



**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools
Final Application Review** Opening School Year 2014-2015

FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW																			
Proposed School Name:	TEC Connections Academy (TECCA) Commonwealth Virtual School																		
Grades Served At Full Capacity:	K-12																		
Number of Students At Full Capacity:	6000																		
Proposed School Location:	Dedham																		
Proposed Opening Year:	2014-2015																		
<p>Mission Statement: The mission of the TEC Connections Academy (TECCA) Commonwealth Virtual School is to provide a rigorous, effective virtual K–12 public school that provides students with multiple pathways to learn, communicate, collaborate and successfully compete for advancement in our global society whether they pursue college or career.</p>																			
<p>Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center;">School Year</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Grade Levels</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Total Student Enrollment</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">First Year</td> <td style="text-align: center;">K-12</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1500</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Second Year</td> <td style="text-align: center;">K-12</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3000</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Third Year</td> <td style="text-align: center;">K-12</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4000</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Fourth Year</td> <td style="text-align: center;">K-12</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5000</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Fifth Year</td> <td style="text-align: center;">K-12</td> <td style="text-align: center;">6000</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment	First Year	K-12	1500	Second Year	K-12	3000	Third Year	K-12	4000	Fourth Year	K-12	5000	Fifth Year	K-12	6000
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Guiding Principles and Core Values																			
<p>Primary Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mission statement was clearly articulated. (Section I.A.) • In addition to the curriculum provided by the vendor, the school would offer a diverse selection of locally developed courses and personalized internships. (Section I.A.) • The TECCA board is committed to providing a rigorous educational program. (1/8/2014 interview) 	<p>Primary Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The application did not clearly explain how the locally developed courses would be implemented and how they would be integrated with the curriculum and system purchased from the vendor. (Section I.A.) • The application identified special populations the school plans to serve, but it did not describe any specific features of its program that are designed specifically for this group of students. (Section I.A.) 																		

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Primary Strengths

- The application listed some innovative courses and programs that the school would offer, including a STEM Academy. (Section I.B.)
- The applicant is committed to using the PARCC Assessment when Massachusetts moves to the new testing program. (Section I.B.)
- The TECCA board is committed to holding the vendor accountable for ensuring that the curriculum adequately addresses the common core standards, correcting any gaps that may be found. (1/8/2014 interview)
- The vendor was able to describe how it has served special education students in other states, including providing courses to students who are blind and contracting with service providers to work with students in their homes, if needed. (1/8/2014 interview)

Primary Weaknesses

- The curriculum did not address some of the topics in the new MA curriculum frameworks, such as mathematical problem solving and reading complex informational text. (Section I.B.)
- The sample lessons did not appear to be engaging, and the proposed instructional model does not allow students enough opportunities to collaborate and share ideas. (Section I.B.)
- The application is unclear about the amount of direct instruction that would be provided, especially for English Language Learners (ELLs) and Special Education students. (Section I.B.)
- With the minimum frequency of contact set at once every two weeks, the proposed program did not appear to offer enough academic or emotional or support for students.(Section I.B.)
- The proposed student-to-teacher ratio (43 to 1 for the default funding level and 32.5 to 1 with the additional \$2000 per student requested) may make it difficult for teachers to deliver all of the services described. (Section I.B.)
- The application did not mention recovery strategies for struggling students or acceleration strategies for gifted students, which are offered by other online programs. (Section I.B.)

Student Services and Supports

Primary Strengths

- The proposed school will orient students to online learning by clarifying expectations during the enrollment process, providing orientation videos, welcoming students with phone calls, and offering an online orientation course. (Section I.C.)
- The proposed school plans to offer internship opportunities and a range of specialized courses, including advanced placement courses and course sequences on topics such as biotechnology. (Section I.C.)
- The proposed school plans to offer field trips, community outings, and a variety of clubs through which students can connect with other students. (Section I.C.)
- The partner’s learning management system provides a way to log and track all contacts between teachers and students (phone, email, live teleconferencing session student attendance). (Section I.C.)

Primary Weaknesses

- The application did not provide sufficient details about how English Language Learners (ELLs) would be served. (Section I.C.)
- The application lacked details about who would be responsible for making decisions about accommodations and modifications for students in special education. (Section I.C.)
- The application did not contain a sufficient explanation of how the tiered system of support would work. (Section I.C.)
- For elementary and middle school students, the proposed school appeared to offer very little peer-to-peer interaction. (Section I.C.)
- The application lacked detail on career counseling and guidance. (Section I.C.)

