonstrate improved academic achievement for all students, as explicitly outlined in the Charter School Statute, M.G.L. c. 71, 89(dd) (App. 1), the [Charter School Performance Criteria](#)<sup>4</sup> (Criteria) (App. 4), and the [Considerations for Charter School Renewal](#)<sup>5</sup> (App. 5), described in further detail in [Selection Criteria \("Sel. Crit."\) f \(2\)\(iii\)](#).

**(b) Increases in student academic achievement as one of most important factors.**

BESE (as sole charter authorizer) uses increases in student academic achievement for all subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v) of the No Child left Behind Act of 2001 as one of the most important factors when determining whether to renew or revoke a school's charter. This assurance is outlined in the Commissioner's memorandum, [Considerations for Charter School Renewal](#) and more fully described in [Sel. Crit. f \(2\) \(iii\)](#).

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/finance/auditing/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=criteria>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=7802>

## COMPETITIVE PREFERENCE PRIORITIES

### **Competitive Preference Priority 1: High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes**

#### ***(a) Multi-tiered clearance or review of a charter school.***

Based upon the parameters of state law, ESE has established a rigorous annual process for the evaluation of charter applications that incorporates clear published criteria used by both applicants and evaluators and employs a multi-tiered review. The process and criteria for charter application review is described in the *Application for a Massachusetts Charter School*, (App. 6), which is updated and published annually in advance of every application cycle (see also [Sel. Crit. f \(1\)\(i\)](#)).

In summary, Massachusetts' charter school application establishes the necessary evidence to identify applicants who are prepared to be successful in the three areas of accountability: (1) faithfulness to charter, (2) academic success, and (3) organizational viability. Each section of the charter application contains specific criteria designed to identify whether applicants have (1) demonstrated alignment of their proposed charter school with the needs of the targeted community and its residents, (2) developed a cohesive and comprehensive design for a high-quality charter school which will recruit, enroll, and serve the Commonwealth's educationally disadvantaged student populations, and (3) shown the expertise and capacity to successfully open and operate the proposed school. All application requirements are aligned to state law and the charter school performance *Criteria*.

The charter application process includes two stages for new operators. New operators submit a preliminary application, called a prospectus, which provides an opportunity to articulate the basic elements of their proposed school design and implementation plan and to receive targeted feedback prior to the submission of a final application. Charter applicants who do not demonstrate the capacity to open and operate a high-quality charter school at the prospectus stage are invited to resubmit their prospectus in a future cycle after further revision and consultation with ESE staff. Applicants who demonstrate capacity and a strong likelihood of

establishing a high-quality charter school are invited to submit a full final application.

ESE develops a detailed analysis of the evidence provided in the prospectus, which is provided to all applicants to clearly identify the areas requiring additional evidence. ESE uses a panel of trained reviewers, both ESE staff and peer experts in the field, to assess each applicant's response to criteria and identify where further development is required. ESE staff has established a cadre of over 100 qualified reviewers, but continues to perform year-round outreach to experts in the field to ensure that each application benefits from a review team typically comprised of at least four external experts and at least three ESE staff at each stage of the review process.

During the second stage of review, applicants submit an application that addresses concerns raised by ESE at the prospectus stage, provides additional information on the targeted community's demand for the proposed charter school, and its five-year implementation plan, including the recruitment and retention of educationally disadvantaged students. ESE then institutes a public comment period for all stakeholders, including a public hearing held in community where the school proposes to locate. This hearing provides an opportunity for community members to demonstrate support of the proposed charter school to ESE and BESE. ESE also performs a capacity interview of the applicant group to augment information provided in the final application and gather additional evidence of the applicant group's ability to open and operate a high-quality charter school as envisioned in its application.

The body of evidence gathered by ESE during the charter application process results in a multi-page report presented to the Commissioner and BESE as well as the applicant group. The report highlights the areas of the criteria and the degree to which they have been addressed by the applicant group. The Commissioner of ESE (Commissioner) makes a recommendation to BESE regarding the applicant groups with the strongest likelihood of establishing a high-quality charter school based upon capacity and the application criteria. BESE reviews the body of evidence prior to making a decision to grant a charter.

After a charter has been awarded, the charter school undergoes a comprehensive opening procedures process, outlined in the annually published *Opening Procedures Handbook* (App. 8).

A new charter school must complete requirements in the handbook in order to open. An ESE staff member participates in an initial board meeting to train trustees and school leadership on opening procedures and to provide an overview of Massachusetts' accountability processes. The successful completion of the opening procedures ensures that the charter school has addressed critical elements of the infrastructure required for public school operation. Failure to demonstrate preparedness prior to the school's opening can have serious consequences, including delayed opening, probation, or revocation of the charter.

During the months prior to opening, Massachusetts' has instituted a number of safeguards to identify readiness to open and to ensure schools stay on track for a successful first year of operation. New schools are required to demonstrate organizational viability through sufficient student enrollment, financial resources, and human capital, as well as compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. ESE provides technical assistance and provides many resources to support a school's effectiveness in meeting these requirements, including policy checklists and guidance to ensure equitable enrollment practices; appropriate fiscal policies and procedures; policies and procedures to appropriately serve educationally disadvantaged student populations, including students with disabilities and English language learners; and equitable student discipline policies and procedures.

***(b) Differentiated review of charter petitions.***

Massachusetts charter school law establishes a number of priorities for authorizing, including applicants who have a track record of prior success, or who seek to establish schools in the state's lowest performing districts. Based upon these priorities, ESE performs a differentiated review of charter applications for current charter school operators (boards of trustees) and groups seeking to establish high-quality charter schools in the lowest performing districts in the Commonwealth. In all review processes, the gathering and development of evidence regarding the likelihood of success for establishing a high-quality charter school is the underlying and primary focus of the charter application review.

The primary focus of the differentiated review for new and current operators is to

distinguish between the capacity required to open and operate one high-quality charter school versus the capacity required to open and operate a network of high-quality charter schools. ESE has established two different versions of the charter application to permit a two-stage process of review for new operators and a one-stage process for current boards of trustees applying for additional charter(s). In order for current boards of trustees to participate in the application process, they must have established a track record of success in the operation of at least one high-quality charter school, as determined by: at least one successful charter renewal; the absence of conditions or probation; identification in the Commonwealth's accountability system as a successful school; and compliance with federal and state laws and regulations. Charter schools that do not meet all of these parameters (i.e., alternative education programs) may consult with ESE regarding their unique circumstances, including the consideration of other potential measures of academic success, to establish eligibility for additional charters.

Both new and existing operators may pursue a new charter school in one of the 29 lowest performing Massachusetts school districts where charter school growth is favored by meeting certain regulatory requirements (App. 2). Eligible operators must demonstrate a track record of success serving an educationally disadvantaged population, including establishing performance similar to statewide averages for all students and one or more student subgroups, such as students with disabilities, English language learners, or economically disadvantaged, in comparable grades over at least a three-year period. New operators may meet these requirements through a partnership with organizations or individuals who have achieved the requisite track record.

***(c) Clear and Specific Standards and Benchmarks for Authorizer Performance.***

As sole authorizer, BESE and its administrative arm, ESE, work diligently to monitor and evaluate its authorization activities with a commitment to continuous improvement. As National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) recognizes in its letter of support, "Mass ESE and its portfolio of charter schools are achieving strong outcomes for students and the public interest, making the department a national exemplar of charter school authorizing practices." Monitoring and assessment efforts include:

1. **Legislative reporting.** Massachusetts charter school law requires an annual report to the legislature from BESE. In 2016, this report included required charter school enrollment data, but also analysis demonstrating Massachusetts’ commitment to charter school access and equity in five key areas: enrollment, demographic comparability of charter school to district school enrollment, attrition, backfilling, and waitlists.

2. **Outside evaluation.** ESE periodically hires outside experts to monitor and evaluate the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign’s (OCSSR) charter school authorizing activities. If successful, Massachusetts intends to use a small share of its CSP grant to fund an evaluation to assess the effectiveness of ESE’s access and equity initiatives.

3. **Benchmarks in ESE’s Delivery Plan.** OCSSR’s charter school work is incorporated in and monitored as part of ESE’s strategic delivery plan, which includes annual goals and objectives. The Commissioner meets with the OCSSR team and delivery analysts regularly to take stock of the OCSSR’s progress toward year-end goals.

4. **Public Reporting on Charter School Performance.** Fundamentally, ESE gauges the quality of its authorizing by the performance of its portfolio of charter schools. Charter school performance data is broadly disseminated. Each charter school is required to submit an Annual Report to ESE and to their local school committee. These reports, which also must be posted on school websites, include each school’s demographic data, academic data, and a self-assessment of performance on charter school performance Criteria. In addition, charter school performance data is available as part of its statewide academic “report cards” published on ESE’s website, where the public will also find accountability data for charter school progress toward closing achievement gaps. Finally, ESE has created charter-school-specific tools that allow public access to charter school financial performance and demographic data (the latter in comparison to similar grades in traditional district schools). The performance of Massachusetts charter schools has also

been extensively reported in a number of research studies.<sup>6</sup>

**Competitive Preference Priority 2: One Authorized Public Chartering Agency Other than a Local Educational Agency (LEA), or an Appeals Process.**

The Massachusetts Charter School Statute (M.G.L. c. 71, § 89) (App.1) establishes the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) as the sole public charter authorizing entity in Massachusetts. Massachusetts has one authorizer as part of its mission to strengthen the Commonwealth's public education system in a consistent, responsible, and transparent manner. As a single authorizer, BESE ensures reliable oversight and employs comprehensive practices as part of a state-wide strategy to close all proficiency gaps so that every student is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, compete in the global economy, and understand the rights and responsibilities of American citizens. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) cannot authorize charter schools in Massachusetts.

**INVITATIONAL PRIORITY**

ESE reports on the student demographics of each charter school in the state on an annual basis. Under the "statewide reports" section of its website ([www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu)), ESE publishes demographic enrollment data for each individual charter school as well as for each public school and school district in the state, as follows:

- ***Enrollment by Selected Population*** (*First language not English, English language learners, Students with disabilities, Educationally Disadvantaged, and Economically disadvantaged*)
- ***Enrollment by Race/Gender*** (*African American, Asian, Hispanic, White, Native American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Multi-race/Non-Hispanic, Male, Female*)
- ***Enrollment by Grade*** (*PK through Grade 12*)

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, <http://seii.mit.edu/research/school-reform/>, <http://credo.stanford.edu/research-reports.html>, and [http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/cohodes/files/informingthedebate\\_final.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/cohodes/files/informingthedebate_final.pdf).

➤ **Enrollment by Kindergarten (Part-time, Full-time, Tuitioned and Total)**

**Figure 1. Sample Report: Enrollment by Selected Populations (School Level)**

**2015-16 Selected Populations Report (School)**



Report Type:  2015-16

This report includes the enrollment of selected populations for all students in public schools and charter schools in the state. The information is as of October 1st of the school year selected. A count of zero indicates that the school or district does not have any students enrolled in that population. The state total for Special Education data includes all students at the district level. The school-level report only includes those students enrolled in public schools. [More about the data.](#)

SCHOOL	First Language Not English		English Language Learner		Students With Disabilities		High Needs		Economically Disadvantaged	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<a href="#">Abby Kelley Foster Charter Public (District) - Abby Kelley Foster Charter Public School</a>	377	26.4	107	7.5	147	10.3	706	49.5	473	33.2
<a href="#">Abington - Abington High</a>	16	3.5	6	1.3	49	10.9	135	29.9	92	20.4
<a href="#">Abington - Beaver Brook Elementary School</a>	45	7.1	26	4.1	80	12.6	203	32.1	131	20.7
<a href="#">Abington - Center Elementary School</a>	18	9.9	8	4.4	34	18.7	63	34.6	29	15.9
<a href="#">Abington - Frojlo Middle School</a>	14	4.2	4	1.2	33	9.9	98	29.3	59	17.7
<a href="#">Abington - Woodsdale Elementary School</a>	11	3.3	4	1.2	38	11.4	105	31.4	69	20.7
<a href="#">Academy Of the Pacific Rim Charter Public (District) - Academy Of the Pacific Rim Charter Public School</a>	68	13.0	35	6.7	120	22.9	263	50.2	158	30.2
<a href="#">Acton-Boxborough - Acton-Boxborough Regional High</a>	271	14.2	20	1.1	246	12.9	337	17.7	88	4.6

[http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state\\_report/selectedpopulations.aspx?mode=school&year=2016&Continue.x=9&Continue.y=5](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/selectedpopulations.aspx?mode=school&year=2016&Continue.x=9&Continue.y=5)

**Figure 2. Sample Report: Enrollment by Selected Populations (District Level)**

**2015-16 Selected Populations Report (District)**



Report Type:  2015-16

This report includes the enrollment of selected populations for all students in public schools and charter schools in the state. The information is as of October 1st of the school year selected. A count of zero indicates that the school or district does not have any students enrolled in that population. The state total for Special Education data includes all students at the district level. The school-level report only includes those students enrolled in public schools. [More about the data.](#)

DISTRICT	First Language Not English		English Language Learner		Students With Disabilities		High Needs		Economically Disadvantaged	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<a href="#">Abby Kelley Foster Charter Public (District)</a>	377	26.4	107	7.5	147	10.3	706	49.5	473	33.2
<a href="#">Abington</a>	104	5.4	48	2.5	259	13.2	629	32.1	380	19.6
<a href="#">Academy Of the Pacific Rim Charter Public (District)</a>	68	13.0	35	6.7	120	22.9	263	50.2	158	30.2
<a href="#">Acton-Boxborough</a>	878	15.6	229	4.1	968	16.9	1,419	24.8	304	5.4
<a href="#">Acushnet</a>	11	1.1	6	0.6	174	17.6	325	32.8	192	19.8
<a href="#">Adams-Cheshire</a>	7	0.5	7	0.5	303	22.2	703	51.6	550	40.4
<a href="#">Advanced Math and Science Academy Charter (District)</a>	174	17.6	1	0.1	44	4.4	101	10.2	56	5.7
<a href="#">Agawam</a>	295	7.5	173	4.4	651	16.3	1,526	38.2	993	25.2
<a href="#">Alma del Mar Charter School (District)</a>	50	17.6	26	9.2	41	14.4	196	69.0	156	54.9
<a href="#">Amesbury</a>	59	2.6	27	1.2	477	20.8	822	35.8	466	20.6
<a href="#">Amherst</a>	303	25.6	196	16.6	215	18.2	565	47.8	332	28.1

[http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state\\_report/selectedpopulations.aspx?mode=district&year=2016&Continue.x=6&Continue.y=6](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/selectedpopulations.aspx?mode=district&year=2016&Continue.x=6&Continue.y=6)

For a discussion and screenshots of CHART, a unique reporting charter school demographic data

**SELECTION CRITERIA**

**Selection Criteria (a): Educationally Disadvantaged Students.**

*1(a) Educationally Disadvantaged Students.* The CSP project directly contributes to ensuring that educationally disadvantaged students meet or exceed Massachusetts academic achievement standards by supporting the creation and expansion of high-quality charter schools in areas with the highest concentrations of academically disadvantaged students, as well as supporting new and expanding charter schools to create effective infrastructure to meet strenuous

performance criteria for diverse learners (see [Sel. Crit. f \(1\)\(i\)](#)), p. 33. ESE will continue to prioritize educationally disadvantaged students for high-quality charter school opportunities, including through targeted CSP subgrant incentives (see [Sel. Crit. d \(1\)\(ii\)](#)), p. 23.

