*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley*Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:**  | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:**  | February 21, 2024 |
| **Subject:** | Charter Schools – Notification of Intended Actions and Report on Conditions for Community Charter School of Cambridge, Prospect Hill Academy Charter School, Hampden Charter School of Science West, Libertas Academy Charter School, and Phoenix Academy Charter Public High School, Chelsea |

At its meeting in February 2013, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) authorized the Commissioner to act on its behalf in “(a) granting charter renewals that do not involve probation; (b) approving charter amendments that do not involve changes in grade span, maximum enrollment, or districts served; and (c) removing or continuing conditions imposed on charters of charter schools; provided that the Commissioner shall report to the Board on all charter renewals, charter amendments, and conditions that have been so approved; and provided further, that the Commissioner shall notify the Board in advance of all such intended actions, and a Board member may request that the Commissioner place the charter matter(s) on the agenda of the Board for discussion and action.” The Charter School Regulations also allow the Commissioner to impose conditions on a school’s charter.[[1]](#footnote-2)

I intend to remove the conditions currently imposed on the charters of Community Charter School of Cambridge, Prospect Hill Academy Charter School, and Hampden Charter School of Science West with respect to enrolling at least 80 percent of their students from school districts in their original charters, and the condition imposed on Libertas Academy Charter School with respect to academic performance. I also intend to remove one of two conditions currently imposed on the charter of Phoenix Academy Charter Public High School, Chelsea, the condition related to additional measurements of academic success. The rationale for each of these intended actions can be found starting on page two of this memorandum.

Please let me know by **Thursday, February 22, 2024,** if you wish to have any of these proposed actions brought to the full Board for review and vote at the February Board meeting.

**Community Charter School of Cambridge**

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| Community Charter School of Cambridge |
| **Type of Charter** | Commonwealth | **Location** | Cambridge |
| **Regional or Non-Regional** | Non-Regional | **Districts in Region** | N/A |
| **Year Opened** | 2005 | **Years Renewed** | 2010, 2015, 2020 |
| **Maximum Enrollment** | 420 | **Current Enrollment** | 261 (October 2023) |
| **Chartered Grade Span** | 6-12 | **Current Grade Span** | 6-12 |
| **Students on Waitlist** | 9 (March 2023) | **Current Age of School** | 18 |
| **Mission Statement:** Community Charter School of Cambridge (CCSC) combines challenging academics with creative use of technology and real-world experience to prepare a diverse student body, grades 6-12, for post-secondary success and productive citizenship. CCSC students are excellent problem solvers and communicators who contribute to their community through internships and other field experiences. |

Community Charter School of Cambridge (CCSC) enrolled more than 20 percent of its total population from outside of Cambridge for several years, including the two years prior to its last renewal. The charter school statute, G.L. c. 71, § 89(n), requires a school enrolling more than 20 percent of its total enrollment from school districts not included in its original charter for two consecutive years to request an amendment to its charter to reflect its actual enrollment pattern; for schools chartered before January 1, 2011, such as CCSC, the Board or the Commissioner establishes a timeline of not less than 5 years for the school to comply with this requirement. At the time of its 2020 renewal, I placed a condition on the school’s charter to address the statutory requirement. The school has substantially met the condition imposed. On August 1, 2023, CCSC submitted a request to amend the school’s charter to become a regional school. At the February Board meeting, I will recommend that the Board approve a modified version of the school’s request for a charter amendment. A summary of the school’s progress toward meeting the condition follows.

**Condition:** By December 31, 2022, CCSC must enroll no more than 20 percent of its total student population from outside Cambridge. To meet this goal, CCSC must limit the admission of students who live outside of Cambridge. If CCSC does not meet the required enrollment target, the school shall submit a request to the Board, no later than August 1, 2023, to amend its charter region based on enrollment trends.