Governance	
<p>Primary Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed school’s board of trustees is includes highly qualified individuals with diverse backgrounds in areas such as online learning, school administration, and technology. (Section II.A.) • An Executive Director will oversee the school and report directly to the TECCA board. (1/8/2014 interview) 	<p>Primary Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The application does not spell out what options the board will have if the vendor(s) do not perform as well as expected. (Section II.A.) • Several members of the proposed board of trustees may have perceived or actual conflicts of interest, due to affiliations with TEC, which may provide contracted services to the proposed school.(Section II.A.) • Members of the proposed board of trustees were unclear about the proposed composition of the board with respect to TEC-affiliated members and the nature and extent of possible contracted services with TEC. (1/8/2014 interview) • Without the TEC-affiliated individuals on the TECCA board of trustees, the board may not possess the wide variety of skills and qualifications necessary to launch, sustain, and oversee the proposed CMVS (1/8/2014)

Partnerships	
<p>Primary Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The application indicated that TEC did a significant amount of research in order to select a partner. Also, TEC successfully piloted courses offered by this partner in 2013. (Section II.B.) 	<p>Primary Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed partner provided data on successful results in other states, but it did not include disaggregated data for SPED and ELL students. (Section II.B.) The proposed partner provided data showing that its students in other states received test scores higher than national averages, but it did not compare test scores to those of Massachusetts students. (Section II.B.) The application proposed a 5% fee to TEC that included services and “the use of TEC’s highly respected name, logo, and goodwill,” which is not something schools traditionally pay for. (stated during the interview on 1/28/14)
Management and Staff	
<p>Primary Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school will require Massachusetts certified teachers. (Section II.C.) The TECCA board plans to hire an Executive Director, who would report directly to the board and oversee the school. (stated during interview and in the 1/24/14 “Proposed Incremental Spending” document; this was a change from the original staffing plan.) The applicant provided detailed job descriptions for key staff. 	<p>Primary Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school may have difficulty recruiting enough teachers, with a salary range of \$40,000-\$50,000, and the requirement that teachers all work in an office in the metro west area. (1/8/2014 interview) The application raised concerns with the proposed student/teacher ratio, especially at the default per pupil funding rate. (Section II.C. and Attachment E) The application did not mention any requirement that the principal have a background in online learning or virtual schools. (Section II.C.) The application was unclear regarding the hiring of ESL staff. (Section II.C. and Attachment E) The application lacked details regarding the model of teacher evaluation that would be used. (Section II.C.) The application lacked details on professional development for staff and parents/guardians, who take the role of “learning coaches” for students in the lower grades. (Section II.C.)

School Finances	
<p>Primary Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant is aware that the \$4925 per-student fee, which is based on school choice fee minus \$75 for ESE to administer the program), may not accurately reflect the needs for a virtual school to provide all of its services. (Section II.D.) • The requested \$6925 per-student fee would provide an improved student-to-teacher ratio, an improved student technology offering (households with more than one enrolled child would receive a second computer if needed), intervention resources, summer school, and the hiring of an Executive Director, who would report to the school’s board. (1/24/14 “Proposed Incremental Spending” document) 	<p>Primary Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The budget does not provide details on services that would be contracted to TEC, such as the locally developed courses. (Section II.D. and CMVS Budget Template.) • The budget does not appear to allocate funds for Special Education services such as evaluations, which the school would need to conduct before it could request reimbursement from the sending district. (Section II.D. and CMVS Budget Template.)
School Characteristics	
<p>Primary Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The application contained a detailed list of strategies for outreach to prospective students. (Section III.A.) 	<p>Primary Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The application did not clearly spell out a retention strategy addressing how the school would support students who are falling behind and are at risk of dropping out. • The application was unclear about how the school would reach out to parents/guardians who are not English proficient. (Section III.A.)

School Operations	
<p>Primary Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The application contained detailed descriptions of the proposed school’s technical infrastructure and technical supports. (Section III.B.) 	<p>Primary Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school has no plans for providing meals to students who qualify for free and reduced price meals. (Section III.B.) The application was unclear about whether the proposed school’s infrastructure would be able to handle all state reporting requirements. (Section III.B.)
Accountability Plan and Process	
<p>Primary Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The application made a commitment to creating an accountability plan. (Section IV.) The sample indicators provided for evaluating the proposed school’s implementation of its program are aligned with its mission. (Section IV.) 	<p>Primary Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The application did not fully address this topic. (Section IV.) The application did not indicate who will be creating or implementing the accountability plan and it did not provide a timeline. (Section IV.)

Learning Management System

Primary Strengths

- The LMS integrates the functions of typical stand-alone course management and student information management systems into one application without the apparent need for third-party applications or custom integrations. (1/24/2014 demonstration of the LMS)
- The LMS has multiple features designed to enhance collaboration between and among educators and students. (1/24/2014 demonstration of the LMS)
- Student performance is tracked individually in the LMS.(1/24/2014 demonstration of the LMS)

Primary Weaknesses

- Teachers are not able to add, update, or remove elements of a lesson. (1/24/2014 demonstration of the LMS)
- Lessons are mapped to broad objectives and state standards but they do not feature rubrics that specify criteria for different levels of student performance. (1/24/2014 demonstration of the LMS)