Overall, as demonstrated in Figure 3, Massachusetts charter schools enroll a significantly higher percentage of educationally disadvantaged students than non-charter schools. Massachusetts’ high-quality charter schools continually perform better than other public schools in all areas and therefore play a major role in the reduction of achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students.

- In Massachusetts, charter public schools serve a higher percentage of racial and ethnic minority students and free and reduced-price lunch students than traditional public schools, showing that charters are serving those students who most need a better public school option.
- Massachusetts also has a relatively high percentage of special-focus schools, showing that charters are providing a diverse array of options for students and educators.

National Alliance of Public Charter Schools 2016 ranking of state charter laws.

**Figure 3. 2015-2016 Demographics: Charter Schools vs. State**

<b>2015-16 Demographics</b>	<b>Charter %</b>	<b>State (non-charter) %</b>
Educationally Disadvantaged	51.1	42.6
Economically Disadvantaged	35.5	27.0
Students With Disabilities	14.3	16.4
First Language Not English	25.3	18.7
English Language Learner	11.1	8.9

These relatively high enrollment rates are in part attributable to multiple provisions in the state’s charter school statute require that access to charter school options be prioritized for educationally disadvantaged students (App. 1 and 2). BESE’s charter authorizing practices serve this legislative priority; of the 96 charter school campuses currently operating in Massachusetts, more than three-quarters are located in urban areas, serving a majority of students who would have attended schools in districts that are not meeting state academic standards.

Prominent charter sector advocates and researchers confirm that Massachusetts prioritizes and benefits educationally disadvantaged students. In its March 2016 report, *The Health of the*

Charter School Movement: A State-by-State Analysis,<sup>7</sup> the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools (Alliance) highlighted that Massachusetts charter schools are serving the students who most need a better public school option and provide a diverse array of educational options for students (see sidebar excerpt from report). The Alliance's 2016 Measuring Up to the Model: A Ranking of State Charter School Laws,<sup>8</sup> placed Massachusetts' laws among the highest for *Clear Identification of Special Education Responsibilities*.

Academic studies by researchers at Harvard, MIT, and Stanford demonstrate the strong comparative advantage in academic achievement and attainment of Massachusetts charter school students versus their peers in other public schools. MIT researcher Elizabeth Setren released a December 2015 study titled, *Special Education and English Language Learner Students in Boston Charter Schools: Impact and Classification*<sup>9</sup>, which uses admission lottery results to measure the impact of attending a Boston charter school for students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs). The study found that the Boston charter schools produced substantial gains for students with disabilities and ELLs on state math and reading assessments and helped narrow the achievement gap for students with disabilities and ELLs. The report also indicates that students with disabilities and ELLs were proportionally represented in the Boston charter lotteries, and that the Boston charter schools tended to move applicants with disabilities to more inclusive settings at higher rates than traditional public schools (see Figures 4 and 5, below).

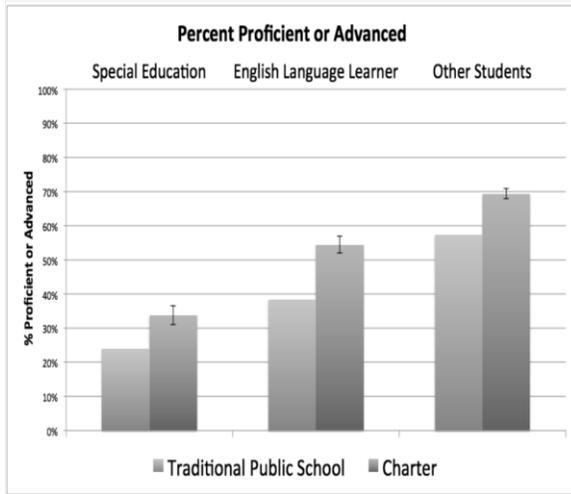
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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/032316-Health-of-the-Movement\\_13\\_final.pdf](http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/032316-Health-of-the-Movement_13_final.pdf)

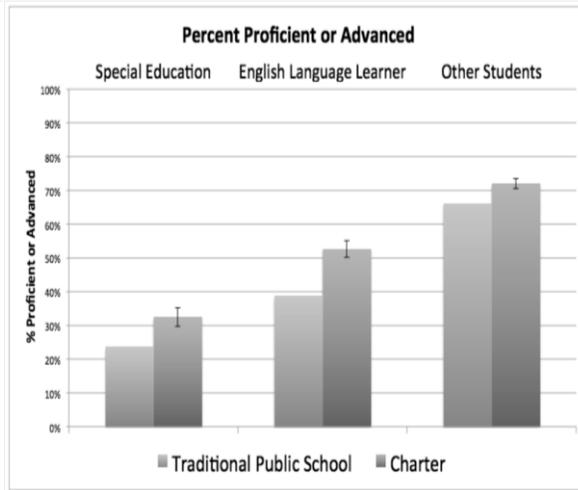
<sup>8</sup> [http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Model-Law-Final\\_2016.pdf](http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Model-Law-Final_2016.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://economics.mit.edu/files/11208>

**Figure 4. 2013-14 MCAS Math.**



**Figure 5. 2013-14 MCAS English.**



Statewide data confirms Setren’s findings. As evidenced by Figures 6 & 7 below, for each of the past five years, all charter schools’ educationally disadvantaged students have outperformed statewide averages as measured by the Composite Performance Index (CPI),<sup>10</sup> Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and PARCC Student Growth Percentile (SGP) rates, a measure of how a group of students’ achievement has grown or changed over time. The results for the educationally disadvantaged students in charter schools are further remarkable for the magnitude of the difference in performance measures.

**Figure 6. CPI for Educationally Disadvantaged Students.**

		CPI% Educationally Disadvantaged Students									
		ELA					Math				
		FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
Charter		82.97	82.72	84.38	84.6	83.25	75.15	74.83	77.7	77.54	76.39
(non-charter)		77.36	76.86	77.08	77.5	76.63	67.7	67.63	69.05	68.93	68.35
State											

<sup>10</sup> The CPI measures progress towards the goal of narrowing proficiency gaps. The CPI assigns 100, 75, 50, 25, or 0 points to each student participating in state assessments based how close they came to scoring Proficient or Advanced. The CPI is calculated by dividing the total number of points by the number of students in the group. The result is a number between 0 and 100. A CPI of 100 means that all students in a group are proficient.

**Figure 7. SGP for Educationally Disadvantaged Students.**

Median SGP Educationally Disadvantaged Students										
Charter	52	54	57	55	55	57	54	58	55	58
(non-charter)										
State	46	46	47	48	47	46	46	46	48	46

As evidenced by Figure 8, the average 4-year and 5-year graduation rates for charter schools have far exceeded the statewide average over the past five years, for all students and for educationally disadvantaged students when comparing all schools and urban schools.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 8. 4- and 5-year Graduation Rates for Educationally Disadvantaged Students.**

	All Students			Educationally Disadvantaged Students		
	5-year Graduation Rates			5-year Graduation Rates		
	Charter %	State (non-charter) %		Charter %	State (non-charter) %	
All Schools	FY11	88.5	83.8	FY11	88.8	78.3
	FY12	91.7	85.0	FY12	91.2	80.1
	FY13	93.0	85.5	FY13	91.7	81.1
	FY14	91.9	86.0	FY14	91.5	81.9
	4-year Graduation Rates			4-year Graduation Rates		
		Charter %	State (non-charter) %		Charter %	State (non-charter) %
	FY11	82.3	80.9	FY12	82.5	76.3
	FY12	84.8	82.3	FY13	85.6	77.0
	FY13	88.1	82.5	FY14	83.4	78.7
	FY14	85.1	83.4	FY15	85.5	78.7
Urban Schools	4-year Graduation Rates			4-year Graduation Rates		
		Charter %	State (non-charter) %		Charter %	State (non-charter) %
	FY11	79.0	59.8	FY12	81.6	60.6
	FY12	82.3	62.1	FY13	85.4	60.3
	FY13	85.9	61.4	FY14	84.9	62.0
	FY14	85.7	63.2	FY15	85.5	64.5
	FY15	87.0	65.6			
	5-year Graduation Rates			5-year Graduation Rates		
		Charter %	State (non-charter) %		Charter %	State (non-charter) %
	FY11	86.9	65.4	FY11	86.6	64.4
FY12	90.4	67.6	FY12	90.7	66.4	
FY13	91.5	67.8	FY13	91.0	66.7	
FY14	93.6	68.5	FY14	93.3	67.6	

Educationally disadvantaged graduation rates for FY11 are not available because this data was not collected until FY12. 5-year graduation rates for educationally disadvantaged was retroactively calculated for FY11.

<sup>11</sup> For purposes of these comparisons, urban public schools are defined as the 25 traditional public school districts with the highest poverty and highest population. Charter schools defined as “Urban” here are located in one of these districts. Of Charter Schools in Massachusetts, 77.8% are considered “Urban”, making a comparison to Urban non-charter schools material and appropriate. Also, alternative schools are routinely excluded from statewide graduation data, and are therefore not included in any of these comparisons.

Aspects of Massachusetts' CSP project targeting the needs of educationally disadvantaged students during the next five-year grant period are specifically described in Program Design, [Sel. Crit. d \(1\)\(ii\)](#), p. 23.

**Selection Criteria (b): Vision for Growth and Accountability.**

Massachusetts' growth and accountability system has fostered some of the most high-performing, gap-narrowing charter schools in the country.

***(1) Plan to support the creation of high-quality charter schools; reasonable growth estimates***

Massachusetts' five-year estimate for charter-school growth results from a careful balance of meeting the overwhelming unserved demand from families (almost 32,646 unique students waiting for a charter school seat for 2016-2017) with the responsibility to ensure that every charter school that opens in Massachusetts has the capacity to meet rigorous standards of excellence for all of its students, particularly those who are educationally disadvantaged. Massachusetts' plan for growth of high-quality charter schools incorporates 1) clear and well articulated criteria for excellence in all aspects of charter school performance that must be addressed by all charter applicants ([see Sel. Crit. f \(2\)\(i\)](#)), p. 38; 2) outreach to strong and proven charter school developers, especially those with proven track records for success with educationally disadvantaged students, to encourage replication (see [Sel. Crit. f \(2\)\(i\)](#)), p. 38; and 3) continuous support for new charter school developers throughout the life cycle of a charter school, starting from successful applications, to school opening procedures that ensure a foundation for high-quality education from the first cohort of students served, to technical assistance that facilitates effective and faithful implementation.

Massachusetts is confident that the CSP grant we will be able to achieve and ensure the following growth of high-quality schools within a five-year period:<sup>12</sup>

- **25** high-quality charter schools and/or substantial expansions will be approved serving a vast majority of educationally disadvantaged students (Figure 9);

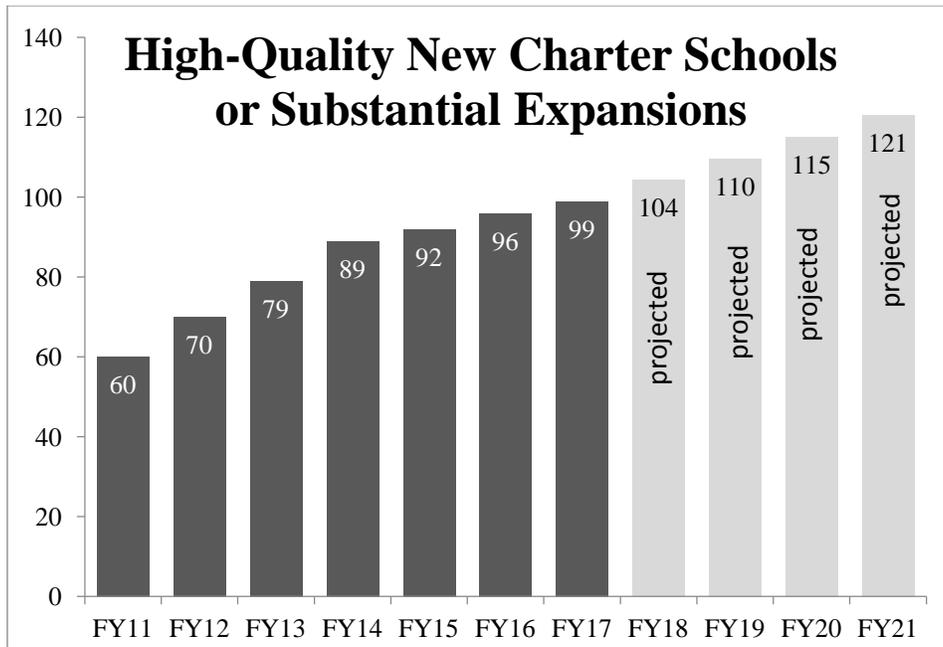
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<sup>12</sup> Massachusetts has applied for a waiver of CSP requirements to allow it to deploy grant funds over a five-year period. See [Waiver Request 1](#).