**Status: Met**

For several years, CCSC has seen an increase in Cambridge enrollment due to its enhanced strategies to recruit, enroll, and retain students who reside in Cambridge. In February 2022, Cambridge was identified as near its net school spending cap which sets a limit on Commonwealth charter school enrollment for Cambridge residents. As a result, the school has limited ability to increase its Cambridge enrollment to 80 percent of overall enrollment. On August 1, 2023, the school submitted a request to amend the school’s charter and become a regional school. The recommended amendment met requirements for submission and was reasonable and consistent with Department guidelines, the charter school statute, and regulations. The recommended charter region would be comprised of Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, and Revere.

**Prospect Hill Academy Charter School**

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| Prospect Hill Academy Charter School |
| **Type of Charter** | Commonwealth | **Location** | Cambridge and Somerville |
| **Regional or Non-Regional** | Regional | **Districts in Region** | Cambridge and Somerville |
| **Year Opened** | 1996 | **Years Renewed** | 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021 |
| **Maximum Enrollment** | 1,200 | **Current Enrollment** | 918 (October 2023) |
| **Chartered Grade Span** | PK-12 | **Current Grade Span** | PK-12 |
| **Students on Waitlist** | 24 (March 2023) | **Current Age of School** | 27 |
| **Mission Statement:** Prospect Hill Academy Charter School will prepare each student for success in college, inspire a lifelong love of learning, and foster responsible citizenship.  |

Prospect Hill Academy Charter School (PHA) enrolled more than 20 percent of its total population from outside of Cambridge and Somerville for several years, including the two years prior to its last renewal. The charter school statute, G.L. c. 71, § 89(n), requires a school enrolling more than 20 percent of its total enrollment from school districts not included in its original charter for two consecutive years to request an amendment to its charter to reflect its actual enrollment pattern; for schools chartered before January 1, 2011, such as PHA, the Board or the Commissioner establishes a timeline of not less than 5 years for the school to comply with this requirement. At the time of its 2021 renewal, I placed a condition on the school’s charter to address the statutory requirement. The school has substantially met the condition imposed. On August 1, 2023, PHA submitted a request to amend the school’s charter to expand the school’s charter region. At the February Board meeting, I will recommend that the Board approve a modified version of the school’s request for a charter amendment. A summary of the school’s progress toward meeting the condition follows.

**Condition:** By August 1, 2025, Prospect Hill Academy Charter School will submit a revised request for an amendment to the school’s charter region that aligns with enrollment demand and would serve to reduce enrollment from outside of its charter region to no more than 20 percent of the school’s total population in future charter terms. The amendment request shall take into consideration all districts from which the school draws students, including those districts where limited seats are available, and a proven provider determination is required.

**Status: Met**

On August 1, 2023, the school submitted a request to amend the school’s charter and expand the school’s charter region. The school has proposed a new charter region that reflects its existing enrollment trends. The recommended amendment met requirements for submission and was reasonable and consistent with Department guidelines, the charter school statute, and regulations. The recommended charter region would be comprised of Cambridge, Somerville, Revere, Waltham, Watertown, and Woburn.

**Hampden Charter School of Science West**

| Hampden Charter School of Science West |
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| **Type of Charter** | Commonwealth | **Location** | West Springfield |
| **Regional or Non-Regional** | Regional | **Districts in Region** | Agawam, Holyoke, West Springfield, and Westfield  |
| **Year Opened** | 2018 | **Year(s) Renewed** | 2023 |
| **Maximum Enrollment** | 588 | **Current Enrollment** | 553 (October 2023) |
| **Chartered Grade Span** | 6-12 | **Current Grade Span** | 6-12 |
| **Students on Waitlist** | 114 (March 2023) | **Current Age of School** | 6 |
| **Mission Statement:** The mission of Hampden Charter School of Science West is to provide a college preparatory-focused education to the youth of every race and ethnic group in Agawam, Holyoke, West Springfield, and Westfield in a safe, academically challenging, and caring educational environment. Our promise is to sustain small school size, to provide extended math and science curriculum, individualized attention, college guidance, and university outreach programs, and to encourage student-teacher-parent partnership. Fulfillment of our mission will empower our students with the support necessary to reach their highest intellectual, emotional, social, and physical potentials, building on the inherent promise to aid students’ preparation for college. |