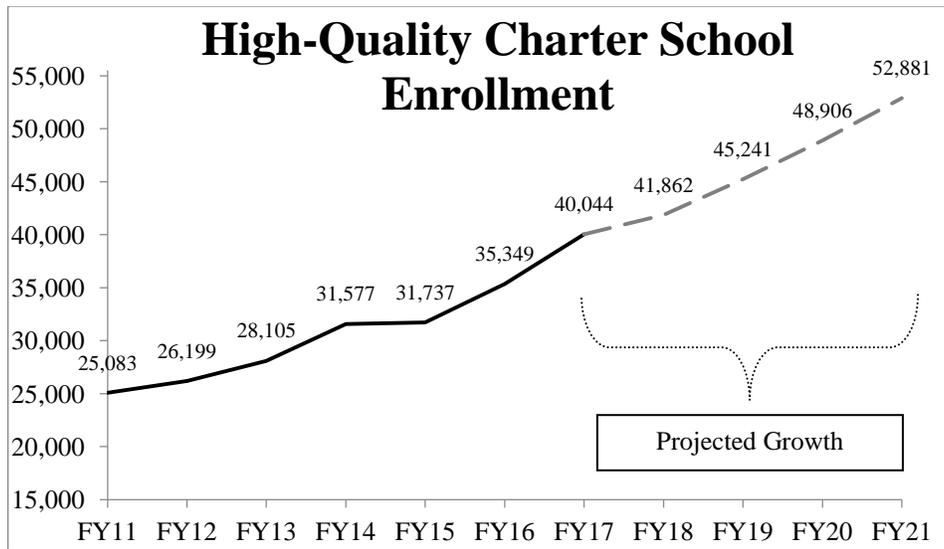
- **17,500** new students will be attending charter schools as a result of the 25 new schools and expansions in existing schools (Figure 10).

ESE believes that these ambitious estimates are well supported by the historical trends of growth, the variety and multitude of partners providing support for the establishment of high-quality educational options for educationally disadvantaged students, and the continued demand for new seats at new and existing high-quality charter schools. The first 15 charter schools in Massachusetts enrolled 2,613 students in 1995. That number has grown to 40,200 students today. Massachusetts’ growth estimate would create 25% more seats than exist today in the next five years, which is reasonable based on our accumulated experience supporting creation of high-quality schools, but still ambitious given that growth will be accelerated compared to prior years.

**Figure 9. Growth in the number of high-quality charter schools over time.**



**Figure 10. Growth in high-quality charter school enrollment.**



In support of these growth projections, in addition to ESE’s robust internal charter school infrastructure, ESE has developed and maintained strong relationships with philanthropic, nonprofit and other community leaders and gatekeepers<sup>13</sup> to leverage additional resources that support the growth of high-performing charter school models in Massachusetts, extending their reach to more families and communities. ESE received letters of intent for the FY16 charter application that provide a clear indication of the continuing interest in establishing high-quality charter schools in some of our highest-needs districts as well as areas that are not currently served by a high-quality charter school option. Applicants sought to establish schools in our largest districts, Boston and Springfield, as well as in other low-performing urban districts.

In addition, given its strong partnership with the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association (MCPSA) on matters of concern to charter schools, ESE has welcomed and encouraged MCPSA’s expanded role in enhancing the pipeline of high-quality prospective applicant groups, encouraging replication and substantial expansion of existing high-quality operators, and increasing availability of local philanthropic funds. MCPSA provides technical

<sup>13</sup> Letters of support have been received by the following organizations submitted letters of support: Boston Foundation, The National Center for Time and Learning, Building Excellent Schools and Strategic Grant Partners.

assistance and support to charter applicants at earlier stages of the charter development process before a charter is granted, including providing review and evaluation of written applications prior to submission to ESE as well as preparing applicants for their capacity interviews with ESE. In addition, MCPSA has developed a strategic plan to encourage and support high-quality charter growth in the highest needs areas to serve the most educationally disadvantaged students.

Finally, with vigorous activity surrounding a charter school ballot initiative that would provide a mechanism to approve significantly more charter schools than currently authorized, ESE is ready to step up its outreach efforts to prospective developers by adding to its existing information sessions (9 yearly) to meet anticipated increased interest.

## ***(2) Supporting Closure of Academically Poor-Performing Charter Schools.***

Massachusetts' plan to support closure of academically poor-performing charter schools is founded in its rigorous enforcement of its accountability system (see [Sel. Crit. f \(2\)\(ii\)](#), p. 39), which rests firmly on clear *Criteria* that consider poor academic performance a bellwether for conditions, probation and closure (see Competitive Preference Priority ("[Comp. Pref. Pr.](#)") [1 \(a\)](#), p. 3). While ESE continues to institute an application process and school opening procedures that are designed to allow only those developers with the demonstrated capacity to establish high-quality charter schools, Massachusetts will continue vigilance through its accountability process to sanction and, where necessary, close any charter school that persistently fails to meet its promise of academic success for all students (see [Sel. Crit. c \(2\)](#), p. 19).

Massachusetts' charter school concept is based on a trade-off: greater autonomy for increased accountability. When this bargain is not met, ESE closes academically and operationally poor performing charter schools. Since 1994, there have been 17 charter school closures in Massachusetts due to poor academic performance. When closure is required, ESE works closely with schools to ensure students and families are able to transition to other schools and that public funds are professionally managed mindful of both stewardship and the duty of care required. Over the years, ESE has developed a closing procedures checklist that helps schools to affect closure, including required communications to families, employees, and contractual partners; a

transition plan for school and student records; a plan to dispose of assets; and a collection of month-to-month financials and minutes from meetings of the board of trustees.

**Selection Criteria (c): Past Performance.**

(1) ***Increase in high-quality charter schools.*** The number of high-quality charter schools in Massachusetts has increased from 60 schools in 2010-2011 to 96 schools/campuses that will be operating in 2016-2017 (see Figure 9, above). Part of this growth can be attributed to high-quality charter school boards of trustees that chose to replicate or substantially expand existing schools.<sup>14</sup> For example, Excel Academy Charter School added a high school and two additional middle schools, which consistently rank among the top schools in the state for student achievement and serve high concentrations of educationally disadvantaged students. Similarly, Match Charter Public School, a nationally recognized high-performing charter school, opened a PK-8 school focusing on serving English language learner students with 700 additional seats. Nationally recognized for top academic achievement, the Brooke Charter Schools have just been awarded an amendment to open a high school with an additional 660 seats. Figure 10, above, shows growth in high-quality charter school student enrollment over the past five years (10,266) and projected for the next five years (17,532).

As shown in Figure 11, below, for each of the past five years all charters schools students have outperformed statewide averages in the aggregate as measured by the Composite Performance Index (CPI),<sup>15</sup> Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and PARCC Student Growth Percentile rates.<sup>16</sup> The aggregate result is noteworthy since charter schools are heavily concentrated in the state's urban districts, and have a higher distribution of educationally disadvantaged students compared to the state as a whole.

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<sup>14</sup> As used here, "substantial expansions" are defined as adding at least 50% new enrollment or 2 grades. See [Waiver 4](#).

<sup>15</sup> The CPI measures progress towards the goal of narrowing proficiency gaps. The CPI assigns 100, 75, 50, 25, or 0 points to each student participating in state assessments based how close they came to scoring Proficient or Advanced. The CPI is calculated by dividing the total number of points by the number of students in the group. The result is a number between 0 and 100. A CPI of 100 means that all students in a group are proficient.

<sup>16</sup> A student growth percentile (abbreviated SGP) measures how much a student's performance has improved from one year to the next relative to his or her academic peers.

**Figure 11. Students in Massachusetts charter school outperform their peers statewide.**

CPI% All Students										
	ELA					Math				
	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
Charter	88.26*	87.95**	88.79**	88.78**	88.63**	81.14	80.93	82.75**	82.21**	82.65**
(non-charter)										
State	87.79	87.33	87.30	87.28	87.26	80.79	80.80	81.57	81.13	81.38

Median SGP All Students										
	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
Charter	52**	54**	57**	56**	55**	57**	54**	57**	57**	57**
(non-charter)										
State	50	50	51	50	50	50	50	51	50	50

\*\* indicates a significant difference of  $p < .001$  between charter schools and non-charter schools throughout the state.  
 \* indicates a significant difference of  $p < .05$  between charter schools and non-charter schools throughout the state.  
 No asterisks indicates no significant difference between charter schools and non-charter schools throughout the state.

**(2) Reduction of academically poor-performing charter schools**

ESE considers an academically poor performing charter school to be one that is 1) designated as Level 3 by the state (lowest 20% of similarly situated schools statewide based on state performance indicators) absent extenuating circumstances (such as a school that is specifically designed to serve students at risk of not graduating) or 2) on probation for reasons of academic performance, or both. These criteria are more rigorous than the federal definition of academically poor-performing, which is only the lowest 5% of schools in the state.

When a charter school is considered to be academically poor performing, Massachusetts mandates one or more of the following consequences depending on the nature of the performance issues: 1) BESE places the school on conditions or probation, 2) revokes its charter, 3) does not renew its charter, or 4) accepts the school’s decision to voluntarily turn in its charter. In a majority of these instances to date, failure to demonstrate academic success was a key factor in the closure decision (17 schools have closed since 1995, and 4 did not open due to shortfalls in developer capacity to deliver a strong academic program).

Since Massachusetts’ CSP application in 2011, five academically poor-performing schools have been closed in keeping with BESE’s historical track record of enforcing high standards and willingness to revoke or refuse renewal of charters in cases of underperformance.

[Sel. Crit. f \(2\)\(i\)](#), on page 38 describes thorough process that ESE uses to review and approve only high-quality charter school applications. The primary goal of the application process is to

open only those schools whose developers show the capacity to establish the highest-quality schools from their opening day. Massachusetts is proud of the number of high-quality schools in its portfolio as well as the fact that so few have had to be closed for academic poor performance since charter schools were authorized in 1993, in large part due to the strenuous application process and monitoring system. See attached letter of support from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), which notes that Massachusetts is one of only ten authorizers nationwide to meet NACSA’s rigorous authorizer outcomes, including “a strong record of closing poorly performing schools.”

**Selection Criteria (d): Project Design.**

***1) Process for awarding subgrants.***

*i) Subgrant Application and Peer Review Process. CSP Subgrants for new schools.* ESE has a demanding process for ensuring that subgrants are awarded to eligible applicants who demonstrate the capacity to create high-quality charter schools and improve student academic achievement (Figure 12), which is integrated with ESE’s charter application and results in every new charter school receiving a subgrant. ESE has taken this approach in order to ensure that every qualified developer authorized by BESE to open and operate a charter school is provided the necessary support to kickstart implementation of approved, high-quality designs. All charter applicant groups must establish sufficient evidence of their capacity through the submitted charter application, the capacity interview with ESE staff, and the public comment period and public hearing process. Based on our track record of authorizing some of the highest quality charter schools in the country, we are confident that our integrated process for charter applications and subgrants results in increasing new charter schools that will improve academic achievement.

ESE has instituted differentiated charter application processes that allow a determination of capacity prior to the submission of a full charter application. For a detailed description, please see [Comp. Pref. Pr. 1 \(a\)](#), p. 3. New operators are required to submit a preliminary application,

called a prospectus. If a new operator is targeting one of the lowest performing districts in the Commonwealth, additional evidence of capacity to serve an educationally disadvantaged student population is also required by Massachusetts' charter school statute. (M.G.L. c.71, §89(i)(3), App. 1). ESE assesses the track record of the developer independently of the assessment of the charter application to determine if the developer is eligible as a proven provider. If the developer does not sufficiently establish the capacity to create a high-quality charter school based upon a current or former management role at a high-quality school, the developer is not invited to submit a full charter application. The proven provider determination is aligned with the determination of a high-quality charter school, including prior performance comparable to statewide averages on the state assessment test and graduation rates for all students and one or more educationally disadvantaged student populations.

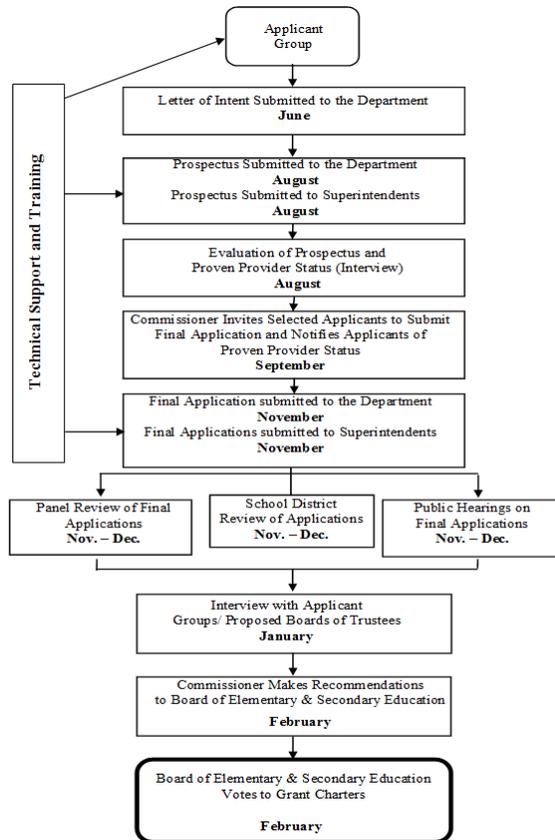
*Existing* Massachusetts charter school boards of trustees undergo a similar preliminary review prior to the submission of a full charter application. While these boards do not submit a prospectus, ESE does review their current track record of performance prior to submission of a full application. In order for current boards/operators to participate in the application process, they must have established a track record of success in their prior charter school operations by meeting academic and operational standards set by statute. (M.G.L. c.71, §89(i)(3), App. 1).

In addition to establishing a threshold for prior success in establishing a high-quality charter school, the charter application contains numerous criteria that identify developers who are focused on educationally disadvantaged students and their needs. In both the preliminary and full charter application, developers must provide evidence that their educational program and its associated practices will produce high academic achievement and the attainment of the knowledge, skills, and experiences that ensures college and career readiness for all of their students, including educationally disadvantaged students, as well a recruitment and retention plan to ensure educationally disadvantaged students have access to high-quality schools and support once enrolled. These required application elements further establish the strength of our

process for awarding subgrants to developers with capacity to address our state’s priorities for improving student academic achievement in our highest need communities.

CSP grants for substantial expansions. In addition to charter applicants, ESE proposes to award subgrants to existing charter schools who seek to substantially expand current operations. Qualifying schools would request the addition of 2 or more grades or at least 50% increase in student enrollment. ESE has instituted a process similar to that for charter applications for all charter schools requesting this magnitude of growth, including an application, capacity interview, and public comment period. ESE has developed targeted criteria to elicit evidence that an existing charter schools has the capacity to both maintain current levels of performance and grow grade span and/or enrollment. Similar to the charter application process, if the existing operator intends to grow in one of the state’s 29 lowest performing districts, ESE must determine the applicant to qualify as a proven provider.

**Figure 12. Timeline: Charter School Program Application and Peer Review Process.**



(ii) Year-by-Year Estimates.

Figure 13. CSP Subgrant Estimates by Year.

CSP Subgrant Estimates by Year				
2016-2017	Planning and Implementation	\$618,750*	3, but if waiver allowed 8**	<p><b>Planning and Implementation Subgrants:</b> Massachusetts' project design includes 4 types of subgrants, two baseline awards and two increments for targeted designs and policies. New schools or substantial expansions would receive a baseline grant of up to \$500,000, and replications of existing high-quality schools would receive up to \$300,000 (expansions and replication grants are contingent on allowance of Waiver Request 4). There are also two possible increments to the baseline: an Access &amp; Equity increment of up to \$175,000 and an Immediate High-Impact increment of \$125,000, designed as incentives to expand opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students to attend high-quality charter schools. The average award is based on projected historical and actual data re: opening schools and expansions of high-quality schools (see Figure 10).</p> <p><b>Dissemination Subgrants:</b> Massachusetts plans to conduct a single competition in 2016-2017 for dissemination grants of up to \$650,000 for projects running from 2017-2018 through 2018-2019. Based on past dissemination grant competitions, Massachusetts anticipates making 4 dissemination subgrants to high-quality charter schools.</p>
2017-2018	Planning and Implementation	\$618,750	5	
	Dissemination	\$582,350	4	
2018-2019	Planning and Implementation	\$618,750	5	
2019-2020	Planning and Implementation	\$618,750	5	
2020-2021	Planning and Implementation	\$618,750	5	

\* Note that this figure represents a subgrant that may be used for up to 36-months (if Waiver Request No. 2 is granted).

\*\* Massachusetts has requested a waiver to allow funding for planning and/or implementation grants for 2 new schools chartered in 2016 and 5 substantially expanding schools, which did not receive any planning or implementation funds from the last CSP grant. If allowed, this waiver will add \$4.3M to 2016-2017 awards.

Anticipating that its waiver will be granted allowing Massachusetts to award subgrants to substantially expanding schools (adding 50% or more students or 2 or more consecutive grades

at high-quality schools), Massachusetts differentiates baseline planning and implementation grants as follows:

***Baseline Planning and Implementation Grants: New Schools and Substantial Expansions.*** Massachusetts will award CSP subgrants to each new charter school or substantial expansion of an existing charter school (as described in [Waiver Request 4](#)) approved by BESE after the conclusion of ESE’s comprehensive new school or expansion review process, which integrates the CSP subgrant process as described in [Sel. Crit. d \(1\)\(i\)](#), p. 20. Each new charter school or substantial expansion that adds grades or a new school in a new community would receive a base-level grant of up to **\$500,000**. A replication of an existing model serving the same grades in the same community would receive a base-level grant of up to **\$300,000**, because curriculum and the educational model have already been successfully developed.

***Targeted Incremental Grants:*** ESE will incentivize the development of high-quality charter schools that are designed to provide access to and better meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged students by awarding significantly increased start-up funds (in addition to base level grants discuss above) for certain design priorities. ESE would provide incremental start-up funding to charters schools that meet one or both of two types of incentive priorities:

1. **Access and Equity.** ESE will provide up to 35% (**or \$175,000**) additional CSP grant funding to those charter schools that either:
  - a. Commit to **backfilling** all vacancies through grade 10 in alignment with current backfilling procedures.<sup>17</sup>
  - b. Adopt an explicit mission and educational program designed to:
    - i. Specifically serve **English language learners**, or
    - ii. Specially serve students who are **disconnected, over-age and under-credited, or off-track** in their education preparing them for high school graduation;
2. **Immediate High Impact.** ESE will provide up to 25% (**or \$125,000**) in additional CSP

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<sup>17</sup> Currently, Massachusetts charter schools are only required to backfill half of the grades that they serve, and high schools are only required to backfill in grade 9.

grant funding to those charter schools that quickly provide new, high-quality educational seats to communities by opening with at least 250 seats in the first year of operation.

Further, ESE expects that both Access & Equity and Immediate High-Impact subgrants will be highly feasible for most new charter schools in the design phase, and, with the incentive that the incremental amounts provide, one or both will likely be awarded to most new or replication schools.

Past CSP grant funds have been key to the successful development and implementation of high-quality educational options for all students. Notably, the cohort of charter schools receiving a CSP subgrant from Massachusetts’ FY11-14 award showed significantly better progress toward achieving proficiency and closing the achievement gap in both English language arts and mathematics in FY15 than their primary sending districts (Figure 14).

**Figure 14. Comparing Progress Toward Proficiency: CSP Recipients vs. Primary Sending Districts.**

	<b>CSP Subgrantees</b>	<b>Sending Districts</b>	<b>Avg. difference</b>
<b>Average CPI</b>	86.1	74.0	12.0
	<b>CSP Subgrantees</b>	<b>Sending Districts</b>	<b>Avg. difference</b>
<b>Average CPI</b>	82.9	67.9	15.0

Note: N=16. A small number (6) of charter schools that consolidated, were too small to report data anonymously or were newly opened were not included, even if they received a CSP grant.

**Dissemination Grants.** In general, dissemination projects that Massachusetts funded in its last subgrant competition share the following characteristics: strong, deliberately cultivated partnerships; thoughtful reflection on the applicant school’s best practices to address the needs in surrounding communities; strategically designed knowledge transfer to sustain impact beyond the funding period; and ample capacity to carry out the project. Massachusetts has found that

<sup>18</sup> Composite Performance Index (CPI) is a metric of school and district performance that demonstrates student progress toward proficiency. Schools/districts where all students score proficient or advanced receive a score of 100.

investment and tangible results were more significant when dissemination grants of a larger dollar amount (and fewer grants), which allowed dedicated resources to be used by our highest quality and most mature schools for targeted partnerships and collaborations. Therefore, future dissemination subgrants will follow similar criteria. Two examples of ongoing dissemination subgrants: Conservatory Lab Charter School has partnered with three Boston schools to disseminate early literacy integrated units and teaching strategies; and Salem Academy Charter School has partnered with Salem Public School district to provide professional development to district school leaders on standards-based instruction. Outcome measures for these subgrant projects are still in process.

***(2) Process for monitoring CSP subgrantees.***

ESE's monitoring of CSP subgrantees is holistically integrated with the comprehensive charter school accountability process detailed in [Comp. Pref. Pr. 1](#), p. 3. ESE employs a team of 10 professionals covering the areas of accountability, finance and data oversight, access and equity, and new school/expansion review— most of whom are state funded, to review potential charter schools, monitor all charter schools, support dissemination of best practices (see [Sel. Crit. e](#), p. 27), and provide and coordinate the training required for all schools prior to opening and during initial implementation. Beyond the criteria found in the charter school application, subgrantees must meet a host of initial benchmarks in order to open as a charter school. (See [Comp. Pref. Pr. 1](#), p. 3). These criteria, requirements, and training, are all in service to the school's planning, designing, and successful realization of a high-quality charter school.

Financially, along with the required financial audit, subgrantees are required to submit a supplemental Agreed Upon Procedures (AUP) report. Massachusetts continues to enhance the supplemental AUP. For example, as a result of the most recent 2014 WestEd CSP monitoring visit, a testing requirement for subgrantees' inventory tagging system will be added to the AUP. ESE also conducts standard subgrant-specific monitoring of budgets, expenditures, and compliance, and requires corrective action as appropriate.

## **Selection Criteria (e): Dissemination of Information and Best Practices**

### ***(1) ESE as state leader for dissemination and research.***

ESE is uniquely-positioned as a reform-oriented state agency with oversight of the K-12 public education system and deep partnerships with the field and key nonprofit technical assistance, philanthropic, and research partners<sup>19</sup> to serve as a dissemination leader. Those involved in the efforts say the various reforms represent a promising “third way” in education, a path that can harness the best practices of charter schools and put them to work at the scale achieved by district systems and with the community input of locally-run schools.<sup>20</sup> ESE’s dissemination plan outlined below leverages ESE’s recent reorganization, designed to strengthen intra-agency collaboration between units, to maximize resources and capacity to identify and disseminate information on successful charter schools practices, which is also a statutory mandate of the Commissioner.

### **Identification of Practices for Dissemination**

- ESE has the **resources and access to data** that will support a comprehensive review and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative school performance data to identify strong candidates for dissemination. Our plan includes an annual review of all school and student performance metrics collected by the agency to identify charter schools disseminators who exhibit clear indicators of success.<sup>21</sup>
- To further identify schools which excel in specific areas of performance described in our *Criteria*, ESE will develop a **comprehensive rubric** to establish clear parameters and standards of performance to help target **charter schools for potential dissemination partnerships**, including those charter schools with the following characteristics: non-existent or insignificant achievement gaps; strong academic growth in the English language arts,

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<sup>19</sup> Examples of existing partnerships include: National Center for Time and Learning, Empower Schools, Gates Foundation, Strategic Grant Partners, MIT’s School Effectiveness and Inequality Initiative and Harvard’s Center for Education Policy Research.

<sup>20</sup> <http://commonwealthmagazine.org/back-story/the-third-way-in-education/>

<sup>21</sup> Currently: (1) at least one successful charter renewal, (2) no conditions or probationary status in the past three years, and (3) demonstration of overall success within the state’s accountability system.

mathematics, or science; low attrition rates; high graduation rates and/or program completion; high persistence rates at post-secondary programs and high college graduation rates; student demographics reflective of their sending districts; low rates of suspension and rates of suspensions that reflect no disproportionate trends related to students with disabilities, and English language learners; and/or high levels of faculty retention and satisfaction.

- Using the annual data reported by charter schools, ESE will augment the identification of potential disseminators with the qualitative data provided in annual reports, site visit reports, and renewal documentation.
- ESE has and will continue to build capacity to perform and support research to identify promising practices by evaluating the impact of specific practices on student achievement. ESE will leverage existing research partnerships, and will also establish a specific project partnership with a third party through a request for proposal process to identify significant relationships between a school's results and practices.
- ESE is committed to employing a 0.25 FTE staff member for the purposes of managing the identification of practices, the dissemination of practices, and the assessment of the dissemination's impact on school leaders, educators, and ultimately students.

### **Dissemination Strategies**

Massachusetts law and ESE's structure and practices provide for a number of unique vehicles that establish incentives for public schools districts to incorporate best practices into their educational programs. ESE's dissemination plan will focus on the following strategies:

- **Integration of Charter School Best Practices into ESE's Strategic Priorities:**

***District and School Turnaround:*** ESE will continue to leverage the agency's unique role in identifying and employing 'receivers' to turnaround the lowest performing schools and school districts. ESE has used its position to good effect; lessons learned in our successful charter schools have substantially informed ESE's turnaround work in the lowest-performing schools, strengthened by partnership between OCSSR and the Office of District and School Turnaround.

Several hallmark best practices first established and honed by the Massachusetts charter school

sector (e.g. expanded learning time and school-level autonomy over staffing and budget) have become part of the “DNA” of the state’s approach to school turnaround and are required elements of state-approved turnaround plans. Successful charter schools identified as dissemination partners through the processes described above are ideal participants, as either receivers or development providers, to support the state’s efforts to improve the quality of education provided to our highest need communities. In receivership situations, ESE looks for operators who can execute a plan for the academic success of the underperforming school or district and can establish a positive school climate where effective student discipline takes place.

***Educator Effectiveness:*** ESE will also strengthen collaboration between OCSSR and the Office of Educator Effectiveness,<sup>22</sup> which serves a key function in reviewing and supporting educator preparation programs and has also developed a number of resources and tools for educators and local professional development leaders that are accessible via the Department’s website. As part of our dissemination plan, ESE will publish high-quality professional development case studies from successful charter schools on the ESE website, with at least one charter school video case study with ancillary support materials developed per year. In order to provide the broadest outreach to public schools in Massachusetts, we will also partner with several ESE offices, including the Office of Digital Learning, to facilitate online and in-person professional development opportunities based upon the best practices of charter school dissemination partners, with a priority focus on school climate and student discipline practices.