Hampden Charter School of Science West (HCSSW) enrolled more than 20 percent of its total population from outside of Agawam, Holyoke, West Springfield, and Westfield during its first charter term, including the two years prior to its first renewal. The charter school statute, G.L. c. 71, § 89(n), requires a school enrolling more than 20 percent of its total enrollment from school districts not included in its original charter for two consecutive years to request an amendment to its charter to reflect its actual enrollment pattern. At the time of its 2023 renewal, I placed a condition on the school’s charter to address the statutory requirement. The school has substantially met the condition imposed. On August 1, 2023, HCSSW submitted a request to consolidate the school’s charter with Hampden Charter School of Science East. At the February Board meeting, I will recommend that the Board approve this request for a charter amendment. A summary of the school’s progress toward meeting the condition follows.

**Condition:** Beginning August 1, 2023, HCSSW must submit for annual Department approval an enhanced Recruitment and Retention Plan that includes deliberate and specific recruitment strategies for residents of the school’s charter region. These strategies must be designed to increase enrollment from within the school’s charter region and to reduce enrollment from outside of its charter region to no more than 20 percent of the school’s total population. By October 1, 2024, HCSSW must enroll no more than 20 percent of its total student population from outside its chartered region. Alternatively, HCSSW may submit a charter amendment request no later than August 1, 2025, to amend its region to reflect the school’s actual enrollment pattern. Any amendment request submitted by HCSSW shall take into consideration all districts from which the school draws students, including those districts where limited seats are available and districts where a proven provider determination may be required.

**Status: Met**

The school’s 2022-23 annual report included an enhanced recruitment and retention plan which described a variety of recruitment strategies for residents of the school’s charter region as required and was approved by the Department. Additionally, the board of trustees for HCSSW and Hampden Charter School of Science East, a network of charter schools, submitted an amendment request on July 11, 2023 to consolidate the two charter schools. If granted, the consolidation would address the statutory requirement; more than 80 percent of the consolidated charter’s population would reside in the districts in the school’s charter. During the 2023-24 school year, 98.6 percent of students enrolled in the two charter schools lived within the proposed charter region if it were consolidated.

**Libertas Academy Charter School**

| Libertas Academy Charter School |
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| **Type of Charter** | Commonwealth | **Location** | Springfield |
| **Regional or Non-Regional** | Non-Regional | **Districts in Region** | N/A |
| **Year Opened** | 2017 | **Year(s) Renewed** | 2022 |
| **Maximum Enrollment** | 630 | **Current Enrollment** | 519 (October 2023) |
| **Chartered Grade Span** | 6-12 | **Current Grade Span** | 6-11 |
| **Students on Waitlist** | 43 (October 2023) | **Current Age of School** | 7 |
| **Mission Statement:** Through rigorous academics, character development, and strong supports for every learner, Libertas Academy Charter School prepares all sixth through twelfth grade students to succeed within the college of their choice and to be positive, engaged members of their communities.  |

In 2022, I renewed the charter of Libertas Academy Charter School (LACS) with a condition related to academic performance. The school has substantially met the condition, and I intend to remove the condition from the school’s charter. A summary of the school’s progress toward meeting the condition follows.

**Condition:** By December 31, 2024, the school must demonstrate that it is an academic success by providing evidence that the school has exhibited significant and sustained academic improvement in mathematics, English language arts, and science. Should the school demonstrate significant and sustained academic improvement before 2024, the Commissioner may consider removing this condition, rather than wait until December 31, 2024.

**Status: Met**

The school’s charter was renewed in 2022 based on academic performance data from 2018 and 2019.[[2]](#footnote-3) In 2019, the Department classified the school as requiring assistance or intervention because the school was among the public schools in the Commonwealth performing in the lowest 10 percent. While the school made substantial progress toward targets in 2019, it was in the 6th percentile when compared to other schools administering similar assessments. In 2023, the Department classified the school as not requiring assistance or intervention. The school met or exceeded targets and is in the 58th percentile when compared to other schools administering similar assessments. The school exhibited significant and sustained academic improvement in mathematics, English language arts, and science for students in grades 6 through 8.[[3]](#footnote-4) In mathematics, 31 percent of students in grades 6 through 8 met or exceeded expectations in 2023, up from 24 percent in 2018. In English language arts, 38 percent of students in grades 6 through 8 met or exceeded expectations in 2023, up from 10 percent in 2018. In science, 28 percent of students in grade 8 met or exceeded expectations in 2023, up from 13 percent in 2022.