***Social, Emotional and Health Needs of Students:*** See Sel. Crit. e (2), below.

- **Prioritize Dissemination for Charter Schools:** To further establish the importance of dissemination for the charter school sector, ESE will host a regular event to showcase the best practices of high quality schools working in the design/redesign space, including charter schools, innovation schools, expanded learning time schools, and turnaround schools. This year’s event is

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<sup>22</sup> For example, the full year field-based experience at City on a Hill Charter Public School and supervisor training of the Match Teacher Residency program (a dissemination effort of Match Charter Public School) are highlighted as commendation spotlights as part of the 2014-2105 ESE Educator Preparation Formal Review Cycle Culmination Report, which is designed to share best practices to inform the field of educator preparation in Massachusetts. See page 10, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/resources/2014-15FormalReviewReport.pdf>.

organized around a varied format including information booths, a poster gallery, short presentations, and thematic panel presentations. Content for the event will be informed by results from an ESE survey from potential participants. ESE offices focused on supporting public school districts serving educationally disadvantaged populations, District and School Turnaround, will be integral participants in the planning and implementation of the event to ensure the event addresses the needs of their client schools and districts. ESE will also include charter school developers to support their efforts to develop high quality charter applications in all areas of the *Criteria*, and to identify potential partners to support their success.

- **Conduct a High-Impact Dissemination Subgrant Competition**

ESE proposes to use up to 10 percent of its total CSP grant award to administer another round of its current high impact charter school dissemination subgrant competition as described in [Sel. Crit. d\(ii\)](#), p. 23. To maximize impact on student achievement at partner schools, ESE is requesting two waivers (described in [Application Requirement \(viii\)](#), p. 58) to extend the project period to 3 years and to allow the state’s highest-performing charter schools to receive a second dissemination subgrant. ESE’s current process was informed by experience running multiple previous competitions, and a qualitative, retrospective analysis of the effectiveness and impact of prior dissemination subgrants awarded in FY2008 through FY2011, conducted by the UMass Donahue Institute. Key features of the dissemination subgrant process include competitive preference priorities that align with strategic objectives (such as a focus on practices related to school climate and student discipline); stringent eligibility criteria (as described above); extensive outreach to the state’s highest-performing eligible charter schools; and longer and larger awards (from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2020 and \$500,000 or more to ensure meaningful dissemination that substantively and sustainably changes educator practice). ESE will conduct evaluations of funded dissemination projects and student outcomes impacts during the 5th year of the CSP grant period, resources permitting.

- **Increase Access to Information:** ESE’s plan for dissemination includes increasing access to resources on best practices through the ESE website, social media, virtual events, and

in-person events for public schools and charter school developers. Areas for further development include:

- Enhancing information available on the charter school website, including profiles of charter schools that have made dissemination of their best practices an effective and successful component of their operation. Examples of successful Massachusetts charter schools that have become almost as well known for their dissemination and partnership efforts as for their success with students include Match Charter Public School, Neighborhood House Charter School, and Francis W. Parker Essential Charter School.<sup>23</sup>

- ESE will include best practices ‘snapshots’ in ESE newsletters that align with the *Criteria* and other rubrics for school performance, such as the Turnaround Practices<sup>24</sup> used by ESE’s Office of School and District Turnaround. Snapshots will provide a brief overview of an identified best practice and its impact on student outcomes with contact information for exemplary schools for the identified practice. ESE will facilitate quarterly webinars for a more in-depth explanation and discussion of the ‘snapshot’ practices.

- As described earlier, ESE will host a regular event to showcase the best practices of high quality schools working in the design/redesign space, including charter schools.

- ESE will integrate dissemination information into our social media strategy, including the use of the ESE Twitter (@MAschoolsK12) and Teachers Top Three (a biweekly newsletter sent directly to teachers), to heighten the awareness about best practices and the availability of resources.

### **Assessment of Dissemination Impact**

We understand firsthand the challenges of facilitating change in public education. Our plan provides a number of vehicles to support access to information about best or promising practices, hard data validating the connection between practices and outcomes, and scaffolding

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<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.matcheducation.org/>, <http://www.thenhcs.org/our-school/leadership-in-the-field/>, and [http://www.theparkerschool.org/pages/Francis\\_W\\_\\_Parker\\_Charter\\_Esse/Sizer\\_Teachers\\_Center/Sizer\\_Teacher\\_Center](http://www.theparkerschool.org/pages/Francis_W__Parker_Charter_Esse/Sizer_Teachers_Center/Sizer_Teacher_Center)  
<sup>24</sup> See <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/support-for-level-3-4-and-5-districts-and-schools/school-and-district-turnaround/turnaround-in-massachusetts/turnaround-and-emerging-practices-reports.html>

for educators who wish to take on the hard work of improving public education for their communities. As stated earlier, ESE will establish a partnership with a third party to identify best practices of successful charter schools and assess the effectiveness of our dissemination strategies on the schools and districts who engage with and adopt new practices as a result of dissemination. In addition, we intend to deploy surveys to dissemination partners, participants in dissemination events, as well as those that use tools and resources on the ESE website to provide an immediate assessment of the likelihood for implementation as well as perceived obstacles. In our assessment of our success, we will continue to ask the field about the obstacles to student success for their schools and districts and develop dissemination strategies and partnerships that address those unique challenges.

*(2) Plan for disseminating about student discipline and school climate.*

ESE has prioritized the identification of charter schools which excel at supporting student success through positive school climate and effective student discipline. ESE's plans to identify charter schools that have a **clearly articulated approach** to establishing a positive and healthy school climate, and that limit the use of exclusionary discipline practices through the use of other **intentional strategies designed to promote student reflection and ownership for behavior**. The ability of ESE to disseminate information and research on best or promising practices in charter schools related to student discipline and school climate is significantly strengthened by a recent ESE reorganization that sites OCCSR within a newly-created Center for Educational Options, alongside the agency's Office of Student and Family Support, which is charged with supporting the creation of safe and supportive learning environments and the implementation of the state's new discipline law.<sup>25</sup> One key goal of the reorganization was to better position ESE resources to deliver on the overall strategic goal of supporting the social, emotional, and health needs of students and families. The best practices of charter schools in student discipline and school climate will be a key component of this strategic work, with additional incentive for

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<sup>25</sup> The Center for Educational Options is led by Senior Associate Commissioner Cliff Chuang, who will leverage deep and longstanding strong relationships with charter school leaders and district superintendents to facilitate this cross-sector sharing.

thoughtful consideration of such practices in the context of new expectations established by the state's new discipline law. Additionally, ESE is continuing its long-standing research partnership with MIT's School Effectiveness and Inequality Initiative, which will be focusing on discipline practices and their impact on outcomes in the next phase of research.

ESE has already performed a differential and comparative analysis of student discipline data to identify several charter schools with promising discipline practices due to legal changes in 2014 to the state's expectations for discipline practices and required discipline reporting. ESE will integrate its current technical assistance efforts related to student discipline into the broader dissemination plan.

**Selection Criteria (f): Oversight of Public Chartering Agencies.**

**1) *Quality of Plan for Oversight. Important Note:*** As noted previously, in Massachusetts, the SEA (BESE and its administrative arm, ESE) itself is the sole public chartering agency in Massachusetts. Accordingly, the "SEA's plan to monitor, evaluate, assist, and hold accountable public chartering agencies" and "the quality of the SEA's plan to provide oversight to authorized public chartering agencies" required for this Selection Criteria is directly predicated on the actions of ESE/BESE as an authorizer itself and self-oversight/monitoring/evaluation practices, as described in [Comp. Pref. Pr.1](#), p. 3. The responses to this Selection Criteria are therefore focused on the nationally-recognized, high-quality authorizing practices and policies of ESE/BESE, and may cross-reference previous portions of this application where these have already been discussed.

**(i) *Design Elements.*** ESE's plan to ensure that charter schools are founded on evidence-based school models and practices that meet the needs of racially diverse and educationally disadvantaged students is found in both the application process and the accountability system, both derived from Massachusetts charter school statute and regulations (App. 1 and 2). Developers applying to open a charter school are required to anticipate the population of students the school will serve and to include explicit research citations in their application to demonstrate that the proposed educational program will result in high academic achievement for those students. See, *Application for a Massachusetts Public Charter School: Proposed*

*Commonwealth or Horace Mann Charter School By New Operator 2016-2017 (App. 6).*

Developers applying to open a charter school are also required to submit a recruitment and retention policy that includes deliberate, specific strategies the school will use to

. Demographic groups that must be included in all recruitment and retention plans include: limited English proficient, special education, free lunch, and reduced-price lunch students<sup>26</sup>, 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.

The second element of ESE's plan for ensuring fidelity to its chosen evidence-based programming is its accountability system. The components of Massachusetts charter school accountability are more fully described in [Sel. Crit.f \(2\)\(ii\)](#), p. 39. Evidence of faithful implementation of the evidence-based academic program proposed in the charter application, as well as recruitment and retention plans, are critical to decisions to renew (or not to renew) charters or to place schools on probation or conditions, as well as to take interim formal measures for schools that are substantially out of compliance during the term of their charters. All charter schools on conditions or probation are published on ESE's website with the justification for their status until corrected.

Finally, ESE, as the Board's administrative arm for charter schools, is subject to public audit for adherence to laws, regulations and policies and by statute must submit a report annually to the Massachusetts Legislature on students enrolled in charter schools:

The commissioner shall collect data on the racial, ethnic and socio-economic make-up of the student enrollment of each charter school in the commonwealth.

The commissioner shall also collect data on the number of students enrolled in each charter school who have individual education plans pursuant to chapter 71B

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<sup>26</sup> Please note: The Department has a new metric, called Economically Disadvantaged. Please see here for information: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/ed.html>

and those requiring English language learners programs under chapter 71A. The commissioner shall file said data annually with the clerks of the house and senate and the joint committee on education not later than December 1.

Mass. Gen. Laws, ch. 71, § 89(kk) (App. 1).

**(ii) Establishing Measureable Performance Expectations.** ESE’s accountability system is guided by protocols, systems, and structures all designed to hold all Massachusetts charter schools to the highest standards of performance. There are rigorous expectations for charter school performance in the three guiding areas of charter school accountability: academic program success, organizational viability, and faithfulness to charter.

Expectations for academic program success for each charter school are set by specific objectives that are aligned to the *Massachusetts school and district accountability and assistance system*, which has been in place since 2012 when Massachusetts received a waiver of certain No Child Left Behind requirements. The accountability system measures each school’s and district’s progress toward reducing proficiency gaps by half between the 2010-11 and 2016-17 school years for all students and up to eleven subgroups, including educationally disadvantaged students.<sup>27</sup> All schools are assigned one of five accountability and assistance levels:

**Figure 15. Massachusetts Accountability and Assistance Levels.**

<b>Commendation</b>	High-achieving, high-growth, gap narrowing schools (Subset of Level 1)
<b>Level 1</b>	Meeting gap narrowing goals (for all and educationally disadvantaged students)
<b>Level 2</b>	Not meeting gap narrowing goals (for all and/or educationally disadvantaged students)
<b>Level 3</b>	Lowest performing 20% of schools (Including lowest performing subgroups)
<b>Level 4</b>	Lowest performing schools (subset of Level 3)
<b>Level 5</b>	Chronically underperforming schools (subset of Level 4)

Accountability Plans: Additionally, in order to track a school’s progress toward meeting its unique mission, each charter school must submit an Accountability Plan prior to the start of its second year of operation that is clear, rigorous, and measurable. Using ESE’s *Accountability*

<sup>27</sup> The educationally disadvantaged category is defined as an unduplicated count of all students in a school or district belonging to at least one of the following individual subgroups: students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL) and former ELL students, or low income students, mirroring the federal definition of *educationally disadvantaged*.

*Plan Guidelines*, (App. 9), each charter school develops objectives and measures for demonstrating achievement of its mission and key design elements. The plan must receive ESE approval, and progress toward the plan's objectives must be included in its annual report.

Alternative Charter Schools Performance Expectations: Massachusetts has 5 charter high schools that serve alternative populations that are at risk for dropping out or not graduating high school or for which standard metrics do not present a complete measure of success. The alternative schools are expected to adhere to the Accountability Plan guidance to create draft measures in academic areas and must work with the ESE to ensure that measures are valid, reliable, and the best fit for the school's unique program. Both the ESE and the charter school are guided by NACSA's report, *Anecdotes Aren't Enough*,<sup>28</sup> about articulating high-quality measures for schools serving alternative populations.

*Note: Massachusetts does not have pre-school or virtual charter schools.*

**(iii) Providing Annual Public Performance Reports.** ESE provides annual reporting for each charter school, summarizing the school's academic performance and identifying areas that need improvement through publicly available annual report cards provided on ESE's website (see App. 10 for a sample report card). As described above, ESE has aligned its criteria for student performance for charter schools with the statewide accountability system, which also reports on

In addition to these reporting tools, the OCCSR has developed tools specifically designed to deliver charter performance data in timely, public and easily accessible visual formats. These two reporting tools provide the public with key information, updated annually:

1. Financial Dashboard,<sup>29</sup> which comprehensively reports financial performance data using readily accessible, color-coded ratings on key indicators of financial health.

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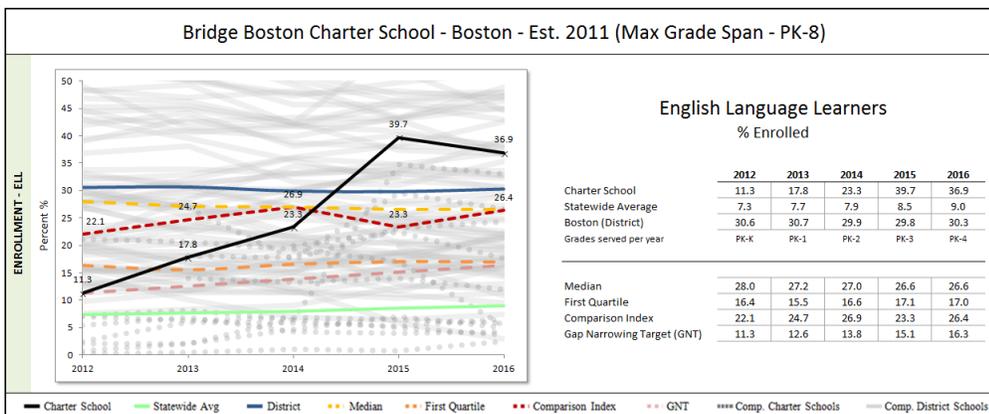
<sup>28</sup> <http://www.qualitycharters.org/2013/10/anecdotes-arent-enough/>. Cliff Chuang and Alison Bagg of the OCCSR contributed to this paper.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/finance/dashboard/>

2. Charter Analysis Review Tool (CHART).<sup>30</sup> This innovative tool, available on ESE’s website, provides multi-school, multi-year demographic comparison data in three categories:

CHART comprehensively displays this data through charter-to-traditional public school

**Figure 16. Sample CHART Graph: English Language Learners**



(iv) **Supporting Charter School Autonomy.** Massachusetts received the highest score possible in the area of “Fiscally and Legally Autonomous Schools with Independent Public Charter School Boards” in the most recent report by The National Alliance of Public Charter

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/finance/chart/>

Schools.<sup>31</sup> The entire statutory scheme creating charter schools (App. 1) is premised upon granting autonomy in exchange for increased accountability. Massachusetts charter schools have the freedom to organize around a core mission, curriculum, theme, and/or teaching method or educational program, as well as to control their own budgets, grade configurations, and size, rules of governance, facilities, transportation, and staffing. (For more on autonomies and flexibilities, see [Sel. Crit. g \(1\)](#), p. 45). In return for these freedoms, charter schools must demonstrate success by meeting the terms of their charters or performance contracts or face probation, conditions, or possible revocation or nonrenewal of their charters. (see discussion of accountability system, [Sel. Crit. f \(2\)\(ii\)](#), p. 39).

**(2)(i) Seeking and Approving High-Quality Charter Schools.** Massachusetts’ strategies to recruit and approve applications from developers that have the capacity to create high-quality charter schools, especially those serving educationally disadvantaged students:

**1) Targeted recruitment of successful charter school operators.** ESE encourages charter school operators with a track record of success to consider applying to replicate in the state’s lowest performing school districts.

**2) Supporting and training of new charter developers.** ESE performs nine information sessions annually for prospective operators. At least half of the sessions each year take place in the state’s highest need districts, where charter growth will increase access for educationally disadvantaged students.

**3) Increasing capacity of charter developers through high-quality partnerships.** ESE maintains close relationships with numerous national organizations with a record of operating or supporting high-quality schools. ESE supports partnerships between these organizations and novice charter applicant groups to facilitate development of the capacity of motivated, new operators to establish high-quality charter schools.

**4) Ensuring developer capacity through rigorous application process.** As described in

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<sup>31</sup> [http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Model-Law-Final\\_2016.pdf](http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Model-Law-Final_2016.pdf)

[Comp. Pref. Pr. 1](#), p. 3, all applicant groups must establish sufficient evidence of their capacity to found a high-quality school through their charter application, a capacity interview with ESE staff, and the public comment period and hearing.

**5) Proven provider status required for applicant groups intending to serve educationally disadvantaged students.** Each applicant group or its identified partner organization seeking to establish a charter school in one of the 29 lowest performing districts is required to demonstrate sufficient prior experience establishing a successful school serving a similar student population. ESE requires at least three years of academic results showing that all students and one or more educationally disadvantaged student subgroups met or exceeded statewide averages based on statewide achievement tests. Annual student attendance, retention rates, graduation rates, student attrition and discipline practices are also considered. In addition, ESE examines the school's success in enrolling and retaining a student population similar to its sending districts.

**(ii) Monitoring and Conducting In-depth Reviews.** ESE monitors charter schools on an annual basis and conducts in-depth review of each charter school at least once every five years. The parameters for each are articulated in Massachusetts' *Guide to Charter School Accountability* (App 13). The Charter School Performance *Criteria* (App. 4), found in Figure 17, are at the center of the Massachusetts charter school accountability system; they set rigorous expectations for charter school performance in the three guiding areas of accountability: academic program success, organizational viability, and faithfulness to charter. First developed in 2005, with subsequent major revisions in 2010, 2013, and 2015, the *Criteria*:

- describe the expectations for all aspects of charter school accountability, from the application process to the renewal process;
- provide charter schools with clear guidance about how BESE, ESE and the Commissioner define their success and on what basis each will be evaluated; and,
- clarify the connections between Massachusetts charter school accountability and additional state and federal accountability standards.

ESE regularly evaluates each school against the *Criteria* using quantitative and/or qualitative data and affirmative evidence compiled over the course of the school's charter term.

**Figure 17. Massachusetts Charter School Performance Criteria.**

Massachusetts Charter School Performance Criteria		Rating	
Faithfulness to Charter	1. <b>Mission and Key Design Elements:</b> The school is faithful to its mission, implements the key design elements outlined in its charter, and substantially meets its accountability plan goals.		
	2. <b>Access and Equity:</b> The school ensures program access and equity for all students eligible to attend the school.		
	3. <b>Compliance:</b> The school compiles a record of compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable state and federal laws and regulations.		
	4. <b>Dissemination:</b> The school provides innovative models for replication and best practices to other public schools in the district where the charter school is located.		
Academic Program Success	5. <b>Student Performance:</b> The school consistently meets state student performance standards for academic growth, proficiency, and college and career readiness.		
	6. <b>Program Delivery:</b> The school delivers an academic program that provides improved academic outcomes and educational success for all students.	Curriculum	
		Instruction	
		Assessment and Program Evaluation	
		Supports for Diverse Learners	
	7. <b>Culture and Family Engagement:</b> The school supports students' social and emotional health in a safe and respectful learning environment that engages families.	Social, Emotional and Health Needs	
		Family Engagement	
Organizational Viability	8. <b>Capacity:</b> The school sustains a well-functioning organizational structure and creates a professional working climate for all staff.	School Leadership	
		Professional Climate	
		Contractual Relationships (If applicable)	
	9. <b>Governance:</b> Members of the board of trustees act as public agents authorized by the state and provide competent and appropriate governance to ensure the success and sustainability of the school.		
	10. <b>Finance:</b> The school maintains a sound and stable financial condition and operates in a financially sound and publicly accountable manner.		

In order to communicate clearly, ESE uses the rating scale below (Figure 18) to summarize a charter school's performance against the *Criteria* in Figure 17, including the detailed key indicators (App. 7). Additional details regarding how this scale is used are outlined in the

Charter School Site Visit Protocol (App. 14), the Charter School Renewal Inspection Protocol (App. 15), and the Guide to Charter School Accountability (App. 13).

**Figure 18: Rating Scale Facilitates Clear Communication About Charter School Performance.**

Rating	Description
<b>Exceeds</b>	The school fully and consistently meets the criterion and is a potential exemplar in this area.
<b>Meets</b>	The school generally meets the criterion and/or minor concern(s) are noted.
<b>Partially Meets</b>	The school meets some aspects of the criterion but not others and/or moderate concern(s) are noted.
<b>Falls Far Below</b>	The school falls far below the criterion and/or significant concern(s) are noted.

ESE annually monitors the academic performance, financial health, faithfulness to charter (the promises and obligations of each charter school), and the adherence to access and equity policies using the following tools and practices:

1) **Monitoring Financial Performance.** Charter schools are required to undergo an annual independent financial audit and to submit the results to ESE along with an end-of-year financial report that provides specific details of their expenses. ESE uses this data to monitor each charter school’s overall financial health and areas of potential risk, and annually reports each charter school’s financial performance in a public, comprehensive *Financial Dashboard* (App. 11).

2) **Monitoring Faithfulness to Charter.** The charter accountability process considers evidence of each school’s progress toward attaining its Accountability Plan objectives and measures. An overview of the Accountability Plan is found in [Sel. Crit. f \(1\)\(ii\)](#), p. 35.

3) **Monitoring Access and Equity.** OCSSR annually posts the Charter Analysis and Review Tool (CHART) ([Sel. Crit. f \(1\)\(iii\)](#), p. 36), which provides multi-school, multi-year demographic comparisons for each charter school in three categories: enrollment percentages by subgroup; attrition percentages by grade level and subgroup; and student indicator statistics, including suspensions.

4) **Site Visits to Corroborate Progress.** ESE has a rigorous, systematic, and differentiated

process for conducting regular on-site reviews of charter schools depending on their age and level of performance. Each new school receives an ESE site visit during the first, second, and fifth year of its charter term and sometimes during the third and/or fourth years as well. In subsequent charter terms, if performance expectations are met, the frequency of visits is reduced, with each school receiving at least one visit sometime during years two, three, or four and an in-depth renewal site visit in the fifth year of its charter term. Site visit teams are comprised of individuals with educational expertise and are in most instances led by an ESE staff member. The primary purpose of site visits is to corroborate and augment the information contained in a school's most recent annual report, especially its stated progress relative to the school's accountability plan performance objectives, and to gather evidence about school performance relative to the standards articulated in the performance *Criteria*. Of ESE's current portfolio of 96 school campuses, ESE performed site visits at over 50% during the 2015-16 school year.

**5) Charter Renewal Process.** Every charter school undergoes a renewal process during the final year of its charter term to determine whether or not the school should continue to operate. This in-depth review is outlined in ESE's *Application for Renewal of a Public School Charter* (App. 16) and the *Charter School Renewal Inspection Protocol* (App. 15). The renewal process includes the school's submission of a renewal application, a renewal inspection visit, and consideration of all evidence related to the charter school's performance collected through ESE's charter school accountability process both at the time of renewal and during the five years of the charter (see, the Commissioner's memorandum, *Considerations for Charter School Renewal*, App. 5 ). The *Criteria* provide the lens of inquiry for the charter renewal process and set the standards for a successful renewal. The resulting analysis is captured in a summary of review, which contains ratings (Falls Far Below, Partially Meets, Meets, or Exceeds) of the school's performance against each of the ten *Criteria*, along with objective evidence to support each of the ratings, such as: a determination of whether or not the school has met the measures contained in its Accountability Plan; an assessment of the school's compliance with applicable State and Federal laws; a summary of the school's academic performance over the charter term; and a

financial dashboard summarizing fiscal viability. The Commissioner's recommendation regarding renewal is presented to BESE. The charter of the school is then either renewed, renewed with conditions, or not renewed for another five-year term.

*(iii) Using Data for Renewal and Revocation Decisions.* Increases in student academic

As

noted in the Commissioner's memorandum, *Considerations for Charter School Renewal* (App. 5),

As described above, ESE's renewal decisions are made by assessing all evidence of a school's performance over the charter term in light of the material terms of its charter, Charter School Performance Criteria (Criteria), and the school's Accountability Plan. Every charter school undergoes a renewal process during the fifth and final year of its charter term, as outlined in ESE's *Application for Renewal of a Public School Charter* (App. 16) and in the *Charter School Renewal Inspection Protocol* (App. 15).

Because renewal is a summative decision determining a school's continued existence,

As the sole authorizer, ESE has revoked, non-renewed, or encouraged the voluntary termination of charters held by academically poor-performing charter schools. Massachusetts' charter school statute and regulations (App. 1 and 2) set clear criteria for revoking a charter or

instituting conditions or probation:

M.G.L. c. 71, § 89(ee) (App. 1).

By law, BESE may suspend or revoke a charter for cause including, but not limited to:

Short of revocation or nonrenewal, BESE or the Commissioner may impose conditions

place a school on probation. For particularly serious or egregious circumstances, such as criminal

## *Charter School*

*Closing Procedures* (App. 17) <sup>32</sup>

***(iv) Ensuring the continued accountability of charter schools during statewide transitions.*** ESE will ensure accountability during the transition to the new statewide assessment system by defining concordance between current and future assessments to allow for meaningful comparison of results. Massachusetts is in the process of moving from its current statewide achievement test, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) to MCAS 2.0. The accountability of charter schools will not be affected by this transition because the state’s charter statute and regulations mandate that charter school accountability decisions must continue, and ESE will continue to use the totality of the evidence available to support such decisions. ESE will also continue to offer professional learning opportunities and technical assistance sessions to facilitate a successful shift to MCAS 2.0 for all schools, including charter schools. These sessions will be targeted toward both ESE staff and to all school leaders, teachers, and instructional staff throughout the state and always include charter schools.

### **Selection Criteria (g): Policy Context for Charter Schools.**

#### ***(1) The degree of flexibility afforded to charter schools under the state law.***

Charter school boards of trustees are granted “all of the powers necessary or desirable for carrying out its charter program.” Mass. Gen. Laws, ch. 71, §89(k) (App. 1). Confirming that Massachusetts charters fully exercise these statutory autonomies, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools in its 2015 report, *Measuring up to the Model: A Ranking of State Charter School Laws* <sup>33</sup> shows that Massachusetts is one of the leading states for fiscally and legally autonomous schools with independent public charter boards.

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=closing>

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/model\\_law\\_2015.pdf](http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/model_law_2015.pdf)

Importantly, Massachusetts law ensures that charter school boards of trustees are afforded complete autonomy to control their funds. ESE respects the fiscal autonomy of charter schools, having no involvement in the regular day-to-day management of funds, but monitors a charter school's overall fiscal health annually by collecting independently audited financial reports.

Massachusetts charter schools also have the legal and business powers necessary to operate independently: they can acquire or lease real estate to be used as school facilities; contract for services, equipment, and supplies, as well as borrow money. They are also exempt from public procurement laws and granted protections in certain lawsuits. A commonwealth charter school's teachers are not subject to union contracts for the district in which the school resides, leaving charter schools free to negotiate their own staff contracts.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, charter schools are given both the space and the encouragement to innovate. As independent LEAs, they are expressly freed of restrictions that shape operations and educational programs at traditional district public schools. Charter schools have the freedom to organize around a core mission, curriculum, theme, and/or teaching method or educational program,<sup>35</sup> as well as to control the school's budget, grade configuration and size, rules of governance, facilities, transportation, and staffing. In return for these freedoms, charter schools are held to a higher degree of accountability than their traditional district counterparts and must demonstrate success or face adverse consequences at the end of their five-year charter. Along with these

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<sup>34</sup> Horace Mann charter schools are an exception to contractual autonomy described here. In Massachusetts, a developer may elect at its discretion a *Horace Mann* charter school model, which operates in-district, and therefore must obtain local school committee approval *and* BESE authorization of its charter. In some cases Horace Mann charter schools must receive approval from the local collective bargaining unit, although this requirement is optional for new Horace Mann charter schools. While a Horace Mann's teachers remain part of the local collective bargaining unit and must receive at least the same salary and benefits as teachers in other district schools, the law expressly allows Horace Mann charter schools a process to modify collective bargaining provisions that inhibit operational flexibility. With the exception of contractual autonomy and some differences in how a Horace Mann charter school receives its funds, it is operated by an independent board of trustees and is granted all other autonomies described above. Of the 96 charter schools operating in 2015-2016, only 10 are Horace Mann charter schools.