**Phoenix Academy Charter Public High School, Chelsea**

| Phoenix Academy Charter Public High School, Chelsea |
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| **Type of Charter** | Commonwealth | **Location** | Chelsea |
| **Regional or Non-Regional** | Regional | **Districts in Region** | Chelsea, Everett, Lynn, Revere |
| **Year Opened** | 2006 | **Year(s) Renewed** | 2011, 2016, 2021 |
| **Maximum Enrollment** | 225 | **Current Enrollment** | 194 (October 2023) |
| **Chartered Grade Span** | 9-12 | **Current Grade Span** | 9-12 |
| **Students on Waitlist** | 0 (October 2023) | **Current Age of School** | 23 |
| **Mission Statement:** Phoenix Academy Charter Public High School, Chelsea challenges resilient, systemically marginalized students with rigorous academics and relentless supports, so they take ownership of their futures and succeed in high school, college, and as self-sufficient adults |

Phoenix Academy Charter Public High School, Chelsea (Phoenix Chelsea) has been operating with two conditions since the school’s charter was renewed in 2021. The school has substantially met the first condition, and I intend to remove that condition from the school’s charter. The school’s efforts to address the second condition are ongoing. A summary of the school’s progress toward meeting the conditions follows.

**Condition 1:** By August 1, 2021, Phoenix Academy Public Charter High School, Chelsea must develop five-year goals for non-statewide assessments in its Accountability Plan that will allow the school to demonstrate a track record of academic success during the charter term.

**Status: Met**

On July 6, 2021, the school submitted a draft of its Accountability Plan for the fourth charter term. The Department provided extensive feedback and assistance with revisions, and the Commissioner granted approval of the Accountability Plan on February 24, 2023. The plan includes goals for student achievement and growth measured by the Star 360 reading and mathematics assessments. The Department will annually monitor the extent to which the school administers and reports student academic performance data related to the measures in the Accountability Plan.

**Condition 2:** Beginning August 1, 2021, Phoenix Academy Public Charter High School, Chelsea will submit for annual Department approval an enhanced recruitment and retention plan that includes deliberate and specific recruitment strategies for residents of the school’s charter region that would serve to support enrollment levels from within the school’s charter region and to reduce enrollment from outside of its charter region to no more than 20 percent of the school’s total population in future charter terms. Alternatively, the school may submit a charter amendment request to amend the school’s charter region to reflect the school’s actual enrollment pattern.

**Status: Ongoing**

The school has submitted for Department approval an enhanced recruitment and retention plan as required. Since the condition was imposed, the school was successful in reducing enrollment from outside its region to less than 20 percent of the school’s total population in FY22; enrollment from within the school’s region rose to 80.2 percent. In FY23(Q4), enrollment from within the school’s region dipped to 77.7 percent; and in FY24, enrollment from within the school’s region rose very slightly to 77.8 percent.

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If you have any questions regarding my intended actions or require additional information, please contact Alison Bagg, Director of the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign (781-338-3218); Regina Robinson, Deputy Commissioner (781-338-3104); or me.

1. Pursuant to 603 CMR 1.12(1), the Commissioner may “impose conditions on a school's charter for violations of law or failure to make progress with student achievement, failure to adhere to and enhance its recruitment and retention plan, failure to comply with the terms of its charter, or failure to remain viable.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department did not implement all aspects of the statewide accountability in 2020 through 2022. The Department did not issue accountability determinations for the 2019-20 school year due to the cancellation of state assessments and school closures related to COVID-19. The Department also did not issue accountability determinations in 2021. In 2022, the Department produced some of the information associated with annual accountability determinations, including school accountability percentiles. In 2023, the Department implemented the full accountability system for the first time since 2019. Further information about the statewide accountability system may be found [here](https://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/lists-tools/default.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The school administered MCAS assessments to students in grade 10 for the first time in 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)