<sup>35</sup> Massachusetts charter schools have taken full advantage of these freedoms to organize around myriad missions, including: Montessori methods, rigorous college preparation, expanded learning schedules, arts-infused curriculum, Chinese immersion curriculum, intensive math and science curriculum, and alternative pathways to high-school graduation, among many others, forwarding the statutory objective for charter schools to "stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education." M.G.L. c. 71, § 89 (b) App. 1).

autonomies, as both public and educational institutions, charter schools remain answerable to the state for essentials of good governance and compliance with all laws governing educational quality and safety.

**(2) Annual information about federal funds and commensurate share.**

As outlined below, ESE has specific protocols and support structures in program units and throughout the agency to ensure that annually, each charter in Massachusetts is informed about and receives its commensurate share of Federal funds. Additionally, OCSSR provides support to other program offices and coordination with each charter school to ensure timely disbursement of the appropriate funds. Specific support structures are:

**1. Central Grant Resource.** ESE's Grants Management webpage<sup>36</sup> provides all relevant information about accessing federal funds, including how to submit proposals, allocation amounts, and all program guidelines for obtaining and administering grant funds. Charter school leaders are updated regularly when new grant information is posted to this webpage.

**2. Technical Assistance to Charter Schools Highlights Federal Grant Opportunities.** To ensure that each charter school is informed of the full array of federal funds and programs available to them, OCSSR conducts a full-day orientation for charter school administrators each fall intended for personnel *new to a charter school* (even if the charter school itself has been in operation for many years) with a strand for finance personnel, and provides specific finance trainings as part of opening procedures for new charter schools.

**3. OCSSR as Liaison for Federal Grant Contacts.** On an ongoing basis, OCSSR's Coordinator of Finance and Data (who also serves as the CSP Project Director) along with the Access and Equity team serve as a resource for schools with questions about accessing and administering federal funds allocated by ESE. OCSSR routinely links charter school leaders with program officers within ESE to ensure that charter school leaders are receiving necessary information to access state and federal programs and funding. The CSP Project Director also

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/Grants/>

uses OCSSR's website and a charter leader/business manager listserv as tools to update schools about deadlines and submission requirements for ESE-administered federal programs.

**4. *OCSSR Facilitates Timely Disbursement of Federal Grant Funds to Charter Schools.***

To ensure that all new and significantly expanding charter schools receive their commensurate share of federal funds in a timely manner, OCSSR coordinates program units within ESE. OCSSR provides enrollment projection data for charter schools, including those anticipating significant expansions, to the appropriate program units within ESE so that charter school allocations for the next school year will be based on projected current-year figures as required by federal regulations. These projections are adjusted once actual enrollment figures are available the following fall/winter. The OCSSR has also ensured that ESE grant program units have procedures for new or significantly expanding charter schools to allow these schools to receive their commensurate share of IDEA entitlement funds in the year of opening or expansion.

In addition to receiving all federal entitlement funds, such as Title I, IDEA special education grants, federal nutrition and Medicaid reimbursements, charter schools in Massachusetts have successfully competed for federal discretionary grants administered by ESE. For example, 43 charter schools participated in the Race to the Top initiative.

**(3) *Compliance with IDEA and civil rights laws.***

All charter schools in Massachusetts are LEAs and are required to comply with IDEA and all other federal civil rights laws (M.G.L., c. 71, §89 (m,s), App. 1). Massachusetts has built numerous checks into its chartering and monitoring structure to hold charter school accountable for full compliance. Charter school application criteria require each applicant to include a complete description of the processes and procedures that the proposed school will employ to identify, assess, and serve students who are English language learners and/or in need of special education services, which becomes part of the school's charter if the application is successful. Charter school developers must also sign assurances as part of their applications that bind each to compliance with all laws, federal and state, pertaining to students who are English language learners and students with disabilities (specifically listing the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1974, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974), as well as the federal Age Discrimination Act and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (see, *Application for a Massachusetts Public Charter School: Proposed Commonwealth or Horace Mann Charter School by a New Operator: 2016-2017* (App. 6)). All successful charter applicants then must submit extensive policies and procedures plans for both English language learners and students with disabilities that are compliant with state and federal law and regulations prior to opening. Once opened, charter schools submit annual reports to the OCSSR that include deliberate, specific strategies used by the school to recruit and retain limited English proficient students and students receiving special education, among other subgroups of students identified by law. Charter school performance with respect to recruitment and retention is part of the evidence forming the basis of subsequent charter renewal decisions.

ESE's OCSSR also has a dedicated Access and Equity (A&E) team, whose members have specialized knowledge about civil rights laws, special education, and English language learners (see, e.g., OCSSR's *Massachusetts Primer on Special Education and Charter Schools*,<sup>37</sup> [http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/sped/primer\\_sl.pdf](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/sped/primer_sl.pdf), with an entire section on federal law). A&E staff members are deeply involved in the review of charter applications to ensure that charter school developers have the expertise and capacity necessary to serve a diverse student body effectively in compliance with federal IDEA and civil rights laws. Once a school is chartered, A&E staff provide required trainings on state and federal compliance through the Opening Procedures process, as well as during its first year of operation to check on initial implementation and to perform student records reviews to provide formative feedback. A&E team members participate in all charter school accountability site visits, as well, gathering evidence on implementation of plans for identification and serving students with diverse learning

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<sup>37</sup> [http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/sped/primer\\_sl.pdf](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/sped/primer_sl.pdf)

needs, which becomes part of the body of evidence for charter renewal decisions.

In addition to OCSSR's oversight, as LEAs, charter schools are monitored for compliance with federal and state laws by ESE's Program Quality Assurance (PQA) unit on a 6-year cycle, like all other school districts, though the comprehensive *Coordinated Program Review (CPR)*<sup>38</sup> process beginning in the charter school's second year. During the CPR, a PQA team conducts a comprehensive review of special education policies, procedures, and staff, and results in mandatory corrective action for any deficiency. Massachusetts' authorizing practices in the area of special education and civil rights are frequently referenced as a model nationally at both national conferences and in print media,<sup>39</sup> and ESE is a founding member of the National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools Equity Coalition.

#### **APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

##### **Application Requirement (i): Disseminating best practices**

Please see [Sel. Crit. e](#) for the response to this requirement.

##### **Application Requirement (ii): Federal funds**

Please see [Sel. Crit. g \(2\)](#) for the response to this requirement.

##### **Application Requirement (iii): IDEA Compliance**

Please see [Sel. Crit. g \(3\)](#) for the response to this requirement.

##### **Application Requirement (iv): Logic model**

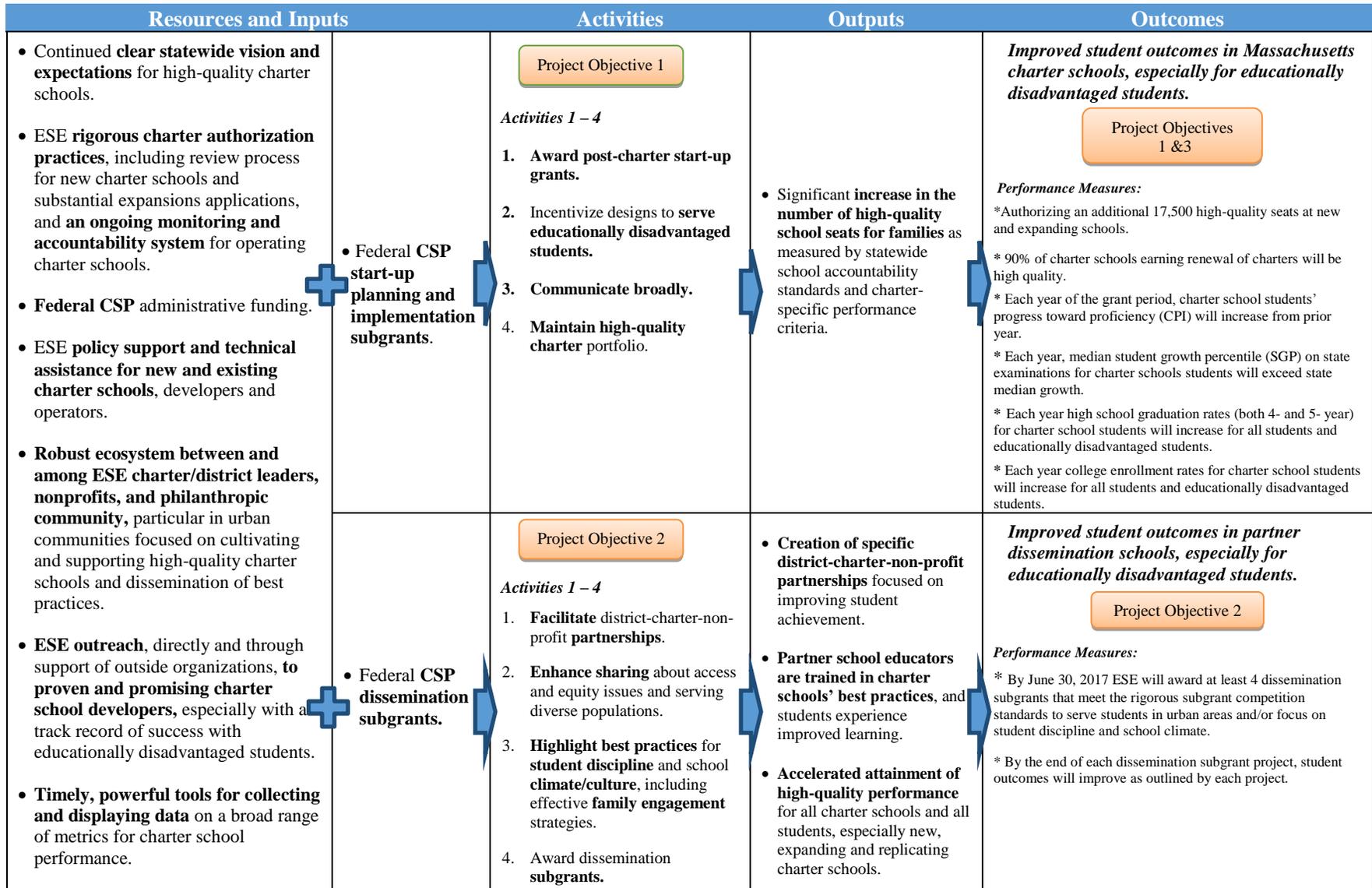
The theory of action of the Massachusetts CSP Project is based on the seamless integration of ESE's overall state strategy, incorporating a rigorous charter school authorization processes with stable and dependable federal CSP funding to support creation of high-quality school seats and collaboration with districts to yield improved student outcomes for students in charter schools and throughout the state.

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/12/05/mystery-parents-test-charters-enrollment-of-spec.html> and [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2015/10/charter\\_school\\_enrollment\\_policies\\_fuel\\_discussion\\_debate\\_at\\_national\\_authorizer\\_meeting.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2015/10/charter_school_enrollment_policies_fuel_discussion_debate_at_national_authorizer_meeting.html)

Figure 19: Logic model



### **Application Requirement (v): Lottery and enrollment preferences**

Massachusetts comprehensively regulates enrollment procedures,<sup>40</sup> which shall not discriminate as defined by state and federal law, and requires neutral, transparent lotteries. ESE assures that it will require each applicant for a CSP subgrant to include, in its application, descriptions of its recruitment and admissions policies and practices, since all charter schools applicants' enrollment policies are evaluated by ESE as part of the charter application review. Once approved, these policies may only be amended with approval of ESE's Commissioner. The regulations recognize limited lottery preferences: 1) In the case of Commonwealth charters – for siblings of existing charter school students and for students residing in the community that the charter school serves; and 2) for Horace Mann charters – additional preferences are given in the school's initial lottery to students attending the school that was subsequently converted and their siblings, as well as students attending school in the Horace Mann charter's district.

### **Application Requirement (vi): Objectives**

*This section should be read in tandem with the Logic Model, [Application Requirement \(iv\)](#).*

The following project-specific performance objectives are designed to help reach the CSP objectives and performance measures by increasing the number of high-quality charter school seats and schools, as well as insuring sufficient capacity to reach high levels of performance for all students, including proficiency on statewide mathematics and ELA achievement tests.

***Project Objective 1: Increase the number of high-quality school seats in Massachusetts, especially for educationally disadvantaged students.***

Because charter schools are part of an overall state strategy to improve educational outcomes for students, the focus of the Massachusetts CSP project is on the creation of high-quality school seats, which can be achieved 1) through the launch of new charter school as well as 2) the replication or expansion of currently operating high-performing charter schools. Massachusetts will achieve this objective through the following activities:

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr1.html?section=05>

***Activity 1: Quickly award post-charter planning and implementation grants to all newly authorized or substantially expanding charter schools in Massachusetts.***

Federal CSP grant funds are key to the successful development and implementation of new, high-quality educational options. Massachusetts will provide CSP start-up subgrants to each new charter school or substantial expansion of an existing charter school (as described in [Waiver Request 4](#)) approved by BESE upon the successful conclusion of ESE’s comprehensive new-school or expansion review process, which is integrated with the CSP subgrant process as described in [Sel. Crit. d \(1\)](#).

***Activity 2: Provide significantly increased post-charter planning and implementation grant awards for applicants that meet specific design priorities related to educationally disadvantaged students***

ESE will incentivize the development of high-quality charter schools that are designed to provide access to and better meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged students by awarding significantly increased start-up funds (in addition to base-level grants discuss above) for charters that meet specific design priorities. ESE currently anticipates providing incremental start-up funding to charters schools that meet two types of incentive priorities:

**Access and Equity.** ESE will provide up to 35% (**or \$175,000**) additional CSP grant funding to those charter schools that either:

- a. Commit to **backfilling** all vacancies through grade 10 in alignment with current backfilling procedures.
- b. Are developed with an explicit mission and educational program designed to:  
Specifically serve **English language learners**, or specially serve students who are **disconnected, over-age and under-credited, or off-track** in their education preparing them for high school graduation;

3. **Immediate High Impact.** ESE will provide up to 25% (**or \$125,000**) additional CSP grant funding to those charter schools that quickly provide new, high-quality educational seats to communities by opening with at least 250 seats in the first year of operation.

**Activity 3: Actively communicate to districts, educators, families, non-profits, communities and charter developers and entrepreneurs about charter schools best practices and the availability of CSP grant funding support for dissemination, planning and implementation.**

See [Sel. Crit. e \(2\)](#) for details.

**Activity 4: Ensure the ongoing high-quality of all existing Massachusetts charter schools through a rigorous accountability review process.**

ESE will increase the number of high-quality charter schools through maintenance of the state’s rigorous accountability and renewal process outlined in [Comp. Pref. Pr. 1 \(a\)](#), and by ensuring that academically poor-performing charter schools currently on conditions or probation either (1) make sufficient progress toward meeting the high-quality standard, or (2) are closed.

**Project Objective 2: Promote the dissemination of Massachusetts charter school best practices to other public schools and collaborative district-charter partnerships to improve student achievement outcomes in partner schools and districts.**

Activities supporting this objective are described in [Sel. Crit. e](#).

**Project Objective 3: Improve student outcomes in Massachusetts charter schools, especially for educationally disadvantaged students.**

The final project objective reflects the overall goal of the Massachusetts CSP Project. As outlined in the logic model, ESE believes that the activities of [Project Objective \(1\)](#) and [Project Objective \(3\)](#) will improve student outcomes in charter schools, which will in turn yield improved student outcomes for all students in the state through dissemination of best practices in all aspects of student growth and achievement.

**Figure 20: Massachusetts 2016–2021 CSP Project Performance Measures**

<b>Project Objective 1: Increase the number of high-quality school seats in Massachusetts, especially for educationally disadvantaged students.</b>		
<b>Performance Measure</b>	<b>Baseline Data</b>	<b>Performance Target and why this is ambitious yet achievable</b>
<b>IA:</b> By June 30, 2021, ESE will authorize an additional 17,500 high- quality school seats.	In FY16, there will be approximately 35,349 high-quality charter school seats in Massachusetts.	Growth of 1,800 to 4,695 high-quality seats annually (17,500 total over five years) is ambitious yet achievable as described in <a href="#">Sel. Crit. b (1)</a> and <a href="#">(c)(1)</a> .

<i><b>1B:</b> Each year, 90% of the portfolio of existing charter schools that are renewed will meet the definition of a high-quality charter school used in this application; those that do not will be required to improve within a specified time through specific conditions or probation, or will be closed.</i>	FY16: 78%	It is reasonable to expect 90% of renewal schools will qualify as high-quality because of Massachusetts' rigorous accountability system including the rigorous renewal process.
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**Project Objective 2: Promote the dissemination of Massachusetts charter school best practices to other public schools and collaborative district-charter partnerships to improve student achievement outcomes in partner schools and districts.**

<b>Performance Measure</b>	<b>Baseline Data</b>	<b>Performance Target and why this is ambitious yet achievable</b>
<i>2A: By the end of each dissemination subgrant project, student outcomes will improve as outlined by each project.</i>	This performance measure is new to the FY17 CSP grant. Baseline data will be established as part of each subgrant project.	An end-of-grant improvement in measurable student outcomes is ambitious, since this represents tangible change for students, rather than just process/input shifts for adults. <sup>41</sup> It is achievable given the significant investment being made by the charter school dissemination subgrantee.
<i>2B: By June 30, 2017, establish a concrete action plan for district-charter collaboration on projects of mutual interest through a joint steering committee of urban district superintendents and charter school leaders representing urban areas in the state.</i>	This performance measure is new to the FY17 CSP grant, so baseline data will be generated over the term of the grant.	This action plan target is ambitious since such collaboration is unprecedented in Massachusetts. It is achievable given the promising collaborative groundwork laid by ESE and district and charter leaders.

**Project Objective 3: Improve student outcomes in Massachusetts charter schools, especially for educationally disadvantaged students.**

<b>Performance Measure</b>	<b>Baseline Data<sup>42</sup></b>	<b>Performance Target; why this is ambitious yet achievable</b>																												
<i>3A1 –3A12: Each year charter school students' CPI will increase from the prior year (GPRA).</i>	<p><u>2015 Charter School Data</u></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="4">CPI</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Grade</th> <th>Subject</th> <th>All</th> <th>Educationally Disadvantaged</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>ELA</td> <td>78.97</td> <td>72.13</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>Math</td> <td>76.84</td> <td>70.97</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8</td> <td>ELA</td> <td>94.56</td> <td>90.91</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8</td> <td>Math</td> <td>83.33</td> <td>76.56</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10</td> <td>ELA</td> <td>98.82</td> <td>97.54</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	CPI				Grade	Subject	All	Educationally Disadvantaged	4	ELA	78.97	72.13	4	Math	76.84	70.97	8	ELA	94.56	90.91	8	Math	83.33	76.56	10	ELA	98.82	97.54	A year-over-year increase in proficiency is ambitious since charter schools already outperform the state overall in many categories. This target is reasonable since narrowing achievement gaps is a primary goal of the state's charter schools.
CPI																														
Grade	Subject	All	Educationally Disadvantaged																											
4	ELA	78.97	72.13																											
4	Math	76.84	70.97																											
8	ELA	94.56	90.91																											
8	Math	83.33	76.56																											
10	ELA	98.82	97.54																											

<sup>41</sup> Annual targets for this measure may not be realistic, given that in ESE's experience, the first year of dissemination projects often must focus on culture-building among adults in order to set the stage for later success with students.

<sup>42</sup> Please note that baseline data provide here are approximations based on aggregate available data, but figures based on precise methodology and student-level data when applicable will be used for formal ED524B reporting as required by USED.

		10	MATH	94.45	89.94	
<p><i>3B1–3B12: Each year the median student growth percentile (SGP) on state examinations of charter school students in the following categories (listed under baseline data) will exceed the state median.</i></p>	<u>2015 Charter School and Statewide Data</u>					
	<b>Median SGP</b>				<b>State (non-charter)</b>	
	Grade	Subject			All	Educationally Disadvantaged
	4	ELA			51	44
	4	Math			50	44
	8	ELA			50	49
	8	Math			50	48
	10	ELA			51	47
				50	47	
<p><i>3C1–3C4: Each year high school graduation rates (both 4- and 5-year) for charter school students will increase for all students and educationally disadvantaged students</i></p>	<p><u>2015 Data</u>  4-year, All students: 86.2  4-year, Educationally Disadvantaged: 85.5  <u>2014 Data</u>  5-year, All students: 91.9  5-year, Educationally Disadvantaged: 91.5</p>					
	<p><i>3D1–3D2: Each year college enrollment rates for charter school students will increase for all students and educationally disadvantaged students.</i></p>	<p><u>2014 Data*</u>  All students: 80.2  High-Needs: 69.5</p>				
<p>A year-over-year target to exceed the state median SGP (usually 50) is ambitious since the sector will need to improve achievement faster than the rest of the state, since the baseline is below 50 in several categories. This target is reasonable given the historical SGP trends of charter schools.</p>						
<p>A year-over-year increase in graduation and college enrollment rates is ambitious since these metrics currently lag behind overall state rates and because charter schools serve a higher proportion of educationally disadvantaged students. This target is achievable due to the college-for-all focus of many charter schools, the corresponding intensive support they provide, and the technical assistance provided by ESE.</p>						

\*2014 is the most recent data available for this metric.

***(4) Steps to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the CSP subgrant***

ESE has a coordinated strategy to proactively inform teachers, parents, and communities about the opportunity for charter schools to create high-quality educational options, and the availability of CSP subgrant funds to support this entrepreneurial work. As part of these efforts, ESE will continue to provide information using a variety of platforms to all parties interested in founding a charter school, charter school best practices, and CSP subgrants. As discussed in Competitive Preference Priority 1, ESE consistently targets its outreach with a particular focus on

communities where there is an identified need for high-quality educational alternatives. ESE aims to increase the effectiveness of its marketing activities, as described below.

- ESE will continue its extensive communication campaign describing the charter application process and the related start-up CSP grant, on its website and through the widely distributed Commissioner's *Weekly Update* emails. ESE will also employ new forms of outreach: Teachers' Top 3 that is distributed directly to teachers, ESE's twitter feed, and will target groups of schools, districts, charter support organizations, and other non-profit organizations.
- ESE conducts nine yearly information sessions in various communities around the state with a particular focus on communities where there is an identified need for high-quality educational alternatives. Attendance at information sessions continues to increase.
- As a public sector leader and highly regarded state educational agency, ESE has been well positioned to cultivate alliances and expand strategic relationships in a robust ecosystem of community partners, including philanthropic and nonprofit organizations that support the growth of new school models in communities in need (see letters of support). As part of its outreach strategy, ESE will continue to nurture these partnerships and relationships with organizations such as the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents and its Urban Superintendents Network to share information with potential founding groups interested in developing charter schools. There is also robust parent organizing and advocacy by groups such as MCPSA, Democrats for Education Reform, Stand for Children, and Families for Excellent Schools that empower parent communities with information about charter schools as alternative educational options. ESE will connect with these groups to ensure information about the availability of CSP funding is broadly communicated. ESE works especially closely with MCPSA to ensure that the appropriate information about the charter application process and the CSP grant program is communicated to potential charter developers, teachers, parents, and community organizations.

***Application Requirement (vii): Revolving loan fund***

ESE will not establish a revolving loan fund under this program.

***Application Requirement (viii): Waivers***

In order to facilitate the successful implementation of its project design, Massachusetts respectfully requests that the Secretary grant waivers of four requirements:

***Waiver Request 1: Extension of CSP Grant from 3 to 5 Years***

Massachusetts requests a waiver of Section 5202(c)(1) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the reauthorization known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which circumscribes the award period for state education agencies (SEAs) to three years. Massachusetts seeks an extension, allowing it to receive a CSP grant for a period of 5 years. This extension will provide greater certainty of critical start-up funding for expected growth in newly chartered schools and expanding high-quality schools, providing an incentive for prospective founding groups at the initial planning stages for new charters, and ensuring that current successful charter school applicants and operators will be strongly supported in establishing high-quality schools and substantial expansions from the day their doors first open and new seats are available.

***Waiver Request 2: Extension of Subgrant Award Period from 2 to 3 Years***

Massachusetts requests a waiver of Section 5202(c)(2)(C) of ESEA to allow subgrantees 3 years rather than 2 years to use their subgrants for dissemination work. Based on our experience with redesigned schools -- turnaround, charter conversions, expanded learning time, and other innovative models, Massachusetts believes that meaningful dissemination requires longer than 2 years of partnership between the disseminating subgrantee and the learning group, both to create and measure gains in student outcomes.

***Waiver Request 3: Allowing Established High-Quality and Certain Early Implementing Charter Schools to Receive a Second Subgrant***

Additionally, Massachusetts requests a waiver of Section 5202(d)(2) of ESEA, which limits grants to one per charter school, to allow a second award to particularly successful charter

schools with proven ability to disseminate key practices effectively that have received and successfully used a subgrant in the past.

Allowing the state's very best charter schools (some that have been operating for 15-20 years) to compete for a second opportunity to disseminate in the context of a different district relationship or with emphasis on new best practices will expand the scope and influence of their success where most needed. The single subgrant restriction unnecessarily limits options for awarding monies to the most effective charter schools, particularly given the priorities and structure of the dissemination subgrant competition described in [Sel. Crit. d \(1\)\(ii\)](#)<sup>43</sup> Notably, ESSA has loosened this restriction to allow multiple subgrants in a 5-year period for charter schools demonstrating success. ESSA at Section 4303 (e)(2). Finally, to the extent prohibited by law or guidance, Massachusetts requests waiver of any provision that prevents a subgrant award for planning and implementation based solely on the fact that a charter was awarded prior to this CSP grant cycle.

***Waiver Request 4: Allowing Established High-Quality Charters to Receive Additional Planning and Implementation Subgrants for Substantial Expansions***

Massachusetts requests a waiver of Section 5202(d)(1) to allow additional subgrants for high-quality charter schools (as defined herein) if they substantially expand. For purposes of this waiver request, we would define "substantial expansion" as: *(1) an increase in the student count of an existing charter school by more than 50 percent; or (2) an addition to an existing charter school of at least two consecutive grades; or (3) for an existing charter school with multiple campuses serving overlapping grades, meeting (1) or (2) for the largest existing campus.*

As this grant recognizes in providing start-up funding for new charter schools, the initial costs of establishing the complex systems that produce a high-quality charter school are significant. These costs remain high for established charter schools increasing enrollment by more than half, adding several grades, or replicating their model at a new campus. Therefore, the

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<sup>43</sup> Because ESE's eligibility requirements for its most recent dissemination subgrant were so rigorous, only 13 schools were eligible to apply without this waiver; an additional 20 were eligible with such a waiver.

financial lift for charter schools undergoing a substantial expansion versus setting up a new charter schools is often a distinction without a difference. Without the requested waiver, the latter group is ineligible for funds from this grant. Notably ESSA (Section 4302(b)(1)(C)) would make expanding high-quality charter schools eligible for CSP subgrants.

Allowing the requested waiver will not compromise the rigor of the vetting process for substantially expanding schools. In Massachusetts, major amendments to existing charters, which include changes to maximum enrollment and grades served, go through a rigorous approval process and require a vote of approval by BESE by state regulation. Over the past five years, these expansions have substantially increased the high-quality educational options for the state's most educational disadvantaged students.